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The Passive Constructions in the 16th and 17th century Danish and Swedish

1 Introduction

The paper discusses the diachronic developments of the passive voice constructions in closely related North Gemanic languages representing the eastern branch, i.e., Danish (Da) and Swedish (Sv). In each language today we find two passive constructions: a morphological one, so-called *s*-passive, and a periphrastic one, so-called *bli*-passive. Even though both are found in Present-Day Danish (PDDa) and Present-Day Swedish (PDSv), their distribution differs significantly (Engdahl 1999, Laanemets 2012, Laanemets 2013), as do their semantics. Both passive constructions are largely interchangeable in PDSv, although the periphrastic passive shows greater affinity with animate subjects (Engdahl 1999). In PDDa, on the other hand, the morphological passive is not

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Abstract: The paper discusses the diachronic developments the passive voice constructions, morphological *s*-passive and periphrastic *bli*-passive, in closely related North Germanic languages, Danish and Swedish. The point of departure is the different distribution of the constructions, as well as their different semantics, in modern languages. The study is based on a corpus of late 16th and 17th century texts, which have been annotated for a number of factors connected with voice and tense. The results show that although the modern passive system is not yet fully formed in either language, by the end of the 17th century significant differences between the languages have already arisen, with respect to the distribution of the passive constructions. In particular, the results show that the Danish *s*-passive is found with modal verbs to a higher extent than the *s*-passive in Swedish. At the same time, the *bli*-passive in both languages is connected with animate subjects.

Keywords: animacy, Danish, language change, modal verbs, passive, Swedish, tense.

available in perfect and pluperfect tenses and only to a limited extent in the past tense, and it is mainly used when presenting rules and regulations, while the periphrastic passive is used to describe specific events (Laanemets 2012).

These differences must have originated in the separate developments in each language. The aim of the paper is to establish whether they are present in the late 16th and the 17th century material. The timeline is based on earlier results suggesting on the one hand that the Danish *s*-passive becomes reinterpreted in the early 16th century (Heltoft and Akhøj Nielsen 2019) and on the other that the *s*-passive spreads to the perfect and pluperfect tense in Swedish in the early 18th century (e.g., Håkansson 2021).

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2 we present in detail the passive constructions and their distribution in PDDa and PDSv, in Section 3 we discuss the corpus and the annotation tool. Section 4 reports the results of the study, comparing tha date with the data from PDDa and PDSv texts. In Section 5 we present conclusions as well as an outlook for further research.

2 The passive in Present-Day Danish and Present-Day Swedish

There are two passive constructions in PDDa and PDSv: the morphological *s*-passive and the periphrastic *bli*-passive. The morphological *s*-passive, formed with suffix *-s* attached to the verb, is etymologically related to the reflexive pronoun *sik* '(him/her/it)self' and has most likely arisen through an intermediate meaning of middle voice, retained in the *nynorsk* variant of Modern Norwegian (Faarlund 1997, see also Holm 1952 for a detailed study of the rise of the *s*-passive in Swedish). The periphrastic *bli*-passive is formed by the auxiliary *være /vara*[1] 'be' or *blive/bliva* 'become', followed by the past participle. The latter auxiliary was originally a loanword from Middle Low German, meaning 'remain, stay', which has ousted the verb *varda* 'become', used in the periphrastic passive voice until ca. 1550 (Skrzypek 2020, Skrzypek 2024). In the present paper the term *bli*-passive is used to refer to the periphrastic construction, irrespective of the

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[1] In cases where the lexical entries are given for Danish and Swedish the first one is always the Danish form, the second, after /, is the Swedish form. In PDSv the verb is usually contracted to *bli*.

auxiliary, 'be' or 'become'. Both passives allow for agents to be specified by a prepositional phrase *af/av* 'by'.

Despite the apparent similarities between the passive voice constructions in PDDa and PDSv, significant differences between them can also be found. In PDSv, the two passives have complete paradigms in all tenses (Table 1). In the periphrastic tenses, the present perfect and the past perfect, the -*s* is attached to the supine (the non-finite form) and not to the auxiliary.

Table 1. The two passives in Present-Day Swedish.

tense	*s*-passive	*bli*-passive	English translation
present tense	Bollen **kastas** (av pojken).	Bollen **blir/är kastad** (av pojken).	The ball is (being) thrown (by the boy).
past	Bollen **kastades**.	Bollen **blev/var kastad**.	The ball was thrown.
	Sången **sjöngs**.	Sången **blev/var sjungen**.	The song was sung.
perfect	Bollen **har/hade kastats**.	Bollen **har/hade blivit/varit kastad**.	The ball has been thrown.
future/modal	Bollen ska **kastas**.	Bollen ska **bli/vara kastad**.	The ball will be thrown.

The choice between the two passives in PDSv seems for the most part free. However, the *bli*-passive is favoured with animate subjects (Engdahl 1999, Laanemets 2012). Formally, the past participle agrees with the subject in number (SG or PL) and gender (C = common gender or N = neuter gender), see examples (1–3).

(1) *Boll-**en***   *blev*   *kasta-**d**/*kasta-**t***.   PDSv
    ball(C)-DEF.SG   AUX.PST   throw-PTCP.SG.C/throw-PTCP.
                                                   SG.N
    'The ball was thrown.'

(2) *Tak-**et***   *blev*   *måla-**t**/*måla-**d***.   PDSv
    roof(N)-DEF.SG   AUX.PST   paint-PTCP.SG.N/paint-PTCP.SG.C
    'The roof was painted.'

(3) *Boll-**ar-na***   *blev*   *kasta-**de**/*kasta-**d**/*kasta-t*.   PDSv
    ball(C)-PL-DEF.PL   AUX.PST   throw-PTCP.PL/throw-PTCP.SG.C/
                                                   throw-PTCP.SG.N
    'The balls were thrown.'

In Danish, the *bli*-passive has a complete paradigm for all tenses while the *s*-passive is limited to present tense and past tense of verbs of the weak inflectional paradigm; thus *kaste* 'throw' can be (occasionally) used in the *s*-passive but not *synge* 'sing', see Table 2.

Table 2. The two passives in Present-Day Danish.

tense	*s*-passive	*bli*-passive	English translation
present tense	Bolden **kastes** (af drengen).	Bolden **bliver/er kastet** (af drengen).	The ball is (being) thrown (by the boy).
past	Bolden **kastedes**.	Bolden **blev/var kastet**.	The ball was thrown.
	*Sangen **sangs**.	Sangen **blev/var sunget**.	The song was sung.
perfect	*Bolden **er/var kastets**.	Bolden **er/var blevet/været kastet**.	The ball has been thrown.
future/modal	Bolden vil **kastes**.	Bollen vil **blive/være kastet**.	The ball will be thrown.

There are also significant differences in terms of the distribution of both passives. The *s*-passive is used generically, with regulations, rules etc., while the *bli*-passive is used to describe specific, individual events (Engdahl 1999, Hansen and Heltoft 2011, Laanemets 2012), as illustrated in examples (4–5). The past participle is formally in the singular number and neuter gender and does not agree with subjects in the plural or common gender, see examples (6–7). Hansen and Heltoft (2011:630) use the term *supine* to denote this form and reserve *past participle* to denote a declinable form. It should be noted that despite the common terminology, there are significant differences between the Swedish form termed *supine* and the Danish one, see Nielsen (2017). In the present description we use the term *past participle* and gloss it PTCP to present both Swedish and Danish constructions.

(4) *Der* **tale-s** *ikke mere dansk i Skåne*.   PDDa
     there   speak-PASS   not   more   Danish in   Scania
     'Danish is no longer spoken in Scania (as an official language).' (*generic*)

(5) *Der* **bliver** *(ofte)* **tal-t** *dansk i Skåne*.   PDDa
     there   AUX   (often)   speak-PTCP.SG.N   Danish   in   Scania.
     'Danish is (often) spoken in Scania.' (*specific*)

(6) *Bold-en*   *blev* **kaste-d/kaste-t.*   PDDa
  ball(C)-DEF.SG AUX.PST throw-PTCP.SG.C/throw-PTCP.SG.N
  'The ball was thrown.'

(7) *Bold-e-ne*   *blev* **kaste-de/kaste-t.*   PDDa
  ball(C)-PL-DEF.PL AUX.PST throw-PTCP.PL/throw-PTCP.SG.N
  'The balls were thrown.'

It should be noted that although it is generally assumed that the *s*-passive is impossible in the past tense with strong verbs (e.g., Heltoft 2006), there are some exceptions, such as the verbs *jage* 'hunt', *lade* 'load' and *tage* 'take'. Modern corpora such as KorpusDK do show some, sporadic and possibly dated, hits of *s*-passive with the past forms of these verbs.

(8) *I 1941* **toges**   *et nyt radiohus i Kbh.* *i brug.*
  in 1941 take.PST.PASS a new radiohouse in Copenhagen in use
  'In 1941 a new radio-house in Copenhagen was put to use.' (KorpusDK)

Finally, there seems to exist an affinity between the modal verbs and the *s*-passive, particularly in Danish. Laanemets (2012) shows that 40% of all *s*-passives appear with modal verbs in written Danish and as many as 90% in spoken Danish. In Swedish, both written and spoken, the percentage is around 20% (Laanemets 2012: 144).

  The differences in distribution are reflected in the relative frequencies of both constructions in PDDa and PDSv, as illustrated in Table 3 (after Laanemets 2012: 85–95).

Table 3. The frequencies of the passive constructions in PDDa and PDSv (after Laanemets 2012: 85–95).

language	genre	*s*-passive	*bli*-passive
Danish	written (news)	58.8%	41.2%
	written (literature)	35.5%	64.5%
	spoken (conversation)	23.1%	76.9%
	spoken (debate)	64.1%	35.9%
Swedish	written (news)	97.0%	3.0%
	written (literature)	90.4%	9.6%
	spoken (conversation)	85.5%	14.5%
	spoken (debate)	93.9%	6.1%

The different frequencies in PDDa and PDSv can be explained by the affinity of the *bli*-passive and animate subjects in PDSv on the one hand and the limited paradigm of the *s*-passive in PDDa on the other. The first observation is based on the fact that since the subject of the passive clause corresponds with the object in the active clause, and that in most clauses the subject is placed higher than (or equal to) the object in the Animacy Hierarchy (Silverstein 1976), it is more likely for the subject of the passive clause to denote an inanimate entity. Therefore the passive construction which favours animate subjects will most likely be less frequent than the passive construction which shows no such preference. We will return to this question in Section 4.

Finally, it should also be mentioned that the *s*-suffix has other functions in both PDDa and PDSv, beyond the passive voice. They include expressions of reflexivity, reciprocity and deponence, as well as remnants of the middle voice. This makes a diachronic study of the construction a challenging enterprise, as the context is often not enough to classify the form categorically as middle or passive voice. Consider example (9) from a Swedish text from 1640.

(9) elliest   hade väl arkelimestarens   huffudh skilgdz   ifrån kroppen,
    otherwise had well storage.room.master.GEN head   separate.S from body.DEF
    om kulan   hade kommidh en handhbredh högre.   (Gyll, 1640)
    if bullet.DEF had come   one hand.breadth higher
    'Otherwise the head of the storage-room master would be separated from his body,
    had the bullet come one handbreadth higher.'

The verb *skilja* 'separate' with the *s*-suffix can be interpreted as either passive voice (= somebody separated something from something else) or as middle voice (= something separated itself from something else).

Interestingly, the differences between Danish and Swedish seem to be of a late date. In his study of the Swedish prose in the 1800s Håkansson (2021) finds examples of the *s*-passive in the perfect or pluperfect tenses, but they are missing in the Swedish prose from the 1700s (Skrzypek 2024). Their absence in the extant sources may have been driven by the normative disapproval for such form, as expressed by the 18th and 19th century grammarians (cf. Platzack 1989). By that time the *s*-passive has most likely spread to the perfective tenses in the spoken language, and there are even earlier examples of the *s*-passive in the present or past perfect tense. Larsson (2009: 412) finds the earliest, and quite sporadic, examples in the 1600s, shown in (10) and (11).

(10) thet　andra　myntet　　haffuer　kallas　　　　köpgilt
　　　 DEF　 other　coin.DEF　has　　 called.PASS　purchase.valid
　　　 'the other coin has been called valid currency' (Petri 1530:38)

(11) när　waran　　　　har　fördts　　　　in, så　ha　namne
　　　 when　product.DEF　has　brought.PASS　in　so　has　name.DEF

　　　 kom[m]it in　mä.
　　　 come　　 in　too
　　　 'when the product has been brought in, the name has come too'
　　　 (Columbus II 1675:7)
(both examples after Larsson 2009:412)

It should be noted that the *s*-construction in example (10) is not un-
equivocally passive, but can also be interpreted as medio-passive. Holm
(1952) points out that as the origins of the *s*-passive lie in the middle
voice construction, there are a number of borderline cases, which may be
difficult to interpret (Holm 1952: 23). Example (11), on the other hand, is
undoubtedly a passive construction, but it is of much later date than (10).

　　A potential, and much earlier, example, is discussed in Holm (1952:
218). Quoted in (12), the example is from a text as early as 1300s (*Öst-
götalagen*).

(12) ok　sua　at　han　gate　þit　　in　**kastatzs**
　　　 and　so　that　he　 get　 there　in　throw.PASS
　　　 'and so that he could be thrown there.' (*Östgötalagen*, 1290)
(quoted after Holm 1952: 218)

The scholars are divided on the actual reading, with Schlyter (1877: 212,
see Holm 1952: 218) reading the form as the infinitive *inkastas* and Olson
(1911, see Holm 1952: 218) as *incastaz*, which he reads as supine (non-fi-
nite part of the periphrastic perfect tense). Finally Rydqvist (1850-83:
481, see Holm 1952: 218) reads the form *inkastatzs* 'in-thrown-S' and
treats it as a very early instance of supine as well. There are a few parallel
constructions in the religious prose (from early 1300s and mid-1400s),
also these after the verb *gita* 'get, manage' as the perfective auxiliary.

　　Despite finding these occasional examples of supines with passive -*s*, we
can say with a measure of confidence that until the 1800s similar restric-
tions seem to apply to the Swedish *s*-passive as those found in PDDa.

　　The differences between the languages have been noticed in earlier lit-
erature, especially Engdahl (1999) and Laanemets (2012, 2013). The extant
studies are all synchronically oriented and touch upon the diachronic

sources of the differences very briefly. Hansen (1967) points explicitly to potential pronunciation difficulties (Hansen 1967:47), although he does not address the question why such differences are overcome in Swedish. As the Norwegian situation is largely identical with the Danish one, Enger (2000) assumes that it is the influence of Danish that has led to the Norwegian system's current form. This explanation may be acceptable for Norwegian, but does not address the question of the missing forms in Danish. Finally, Heltoft (2006) suggests that the lack of forms is due to a conflict in meaning which arises when a perfective tense should be used with *s*-form, which is not limited to passive meaning but more broadly, is an exponent of modus. For Heltoft this makes it impossible to form *s*-passive of verbs in the perfect tenses. If this is correct, we would need to account for some deep-seated differences in the tense systems of Danish and Swedish, as such conflict does not seem to arise in Swedish. This is potentially the case, as the perfect and pluperfect tenses in Swedish are only formed with the auxiliary *hava* 'have', while in Danish there is a variation between *have* 'have' and *være* 'be', suggesting that the systems are indeed idiosyncratic (see also Larsson 2009 for a detailed reconstruction of the rise of the perfect tense in Swedish).

An explanation in diachronic terms would suggest that the grammaticalization processes of both passive constructions took partly different courses. This may be expected, since these processes take place largely in the individual histories of each language. In the rest of the paper we will therefore focus on exploring the differences between the systems in the 16th and the 17th century.

3 Corpus and annotation

The corpus chosen for this study consists of passages from five texts in Danish and five in Swedish, all written down between 1560 and 1700. The timeframe was chosen with respect to known developments of both passive constructions and the historical development of both languages. With the Reformation and the break with Rome, both Denmark and Sweden (as well as many other protestant countries) saw the upsurge in the use of the national language (where Latin was the natural choice before). Other major changes include the onset of the Reneissance and the invention of print. Language change is clearly visible between the early and late 16th century, including changes in the passive constructions (Skrzypek

2024). By 1600 the *bli*-passive was fully grammaticalized in both Danish and Swedish and its form and use do not deviate from the modern form and use (Skrzypek 2024). The *bli*-passive was used in all tenses and the original auxiliary *varde/varda* was largely replaced by the new auxiliary *blive/bliva*, with few examples of *varda* retained in the Swedish prose from the 18th century.[2] On the other hand, the *s*-passive in Swedish is not found with perfect tenses until late 18th century or early 19th century (see Section 2). We have thus chosen to focus on a period of time in which both languages seem to still have identical passive systems, in order to study in detail when the deviating systems are formed and what factors may lie behind this development.

Collating a balanced corpus in diachronic linguistics is always a challenge, in which many factors need to be taken into account. We have tried to achieve a balanced sample from each language, choosing, from the available sources, prosaic texts, including fictional narratives, travel accounts and historical chronicles. From the Danish material we have excerpted the following texts: *Danske folkebøger* from the 1500s and 1600s, including the following stories: *En doktors datter*, *De syv vise Mestre*, *De skøne Magellona* and *Uglspil* (FB); *Om Ove Gieddes ekspedition* (OG), a travel account from 1623; *Ahasverus* (Ahas), a religious narrative from 1631; L.C. Ulfeldts *Rejsen til Korsør* (URK), a travel account from 1656; L.C. Uhlfeldts *Confrontationen i Malmø* (UCM) from 1659. The Swedish sample includes the following texts: *Peder Swart krönika* (Swart), a historical chronicle from 1560; *Per Brahes krönika* (Brahe), a historical chronicle from 1585; *Carl Carlsson Gyllenhielm: Egenhändige anteckningar rörande tiden 1597–1601* (Gyll), a historical chronicle from 1640; *Stratonice* by Urban Hiärne (Hiarne), a *roman à clef* from 1665; and *Haqvin Spegel: Dagbok* (Spegel), a diary of Haqvin Spegel, documenting the historical developments of his times from 1680.

Where possible, we have chosen fragments of texts of comparable length and annotated all predicates. The size of each corpora and the number of annotated VPs is given in Table 4. The total amount of annotated VPs is 6148.

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[2] In Danish the auxiliary *varde* was lost much earlier than in Swedish. A number of phonological changes which took place in the 14th century have led to a coalescence of *vara* and *varda*. The changes include the loss of /ð/ after /r/ and the rounding of /a/. As a result, forms such as *varð* and *varða* could merge with *var* and *vara* respectively. In his edition of ODa texts, Brandt (1849) comments that *vord* is often spelled *vor* and *vorde* can be found spelled *vore* (*voræ*). This would imply that the two verbs could have merged.

Table 4. Sources and annotated VPs in the corpus.

language	text	year	annotated VPs
Danish	FB *(Folkeboger)*	1592–1621	1233
	OG *(Om Ove Gieddes ekspedition)*	1623	145
	AH *(Ahasverus)*	1631	163
	URK *(Rejsen til Korsør)*	1656	525
	UCM (Confrontationen i Malmø)	1659	1060
Total Danish			*3126*
Swedish	Swart	1560	600
	Brahe	1585	607
	Gyll	1640	601
	Hiarne	1665	604
	Spegel	1680	610
Total Swedish			*3022*
Total			**6148**

For the annotation we have used a DiaPass tool, which was tailor-made for the project. The annotation included features such as tense, mood, animacy of the subject (as this proves important in the distribution of the passive constructions in PDSv). The lexical verbs *være/vara, blive/bliva* and *varda* were annotated in more detail, including information on complements (adjectival and nominal) and adverbials. If the verbs were accompanied by the past or present participle, this was also annotated, and in the case of past participles, the annotation included information on agreement with the subject. All *s*-verbs were annotated as well, including other uses of the form than the passive one. The annotation enabled a quick excerption of all instances of the verbs *blive/bliva* and *være/vara* and *varda* as well as all *s*-verbs from the corpus.

4 Results

The passive constructions constitute over 10 % of all finite verbs in the corpus. In Table 5 we show the overall frequencies of both passive con-

structions in the Danish and Swedish material. *bli*-passive refers to all instances of periphrastic passive, with auxiliaries *vara*, *varda* or *bliva*.

Table 5. The frequencies of the two passive constructions in Danish and Swedish.

	s-passive		*bli*-passive		Total no of passive constructions	
	No of instances	% of all VPs	No of instances	% of all VPs	No of instances	% of all VPs
Danish	61	1.9	134	4.3	195	6.2
Swedish	82	2.7	247	8.2	329	10.9

As can be seen from the general frequencies, there are some differences between the languages. The passive constructions constitute about 11 % of all predicates in the Swedish material and a little over 6 % in the Danish material. The difference in frequencies can be dependent on style and does not seem to point to any more general differences between the two languages in terms of voice. However, the frequencies of each construction show some more variation. The frequencies of the *s*-passive are comparable in both languages, but in Swedish the *bli*-passive dominates clearly over the *s*-passive.

Throughout the rest of the section we will look at the distribution of both passives across a range of other features, such as co-occurrence with modal verbs, tense and animacy of the subject.

4.1 Passive and modal verbs

The affinity of the passive construction and the *s*-passive in historical texts has been noted in earlier studies on both Swedish (Holm 1952: 161) and Danish[3] (Heltoft and Akhøj Nielsen 2019: 213–218). Laanemets (2012) notes the same affinity for PDDa and PDSv. The present study reveals that this affinity was present in the late 16th century and the 17th century, as illustrated in Table 6.

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[3] Heltoft and Akhøj Nielsen (2019) is a chapter in a textbook on the history of the Danish language. The diachronic data was gleaned from two texts from 1591 and 1592 respectively. One of the texts, SVM, is part of the corpus used for the present study.

Table 6. The co-occurrence of the passive constructions with modal verbs.

language	construction	total	with MOD	% with MOD
Danish	all predicates	3126	494	15.8
	s-passive	61	31	50.8
	bli-passive	134	6	4.5
Swedish	all predicates	3022	471	15.6
	s-passive	82	19	23.2
	bli-passive	247	11	4.5

There is a stronger affinity between the modal verbs and *s*-passive than between the modal verbs and the *bli*-passive in both languages. However, the Danish results show that more than half of all instances of the *s*-passive appear with a modal verb, as compared with only 23 % in Swedish. When compared with the results for PDDa and PDSv given in Laanemets (2012) we may conclude that although the affinity between the *s*-passive and modal verbs is already visible in our material, it is by no means as advanced as in the modern languages.

4.2 Passive and tense

As we have mentioned in Section 2, the *s*-passive in PDDa does not have a full paradigm, but is found in the present tense and, to a limited extent, in the past tense (of the weak verbs). It is not possible to form *s*-passive of any verbs in the perfect or pluperfect tense. Similar restrictions are not found in PDSv.

We have annotated all predicates in our corpus, including those in which the finite verb is a modal verb, see ex (13).

(13) Min Herre annammede den paa Hans K.   Mt.s   Vegne og
      my lord   received   it   on his   royal highness.GEN side   and

      representerede Hans K.   Mt.s   Person; hvor **kunde** ded
      represented   his   royal highness.GEN person   how   could   it

      forstaaes,   at   han den selver dermed presterede? (Da, 1659)
      understand.PST.PASS that he   it self   thus   perfom.PST
      'My lord received it on the behalf of His Royal Highness and representd His Royal
      Highness, how could it be understood that he acted himself?'

However, as it is the modal verb that carries the grammatical information connected with the tense and the *s*-passive is found in the non-finite verb form in such examples, it can be misleading to consider all annotated VPs. We have thus limited the search to such VPs which do not include a modal verb. In this way we only consider such examples in which it is the finite verb that appears in *s*-passive, as in example (14) or the finite verb is a passive auxiliary *varda* or *blive/bliva* or *være/vara*, as in (15) and not the modal verb which carries the temporal information, as in (16).

(14) Derpaa   **svartes**   intet. (Da, 1659)
      to.this   answer.PASS   nothing
      'To this, nothing was said.'

(15) da   han   **blev**   første Gang   **examineret** (Da, 1659)
      when   he   became   first time   examined
      'When he was examined for the first time.'

(16) saa Intentionen **kunde sees**,   og vidre blev   intet   udrettet. (Da, 1656)
      so intention   could see.PASS and still became nothing accomplished
      'so the intention could be seen and still nothing was accomplished.'

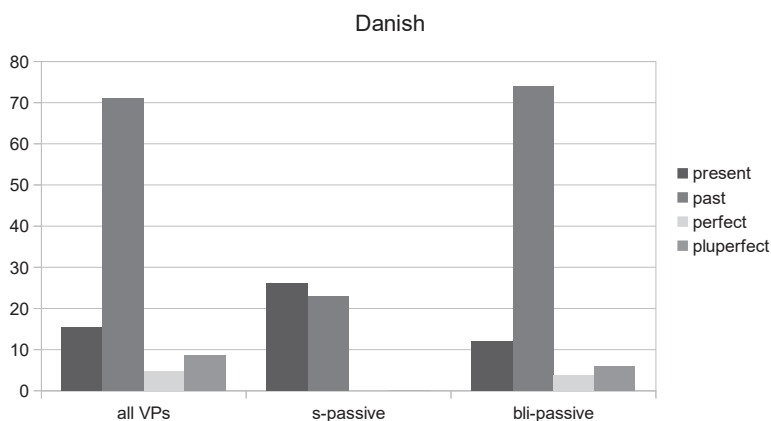The Danish results are presented in Figure 1 and the Swedish results in Figure 2.

Figure 1. Distribution of the passive constructions across tenses in Danish.
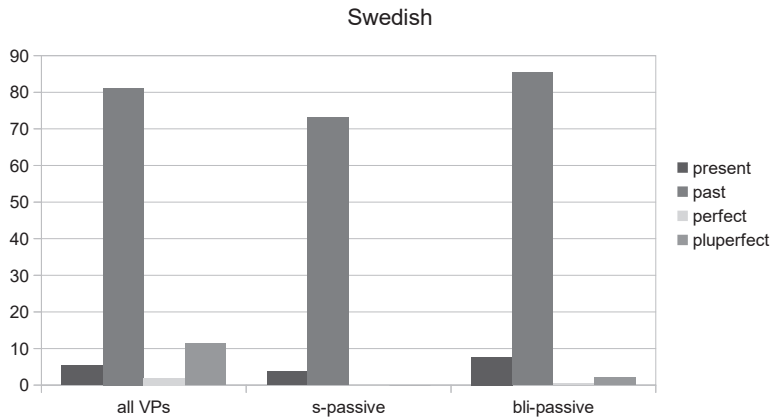
Figure 2. Distribution of the passive constructions across tenses in Swedish.

The first observation one can make is that the perfect tense is very rare in the corpus. This has mainly to do with the genre, which is written and not spoken, and typically describing completed past events in the simple past tense, or in the present tense to render the text more dynamic (the historical present) or in the pluperfect to show the relative chronology of past events. We do, however, see a striking difference between the Danish and the Swedish *s*-passive construction in the past tense. While only ca. 20 % of the *s*-passives in Danish are in the past tense (with over 70 % of all VPs used in the past tense), as many as 74 % were found to appear in the past tense, a comparable percentage to all VPs (81 %).

Aa shown in (17) and (18), we find also strong verbs (*gjordes* from *gøre* 'do' and *gaffz* from *give* 'give') among the verbs in *s*-passive, past tense, which as we noted in Section 2, have a very restricted possibility to appear in this construction in PDDa.

(17) at af de Breve, Hans K. Mt.   havde skreven min Herre til
     that of DEF letter.PL his royal highness had   written my lord to

     siden den Tid, den Contract **gjordes**,   kunde sees,   at han var
     since DEF time DEF contract do.PST.PASS could see.PASS that he was

     Hans K.   Mt.s   Tjennere. (Da, 1656)
     his   royal highness.GEN servant
     'From the letters His Royal Highness had written to my lord since the time the
     contract was made could be seen that he was a servant of His Royal Highness.'

(18) När thetta war bestält **gaffz**   almogin   förloff   att draga
     when this   was ordered give.PST.PASS commonry.DEF permission to   go

     heem, huar   thill   sitt. (Sv, 1585)
     home each   to   POSS.REFL
     'When this was ordered, the commoners were given permission to return home, each
     to his own.'

Such examples, however, remain rare in the Danish material.

4.3 Passive and subject animacy

For PDSv, where both passive constructions have complete paradigms,
the distribution of each construction is to some extent dependent on the
animacy of the subject. The subjects that denote referents high on the
animacy hierarchy (humans or animals, see Silverstein 1976) tend to be
found with the *bli*-passive more often than inanimates (Engdahl 1999).
As animacy is closely connected to volition and control, it seems coun-
ter-intuitive that animates should be subjects of passive clauses. However,
the periphrastic passive in Swedish carries with it an additional meaning
of the subject allowing him/herself to undergo some process (expressed
by the passive voice). This can be illustrated by the effect of adverbial
gärna 'willingly'[4], when used with either passive construction, consider
the different reading of (19) and (20).

(19) Han   opererades   gärna.
     he   operate.PST.PASS   willingly
     'He was willingly operated = The doctors were happy to operate on him.'

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[4] We use 'willingly' as the closest counterpart of the Swedish adverb *gärna*, which is
notoriously difficult to translate into English (Aijmer and Altenberg 2013).

(20) Han   blev   gärna   opererad.
     he   become.PST   willingly operated
     'He underwent the surgery willingly.'

To be able to gauge whether animate subjects are overrepresented in *bli*-passive, in Table 8 we first compare the frequencies of animate and inanimate subjects across the Danish and Swedish corpora in all clauses with the frequencies in passive clauses.

Table 8. Subjects in the Danish and Swedish corpora.

language	construction	all VPs	subject denotes animate entity	%	subject denotes inanimate entity	%
Danish	all VPs	3126	2613	83.6	502	16.1
	passive clauses	195	94	48.2	97	49.7
Swedish	all VPs	3022	2422	80.2	592	19.6
	passive clauses	329	165	50.2	159	48.3

We can see that both languages show similar distribution of different types of subjects. When all VPs are taken into account, the animate subjects dominate in the material, with 80 % of all instances.[5] This is not surprising, since subjects are typically located higher in the Animacy hierarchy than objects (Bock, 1986; Dahl and Fraurud, 1996; Dahl, 2008; Malchukov, 2008). The inanimate subjects in our material constitute around 20 % of all subjects. We may venture that this distribution is neutral and most likely similar to the distribution across different periods in the history of both languages.

   The results for animacy of the subject in passive clauses are again quite similar in Danish and Swedish, unsurprisingly, the percentage of inanimate subjects rises quite significantly in comparison with the results for all VPs. This is the effect of the passivization, raising the (usually) inanimate object to the subject position. Again, the results are not surprising and are similar for both languages.

   We will now turn to the distribution of animate and inanimate subjects across both passive constructions and both languages, reporting the results separately for *s*-passive and *bli*-passive in Table 9.

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   [5] In fact, all subjects denote either humans of higher beings such as god, angel, devil.

Table 9. Animacy status of subjects in passive constructions.

language	Passive construction	Passive construction	subject denotes animate entity	%	subject denotes inanimate entity	%
Danish	s-passive	61	21	34.4	40	65.6
	bli-passive	134	74	55.2	60	44.8
Swedish	s-passive	82	26	31.7	56	68.3
	bli-passive	247	140	56.7	107	43.3

Here we come across a pronounced difference in the distribution of all subject types across the two passive constructions in Danish and Swedish. The results presented in Table 9 indicate that the affinity of animate subject and the periphrastic passive is similar in Swedish and Danish, but the *s*-passive patterns distinctly with inanimate subjects in Swedish but not in Danish. This is not to say that human subjects are impossible with the *s*-passive, indeed, in PDSv they obviously can be used in the construction. This follows from the tendency of animates to wield control over the situation (see also Laanemets 2012: 60). Interestingly, there is no difference between Danish and Swedish in this respect, as *bli*-passive patterns with animate subject in both languages and animate subjects are dispreferred with *s*-passive also in both languages. Thus, the differences between Danish and Swedish seem to be of later date.

As we noted in section 2, there are in fact two auxiliaries which can be combined with the past participle: *blive/bliva* and *være/vara*. So far, we have treated all together under the umbrella term '*bli*-passive'. In her account of modern Danish and Swedish, Laanemets (2012) only considers *bliva*, so we cannot categorically say whether the distribution of *være/vara* is similar to that of *blive/bliva*[6] in modern languages. However, when we consider the results from our corpus, we do find some significant differences. See Table 10.

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[6] Laanemets (2012) defines the periphrastic passive as a combination of *blive/bliva* and the main verb: 'Den perifrastiske passiv dannes ved hjælp af hjælpeverbet *blive* (DK)/*bli* (NO, SV) og et hovedverbum.' (Laanemets 2012:33).

Table 10. The choice of passive auxiliary and animacy of the subject.

language	Passive auxiliary	number of occurences	subject denotes animate entity	%	subject denotes inanimate entity	%
Danish	*blive*	83	55	66.3	28	33.7
	være	51	19	37.3	32	62.8
Swedish	*bliva*	101	69	68.3	32	31.7
	vara	109	49	45.0	60	55.1
	varda	37	22	59.5	15	40.5

It seems that it is only the *blive/bliva* 'become' that favours animate subject (in both Danish and Swedish). The construction with *være/vara* 'be' is in this respect similar to the *s*-passive. The Swedish *varda* 'become' (no longer found in the Danish material), occupies an intermediate position. Significantly, the preference for animate subjects with *bliva* is equally strong in Danish as it is in Swedish. This is different from the situation in PDDa, where no similar preferences have been noted.

5 Discussion and conclusions

PDDa and PDSv, despite their common origins and close typological and areal affinity, demonstrate notable differences in the distribution of the two passive constructions which have arisen in their history: the morphological *s*-passive and the periphrastic *bli*-passive. These differences must have originated in the separate developments in each language. The aim of the present paper was to establish whether they can be found in the late 16th and the 17th century material. Based on a study of a balanced corpus of Danish and Swedish texts we argue that the origins of the differences between PDDa and PDSv can be traced back to the 16th and 17th centuries, despite the superficial similarities between the constructions in the two languages at that time.

The results of the corpus study show that even though the passive constructions seem to be very similar in both form and scope of use in both languages, we find early indications of increasing differences between the Danish and Swedish passive systems, which lead to further divergent developments. In particular, there is already a much higher percentage of *s*-passive with modal verbs in Danish as compared with Swedish (Table 6).

The most striking difference, perhaps, is the possibility to use the *s*-passive in the past tense, of both weak and strong verbs. In Danish this use is limited and there is a visible tendency for the *s*-passive to be used in the present tense (Figure 1) and with modal verbs, which strengthens its affinity with generic use. It should be noted that the spread of the *s*-passive beyond the present tense and past tense of the weak verbs was a viable possibility, as we find examples of past tense of strong verbs in our Danish material, which we do not expect to find in PDDa. This spread seems to have been halted, most likely through a reanalysis of the *s*-passive construction, as a result of its frequent use with present tense and modal verbs. The Swedish *s*-passive is not similarly restricted and therefore may spread to the perfect and pluperfect tenses more easily (this development, however, is not yet visible in the corpus).

The preference for human subjects with *bli*-passive is similar in Danish and in Swedish, which is different from the modern distribution, where no preference for animate subjects with *bli*-passive can be found.

The developments charted here show how distribution may affect the interpretation of a construction, whose meaning will change overtime to accomodate the fact that some forms are lacking. They also show how lengthy the process of language change is, and how long one needs to look back to see the first symptoms of change.

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Danish

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