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ON THE SO-CALLED "PASSIVE" USE OF THE GOTHIC ACTIVE INFINITIVE

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One feature of Gothic syntax that has been consistently commented upon in the handbooks and the literature¹ is the so-called "passive" use of the active infinitive after the verbal adjective *mahts* 'able, possible' and *skulds* 'owing, owed; lawful'. According to the traditional accounts, in these constructions, the Gothic infinitive, though formally active, is best understood in a passive sense; examples include Luke 8:43 *jah ni mahta was fram ainomehun galeikinon* 'and she could not be healed by any', I Timothy 5:25 *jah poei aljaleikos sik habandona filhan ni mahta sind* 'and those comporting themselves differently cannot be hidden', John 12:34 *skulds ist ushauhjan sa sunus mans* 'the Son of man must be lifted up', and Mark 8:31 *jah uskiusan skulds ist fram paim sinistam* 'and he [the Son of man] must be rejected by the elders', and other similar sentences.

Although there are other constructions in which Gothic uses a formally active infinitive that is best understood in a passive sense, only the usage after *mahts* and *skulds* seems to have been the subject of any scholarly debate. For example, the verb *ganisan* in Gothic seems to be a lexically passive item, for it is best rendered in English as a passive 'be saved' and translates a Greek passive infinitive, for instance, Mark 10:26 *hwas mag ganisan* = *τίς δύναται σωθῆναι* 'Who can be saved?'. This use probably reflects the fact that the root of *ganisan*, Indo-European *nes- seems to have originally been associated with middle voice forms. Also, with the verb *haitan* 'order', an active infinitive is generally used where English or Greek would use a passive infinitive, as in Mark 10:49 *haihait atwopjan ina* = *εἶπεν αὐτὸν φωνηθῆναι* 'he ordered him to be called forth' (literally, in Gothic, "he ordered [someone] to call him forth"); this construction seems to involve, then, an understood agent of the infinitival complement, and occurs in other Germanic languages (e.g., Old English) with the cognate verb *hātan*. Since these uses of the active infinitive in Gothic have not raised any

¹ For example, Wilhelm Streitberg, *Gotisches Elementarbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1910) p. 208; Wilhelm Streitberg, ed. *Die gotische Bibel* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1965), under *magan* and *skulan*; F. Mossé, *Manuel de la langue gotique* (Paris, 1956), p. 179; and the articles listed in n. 3.

controversy, attention will be focused here on the use with *mahts* and *skulds*.

Moreover, this usage is both curious and interesting for two reasons. First, if the infinitive in this construction is truly "passive" in some sense (but see discussion below), then one might expect that the Gothic formal equivalent of a passive infinitive, consisting of the infinitive *wairþan* plus a past (passive) participle, would be used; however, it is not. This formally passive infinitive occurs, for instance, in Luke 9:22 *skal sunus mans . . . uskusans fram sinistam wairþan* 'the Son of man must be rejected by the elders', a sentence providing a striking contrast with Mark 8:31, given above. Both Mark 8:31 and Luke 9:22 translate the same Greek sentence (δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου . . . ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων) but Mark 8:31 does so with the verbal adjective *skulds* instead of the verb *skulan* found in Luke 9:22 and with a formally active infinitive "understood" in a passive sense.² Given the equivalence of these Gothic sentences, one wonders why both active and passive forms of the infinitive can be used here, and why the passive infinitive is not used in the preceding examples, including those with *mahts*.

Second, as Mark 8:31 clearly shows, this construction is not a calque on a Greek syntagm. In this verse, the Greek has a passive infinitive (ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι) but the Gothic an active infinitive. There are many other examples of this same construction. For example, in Luke 8:43, the active infinitive *galeikinon* translates the Greek passive infinitive θεραπευθῆναι 'to be healed'—thus the Gothic is literally 'and she was not capable of healing by anyone' while the Greek is literally 'and she was not capable of being healed by anyone'. Similarly, in John 12:34, *ushauhjan* translates the Greek passive infinitive ὑψωθῆναι 'to be raised', so the Gothic is literally 'the Son of man is owed a lifting up' whereas the Greek is literally 'it is necessary for the Son of man to be lifted up'. It is important to note, too, that the verbs in these sentences can be made passive—passive forms of *ushauhjan* occur in Luke 14:11, 18:14, John 12:32 (*ushauhjada*), and II Corinthians 11:7 (*ushauhjindau*), and a passive form of *galeikinon* occurs in Luke 8:2 (*wesun galeikinodos*). Thus there is no reason *a priori* why a passive infinitive such as *ushauhjiþs wairþan* could not have been used in John 12:34, for example.

These two points taken together have made the syntagm an object of interest among scholars of Gothic—in particular, because it is not

² The difference in the infinitive may in fact be ascribed to the difference between a verbal predicate and an adjectival predicate—on this difference, see the comments at the end of this paper.

a calque on the Greek and therefore must represent a true feature of Gothic syntax. As such it deserves explanation in terms of Gothic itself. Two such attempts to explain and account for this "passive" use of the active infinitive were made by A. M. Sturtevant and Ch. Peeters.³

Peeters develops a rule for the distribution of the active and passive senses of the formally active infinitive: "wenn *mahts* unpersönlich verwendet wird dann hat der abhängige Infinitiv aktiven Sinn, wenn *mahts* dagegen als Adjektiv gebraucht wird dann hat der abhängige Infinitiv passiven Sinn." This may correctly describe when the infinitive is understood passively and when actively after *mahts*, but it suffers from the fact that it gives no motivation at all for why the infinitive should be understood in a passive sense in just these syntagms, after personal *mahts* and *skulds*.

One can take issue, though, with Peeters' interpretation of John 10:35 *jah ni maht ist gatairan pata gemelido* 'und (es) ist nicht möglich die Schrift zu brechen' which both Luther in his Bible translation and Sturtevant (p. 505) take in a passive sense: 'und die Schrift kann doch nicht gebrochen werden / and the scriptures cannot be broken'. Similarly, Peeters takes Skircins 6.14 *unte hwarjatoh waurde at mannam innuman maht ist anþarleikein inmaidjan* as active, 'denn jedes Wort kann bei den (innern?) Menschen die Verschiedenheit verwandeln' whereas W. H. Bennet takes it as having a passively understood infinitive, 'because every statement derived from men can be changed to something different'.⁴

Sturtevant, on the other hand, does give a reason for the passive interpretation of these infinitives, but his analysis is not without other problems. For example, he claims (p. 504) that "the reason for the fixed usage of the infinitive in a passive sense after the adjectives *mahts* and *skulds* lies in the meaning of these adjectives . . . both of these adjectives retain a passive force [being] past participial formations from the active verbs *magan* 'can', 'be able [to do something]', *skulan* 'owe'." He continues: "My reason for interpreting these adjectives in a passive sense is that the infinitive dependent on them is always passive in force." His analysis, therefore, contains a circularity in reasoning—the infinitives are passive in force because they are embedded

³ Albert M. Sturtevant, "Gothica 1. The Passive Use of the Active Infinitive after the Verbal Adjective *mahts* and *skulds*," *JEGP* 24 (1925), 504-508; Ch. Peeters, "Zum passiven Infinitiv nach *maht(s)* ist im Gotischen," *Studia Linguistica* 28 (1974), 112-14. Actually Peeters discusses only the syntagm with *mahts*, though presumably his analysis could be extended to *skulds*.

⁴ William Bennett, *The Gothic Commentary on the Gospel of John: skircins aiwggeljans þairh iohannen. A Decipherment, Edition, and Translation* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1960) (Monograph Series XXI), p. 72.

under adjectives that are themselves passive in force, but the main motivation Sturtevant has for assigning this interpretation to these adjectives is that the infinitives dependent on them are always passive in force. Hence he has no independent motivation for treating these adjectives as "passive in force," outside of their use in these constructions.

Furthermore, Sturtevant (p. 507) explains the impersonal *skuld ist* plus infinitive (active in form and sense) 'it is lawful to . . .' as a "secondary" development, which was then "extended to a plural subject indefinite," such as II Corinthians 12:1 *þoei ni skulda sind mann rodjan* '(words) which are not lawful for a man to utter.' But this passage is no different in structure from other ones with *skulds* (e.g., John 12:34), in which the infinitive supposedly has a "passive force." Thus he is forced to treat two Gothic sentences that are entirely parallel in structure as being somehow different.

Thus these two main attempts at an analysis of this Gothic syntagm are both somewhat deficient—Sturtevant's for the reasons mentioned above and Peeters' because he does not go far enough with his analysis. In order to come up with an analysis that avoids these problems, and gives both a coherent account for the passive interpretation of these infinitives and some motivation for this interpretation, it is necessary first to examine the nature of the "passive" sense of the infinitives in this construction, for none of the traditional accounts makes explicit what is meant by a phrase like "understood in a passive sense." This inexplicitness makes it difficult to assess this notion adequately and to thereby examine it critically.

Several interpretations of the expression "understood in a passive sense" can be put forth. Each one gives a degree of explicitness to the notion "passive in sense" but each entails certain problems that reduce its usefulness. These interpretations and the problems associated with each are as follows: (1) the active infinitive can be paraphrased within Gothic by a passive infinitive, as in the case of Luke 9:22 and Mark 8:31 discussed above—while this may be true, it still leaves unanswered the question of *why* such a paraphrase relation should exist at all; (2) the Gothic active infinitive renders a Greek passive infinitive (e.g., Luke 8:43 *galeikinon* = Greek *θεραπευθῆναι*)—this is certainly a valid statement for some instances of this construction, but it does not hold for all; for example, II Corinthians 12:4, *þoei ni skulda sind mann rodjan*, translates a Greek sentence with an active infinitive, though in an impersonal construction, ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι '(things) which it was not legal for a man to say'; (3) the Gothic is best

translated into English (or German) with a passive infinitival phrase, such as Luke 8:43 'she could not *be healed* by anyone' ('[sie] konnte von niemand *geheilt werden*')—as with the rendering of the Greek, this is not in any way an essential feature of the translation into English (or German): one could equally well use an active infinitive, that is, 'she was impossible *to heal*' to capture the sense of the Greek, or even no infinitive at all, 'she was not capable of *a cure*' ('nicht fähig des *Heilens*').

Finally, there is one additional sense in which "understood as passive" can be taken. This is the most interesting and important one in terms of giving a coherent account of this Gothic construction. Lying beneath the traditional classification of the active infinitive as passive in this syntagm is the following reasoning: the infinitive in the Gothic sentences under discussion is a form of a verb that is generally transitive (i.e., takes a direct object), such as *galeiknon* 'heal (someone)' or *ushauhjan* 'raise (something or someone) up'; in this construction with *mahts* or *skulds*, this infinitive, however, occurs with no overt object, even though it is still felt to have one and so is felt to be transitive in meaning—that is, *sa sunus mans* is taken to be the object of *ushauhjan* (*sa sunus mans* is the person being lifted up), despite being formally the subject of the main clause; since passive forms of transitive verbs have no objects but are interpreted as if they did, in the traditional view, infinitives of this sort, with no object but interpreted as if they had one, must be "passive in sense." It is certainly true that passive forms of transitive verbs have no object but are nonetheless felt to have one; there are, however, other syntactic processes by which a transitive verb can "lose" its object while retaining its transitive value, and it seems that one of these processes is what is at work in these Gothic sentences. We turn now to an analysis of this Gothic construction which refutes all of the objections raised so far.

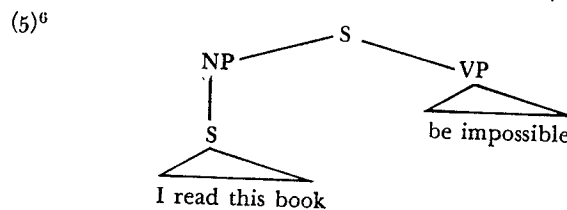
Within the framework of generative approaches to grammar and syntax, a number of syntactic operations have been proposed which relate sentence pairs (or triplets) in which a nominal in a subordinate clause in one sentence corresponds to a main clause nominal in another sentence—such operations are generally called "Raisings" in the generative syntactic literature, and can relate the subject of a subordinate clause, as in (1a) or (1b), with a main clause subject, as in (2) (Subject-to-Subject Raising):

- (1) a. That *John* will win is likely.
 b. It is likely that *John* will win.
- (2) *John* is likely to win.

or they can relate the object of a subordinate clause, as in (3a) or (3b), with a main clause subject, as in (4) (Object-to-Subject Raising, also known as *Tough Movement*):⁵

- (3) a. For me to read *this book* is impossible.
 b. It is impossible for me to read *this book*.
 (4) *This book* is impossible for me to read.

Each of the sentences in these sets derives synchronically from the same underlying (or "deep") structure, roughly equivalent to the logical structure of the sentence; for example, the sentences in (3) and (4) are all derived from a deep structure approximately as in



and (4) involves the operation of Object-to-Subject Raising, but (3a) and (3b) do not.

Under this analysis, related sentences like (3) and (4) or (1) and (2) are essentially synonymous because they derive from the same logical structure source. Moreover, the infinitive in an Object Raising sentence like (4) has no overt object, although it is understood as if it did, since those aspects of semantic interpretation involving thematic relations (i.e., who did what to whom) are generally held to be fixed at the underlying level (logical structure). Furthermore, the infinitive in an Object Raising sentence is active in form because there is no application of the passive rule involved in its derivation—only a rule "raising" the object of a sentential subject to subject status in the main clause is operative.

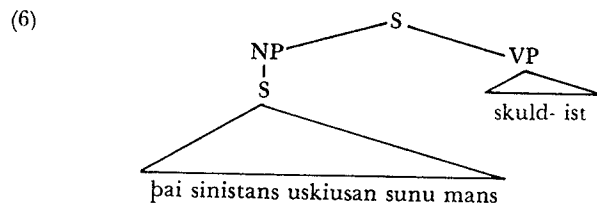
The syntactic relationship between sentences that is captured through the analysis just given with a syntactic rule of Object-to-Subject Raising is not restricted to such sets of sentences in English—sentences like (4) for which the same analysis holds can be found throughout the Indo-

⁵ An additional type of Raising not relevant to the discussion here relates the subject of a subordinate clause with the object of a main clause (Subject-to-Object Raising) as in: (i) They believe that *John* is innocent. (ii) They believe *John* to be innocent.

⁶ The use of this formalism is merely to keep in step with "traditional" Generative Transformational Grammar practice—no claims about the nature of syntactic representations are intended thereby. Many details of structure are omitted here for convenience. In the diagrams S=Sentence, NP=Noun Phrase, VP=Verb Phrase.

European languages⁷ (cf. French *Ce livre est facile à lire* or Ancient Greek *ῥύστη μάθειν* '[it is] easiest to learn', e.g.) as well as in such diverse languages as Georgian (*es gveli žnelia moşklavad* 'This snake is-hard to-kill'), Korean (*ku cheyk-un ilk-ki oriopta* 'this book to-read is-hard'), and the Polynesian language Niuean (*to-maeke e-tama-ē ke-lagomatai he-ekakafo* 'will-be-possible child-this to-help the-doctor' i.e., 'This child is possible for the doctor to help'). Thus, Object Raising may safely be posited as a syntactic operation available in Universal Grammar to be utilized in the description of particular languages.

Given these facts, then, the following analysis suggests itself for the Gothic sentences in question. A sentence such as Mark 8:31 derives from a deep structure, roughly as in

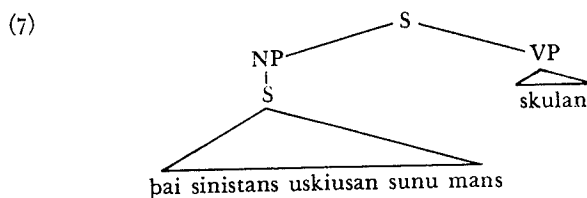


by the operation of Object Raising with the marking of the subordinate clause subject by *fram* plus the dative, much in the way one finds *for* in English. There is a difference between the marking found in Gothic for the subordinate clause subject in this sentence and that found in a comparable Object Raising sentence in English—the Gothic marking *fram* plus Dative is the same as that used for agents in true passive sentences, while *for* in English is not used in that way. This might be taken to suggest that Passive does have some role in the derivation of at least some of the Gothic Object Raising sentences (despite the absence of passive morphology on the infinitive, i.e., *uskusan* here and not *uskusans wairpan*), and there are languages, such as Indonesian, in which Passive and Object Raising apply together (so that Raising of logical objects is allowed only if they first become subjects through application of Passive, even though logical subjects cannot be Raised). The evidence from Gothic, however, is too scanty on this issue to warrant any hypotheses of that sort, so that it seems best per-

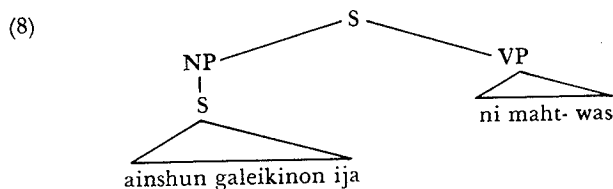
⁷ For a survey of Object Raising in various Indo-European languages, ancient and modern, see Brian Joseph, *Universals and Morphology in Syntactic Change: Evidence from Medieval and Modern Greek*, Ph. D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1978 (Printed and distributed by Indiana University Linguistics Club). The facts from Georgian and Korean are noted there as well. For a discussion of Object Raising in Niuean, see William Seiter, *Studies in Niuean Syntax*, Ph.D. Dissertation Univ. of California, San Diego, 1979 and his "Instrumental Advancement in Niuean," *Linguistic Inquiry* 10 (1979), 595-621.

haps to treat this marking as an aspect of translation syntax, especially since in this sentence the Greek has a clearly expressed passive agent in a prepositional phrase, ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων. Similarly, Luke 8:43 can be said to have *fram ainomehun* because of ἐπ' οὐδενός in the Greek. What is especially interesting in such sentences, even if *fram* plus Dative is from the Greek, is the fact that, as noted above, the Gothic *active* infinitive is used to render a Greek *passive* infinitive—this aspect of these Gothic sentences must be a real feature of Gothic syntax, even if *fram* plus Dative in them may not be.

Luke 9:22 derives from an underlying structure, different from (6) only in having the verb *skulan* as the main clause predicate instead of the synonymous *skuld-ist*—



—by the operation of passive in the subordinate clause and then Subject-to-Subject Raising (cf. (1) and (2)), giving a true passive infinitive in the subordinate clause. Similarly, Luke 8:43 (*ni mahta was fram ainomehun galeikinon*) would derive from an underlying structure as in



by the operation of Object Raising, and so on, for all the sentences under discussion.

This analysis predicts that one should be able to find sentences in Gothic roughly of the form of those in (3), in which the underlying structure occurs as such on the surface, with no application of Object Raising. This prediction is borne out by the Gothic data, thus lending support to the analysis proposed here. For example, there are several instances of "impersonal" *maht* with a clausal subject, such as John 10:35 *jah ni maht ist gatairan pata gamelido* 'and it is not possible to break the scriptures' or Mark 14:5 *maht wesi auk pata balsan frabug-*

jan 'for it would have been possible to sell this ointment'.⁸ Similarly, impersonal *skuld* (albeit in the specialized meaning 'lawful') occurs with a sentential subject in Mark 6:18 *ni skuld ist þus haban qen broþrs þeinis* 'it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife'. These observations put Peeters' rule into its proper perspective—the infinitive with *maht(s)* and *skuld(s)* is "active" in sense when Object Raising has not applied (as in Mark 6:18, John 10:35, or Mark 14:5) and "passive" in sense when it has applied (such as in Mark 8:31 and Luke 8:43).

This analysis disposes of all of the objections to Peeters' and Sturtevant's analyses which have come up in the course of discussion. In particular, the analysis espoused here provides an explanation of why the infinitive is active in form but "passive" in sense, and of why the infinitive is interpreted as active in sentences with *maht* and *skuld* (impersonal use) but not with *mahts* and *skulds* (personal use): in each case, the deciding factor is the operation (or failure of operation) of Object Raising in the derivation of the sentences in question.⁹ The circularity evident in Sturtevant's account is thereby completely avoided in this analysis. Furthermore, there is no inexplicitness in this account: an infinitive is "understood as passive" only to the extent that it has no overt object but is interpreted semantically as if it did; the terminology "passive in sense" can actually be seen to be misleading, for there is no application of a rule of passive in the derivation of these sentences. Moreover, with no application of passive, there is no reason to expect a formally passive infinitive to occur in these sentences—where one *does* occur, as in Luke 9:22, the sentence has an entirely different derivation (Passive and then Subject-to-Subject Raising) from that of an Object Raising sentence. The passive infinitive found in the Greek or English or German version of these sentences, then, is a feature of translation only and is not relevant to the analysis of the Gothic syntagm *per se*.

In addition, there are two bonuses to this analysis. First, the paraphrase relation holding between Luke 9:22 and Mark 8:31 is accounted for in a straightforward manner by deriving them both from underlying structures differing only minimally in lexical content and not at all in semantic content, through the operation of different syntac-

⁸ These could be interpreted as Object Raising sentences because *maht* is neuter singular, as is *þata gamelido* and *þata balsan*—however, the word order in these sentences suggests that these nominals are objects of the infinitive on the surface and not main clause subjects.

⁹ Object Raising must be viewed as an optional syntactic operation, though one which may be required under certain discourse conditions, as it is in English.

tic rules. Second, the sentences which Sturtevant must treat as different, even though they are parallel in form and structure (i.e., II Corinthians 12:4 and one like John 12:34) can be treated alike, not differing in any significant way structurally. Both derive, in this analysis, from an underlying structure parallel to that of (6), with the only difference being the specific meaning of the main clause adjective *skuld*. It is this difference in meaning that leads to the necessity for a different translation of the infinitive (passive for John 12:34, active for II Corinthians 12:4) in English; this, however, should be taken as a fact about English and not as a consideration relevant for the analysis of Gothic.

The only problem raised by this analysis is one that any analysis has to face—namely the fact that the verbal adjectives *mahts* and *skulds* serve as predicates which allow Object Raising, whereas the related and synonymous verbs *magan* and *skulan* do not.¹⁰ It is possible to note, though, that in Indo-European languages especially, adjectival predicates seem more prone to allowing Object Raising than verbal predicates do. Thus while in English there are many adjectives that can “trigger” Object Raising (e.g., *easy*, *simple*, *hard*, *tough*, *difficult*, *impossible*, *legal*, *illegal*, among others), there are relatively few verbal triggers.¹¹ *take*, in the sense of duration of time, is one of the few—

- (9) a. It will take two hours for us to paint *this chair*.
b. *This chair* will take two hours for us to paint.

—but others are rare to the point of nonexistence.

Thus a consideration of Generative Grammar, especially with regard to Raising rules in syntax, can provide some insights into a controversial area of Gothic syntax. Besides the intrinsic value of such an analysis that deepens our understanding of the syntax of this important Germanic language, it has the added merit of showing how the principles of Generative Grammar, so often felt to be at odds with

¹⁰ Sturtevant did attempt an explanation of this fact, but, as noted above, his explanation suffers from circularity.

¹¹ David Ianucci, “Verb Triggers of Tough Movement,” *Journal of Linguistics* 15 (1979), 325–29. Ianucci argues that constructions with verbs like *resist* or *merit* as in *The problem resisted solution* or *This report merits our attention* are to be analysed as involving Object Raising with verbal triggers. Deriving nominals like *solution* or *attention* from underlying sentential sources, while quite plausible from a semantic standpoint, is somewhat controversial; thus his analysis is more open to doubt than the analysis proposed for constructions with a verb like *take*, in which the subordinate clause contains the productively formed infinitive. His analysis suggests, however, that there may be more verbal Object Raising triggers than previously believed.

the goals of traditional historical linguistic investigations, can be utilized to make a positive contribution to the study of Gothic. Moreover, this result is in keeping with Peeters' admonition that "nur wenn der gotische Text einer streng synchronischen Untersuchung unterzogen wird, kann man zu wichtigen Ergebnissen auf dem Gebiete der gotischen Syntax kommen."