Passivizability of Possess
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In this paper, we discuss the passivizability of possess and point out that some previous approaches do not deal with this issue properly.

There is no disagreement among previous studies on the passivizability of have and own; own can be passivized, while have cannot:

1. A house on Kauai is owned (by Leslie).
2. * A house on Kauai is had (by Leslie). (Wasow (1980:308))

As for possess, however, there are notable differences among previous studies as shown in the following (3).

1. unpassivizable verb / passivizable verb
   a. have, possess / own
   b. have / possess, own
   c. have, possess (alienable) / possess (alienable), own
   d. have / possess (alienable, inalienable), own

(3a) is an observation made by researchers like Palmer (1974), Quirk et al. (1985) and Dixon (1991), where possess is assumed to be unpassivizable. However, they do not explain why possess cannot be used in passive.

(3b) shows the prediction that is made from positions taken in Wasow (1980) and Kageyama (1996, 1997). First, Wasow (1980), based on the view that the passive formation involves a morphological, but not syntactic, process, considers that the passivizability of verbs of possession has a systematic correlation to their ability to have various affixes, as shown in (4):

1. owner, ownership, pre-owned, homeowner
3. possessor, possession, possessive, repossess, etc.

(Wasow (1980:309))

Wasow then states that own can undergo the affixation, while have cannot. As for possess, he only gives examples like (4c), but there is no mention as to whether possess is passivizable or not. However, it may safely be predicted that Wasow would take it as passivizable, in view of the fact that it is compatible with affixation. Kageyama (1997:50), on the other hand, tries to account for the passivizability of this class of verbs in terms of whether they have external arguments or not. This distinction, he further assumes, has much to do with the fact that own can be used in the form of owner but have has no corresponding nominals. Though Kageyama does not make an explicit reference to the nominal possessor,
he claims that possess is also passivizable. It is clear that his claim is based on the presence of that nominal.

Still another view is taken by Pinker (1989), which can be summarized into (3c). He assumes that there is a close relation between verbs that express alienable possession and their passivizability: alienable possession has the implication that the possessee is likely to move away from the owner, which means that alienable possession can be regarded as a quasi agent-patient relation between the possessor and possessee. Thus, it should be predicted that the passive of possess would be possible when alienable possession is expressed.

My position about the passivizability of verbs of possession is shown in (3d), which is obtained by my inquiry into the body of attested data. Importantly, as the following examples show, possess can invariability allow passivization regardless of whether it expresses alienable or inalienable possession:

(5)  a. ... by far the most powerful fleet hitherto possessed by any State.
      b. The herding, hunting, guarding, group companionship and
         communication possessed by the wolf and many wild dogs of today.

(British National Corpus)

(5a) is an example of alienable possession, since the most powerful fleet can be separable from its possessor. In (5b), the passive subject the herding, hunting, guarding, group companionship and communication expresses one of the characteristics of the wolf and many wild dogs of today, and thus they are in inalienable relations.

Form this result, it can be said that some of the studies I reviewed are inadequate in one respect or another, though it does not pose a problem to Wasow (1980) and Kageyama (1996,1997), since they take possess as passivizable. Yet, I do not adopt their explanations, and try to explain the passivizability of this class of verbs from a perspective that shed new light on the issues that would not have been given an appropriate treatment in the literature. I would refer the interested reader to my paper in this volume.

REFERENCES