English *Get*-Passives: Reassessing the Frequencies across Genres

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the *get*-passive in American English, with emphasis on its distribution in different text types and its semantic features characterized by co-occurring verbs. The data was drawn from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), i.e. the latest version with eight different genres. The findings indicate that the get-passive is a linguistic feature of informal English due to its highest frequency in spoken genres, e.g. TV and movie subtitles, and blogs. Furthermore, common verbs constituting the *get*-passive were explored and their meanings in context were analyzed. In agreement with previous studies, the semantic analysis of *get*-passives revealed a higher proportion of verbs expressing adversity, followed by those with positive and neutral meanings, respectively. The existence of non-adversative *get*-passive predicts a decline in the adversative type.

Keywords: *get*-passive; text type; common verb; COCA; adversative and non-adversative meaning

INTRODUCTION

A clear understanding of English grammar increases learners' accuracy in second language (L2) English comprehension and production. As one of the most common points of grammar, the passive construction presents challenges for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Learners from different L1 backgrounds are often confronted with the complicated usage of passives in English (Loan, 2019). Those whose L1 lacks the passive voice are often seen struggling with the acquisition of L2 English passives (Cowan, 2008). Even for learners whose L1 contains some limited form of the passives often encounter difficulties. To illustrate, L1-Thai speakers, whose L1 allows passives primarily with a negative sense of meaning, are found to commit errors in their interlanguage English passive constructions (Simargool, 2008).

As an alternative to 'the *be*-passive', i.e. the passive construction made up of *be* and past participle, 'the *get*-passive', i.e. the structure comprising *get* and past participle, is natural in spoken English (Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009). Several corpus-based studies place an emphasis on the use of get-passives in major varieties of English (e.g. Carter & McCarthy, 1999; Mair, 2006), while others make a comparison between Inner-Circle Englishes, such as British English, and Outer-Circle Englishes, such as Philippine English (e.g. Alonsagay & Nolasco, 2010), or Expanding-Circle Englishes, such as Swedish English (e.g. Fredriksson, 2016) and Chinese English (e.g. McEnery & Xiao, 2010).

The focus of this study is on the occurrence of *get*-passives in various text types representing American English, as shown in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and common verbs, from which the *get*-passive structures are constructed.

The following section reviews the major concepts and past studies related to English *get*-passives.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

THE ENGLISH *GET*-PASSIVE

An action expressed by a clause can generally be viewed in two possible ways: active voice, as in (1), and passive voice, as in (2), both of which are identical in meaning. In (1), the subject *the dog* receives emphasis as it is the doer or 'the agent' of the verb *saw*, and the object *the cat* is 'the patient', i.e. the person or thing that the action was done to (Chan & Maglio, 2020). In (2), by contrast, the patient *the cat* becomes the topic or the subject of the corresponding passive sentence, whereas the agent *the dog* appears in the prepositional phrase *by the dog*. This *by*-phrase can sometimes be omissible if "the doer of the verb is not important or not known or if we do not want to say who the doer is" (Carter, McCarthy, Mark & O'Keeffe, 2011, p. 363).

(1) The dog saw the cat.
(Crystal, 2004, p. 96)

(2) The cat was seen by the dog.
(Crystal, 2004, p. 96)

Alternatively, the *be*-passives can also be replaced by *get*-passives. For instance, (3) and (4) are semantically equal. It is worth noting that the *get*-passive usually occurs in informal speaking. The use of *get*-passive emphasizes the nature of the action itself or the person involved in the action (Carter, McCarthy, Mark & O'Keeffe, 2011).

(3) The trees in the garden ***were*** damaged in the wind.
(Carter, McCarthy, Mark & O'Keeffe, 2011, p. 222).

(4) The trees in the garden ***got*** damaged in the wind.
(Carter, McCarthy, Mark & O'Keeffe, 2011, p. 222).

SEMANTIC FEATURES OF *GET-PASSIVES*

(5) He feels his paintings are always ***getting criticised***.
(Carter, McCarthy, Mark & O'Keeffe, 2011, p. 222).

(6) Our car ***got stolen*** last night.
(Carter, McCarthy, Mark & O'Keeffe, 2011, p. 222).

The *get*-passive usually expresses meanings that are negative, undesirable, or adversative, as shown in the verbs *criticised* in (5) and *stolen* in (6). This structure often reflects an unfavorable attitude toward the action (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). Many subsequent studies provide support for this finding. According to Francis, Hunston & Manning (1996), the *get*-passive is indicative of an unpleasant situation and often conveys the speaker's negative attitude toward that situation. In a similar vein, a corpus-based study by Stubbs (2001) also corroborates such a notion in that the motivating factor in the communicative aspect of the *get*-passive is its negative connotation. Nevertheless, Carter & McCarthy (1999) revealed that not only is the *get*-passive often associated with adversative meanings but it also expresses neutral senses, as in *get involved*, or positive senses, as in *get paid*.

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SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF *GET-PASSIVES*

Some aspects of the syntactic features of *get*-passives are as follows. First, unlike *be*-passives, *get*-passives are normally used without an expressed agent, thereby not preceding a *by*-phrase (Crystal, 2004). This agentless passive construction emphasizes the patient rather than an agent, and it is far more likely to occur with the patient being a recipient of a negative action (Mair, 2006). By way of illustration, the *be*-passive with a *by*-phrase in (7) is more common than the corresponding *get*-passive with a *by*-phrase in (8).

(7) I was hurt by the car.

(Crystal, 2004, p. 97)

(8) I got hurt by the car.

(Crystal, 2004, p. 96)

Another aspect lies in the type of verb co-occurring with the *get*-passive. While the *be*-passive can be used with both dynamic and stative verbs, the *get*-passive requires only dynamic verbs, as in *get stuck, get killed, get bitten*, etc.

In addition, the *get*-passive can also be used in some idiomatic expressions, such as *get married, get washed, get shaved, get (un)dressed, get changed, get engaged, get divorced, get started, get lost* (Eastwood, 2005, p. 127).

PAST STUDIES ON THE *GET*-PASSIVE

Sawasaki (2000) investigated English native speakers' perceptions of *get*-passives, looking at how the *get*-passive configuration and the animacy of the subject with and without contextual information play a role to constitute the adversative implication. The results indicated that a significant increase of native speakers' perceived adversity was clearly seen only when *get*-passives and human-subject factors were combined. It is, however, important to note that the actual ratio of adversity for *get*-passives was only 0.3704, which is not remarkably high, whereas the ratio for neutrality was considerably higher (0.5148).

A corpus-based study that analyzed English *get*-passives was conducted by Mair (2006). The findings revealed a steady rise in the use of *get*-passives in both British English, as can be seen in Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus (LOB), Freiburg LOB Corpus (FLOB), and Freiburg Brown Corpus (FROWN), and American English, as demonstrated in the Time Corpus. A sudden increase in the *get*-passives could be seen from the 1990s onwards. Like other previous studies, Mair found that *get*-passives predominantly involve verbs with negative meanings, e.g. *get caught, get busted, get hurt, get killed, get sacked*. Although some verbs might sound positive, e.g. *kiss*, the context in which they appear are often adversative in meaning. In a specific example from the corpus data, a woman *got kissed* by a nasty man; this shows the particular kiss was something unpleasant.

Mair, in line with Carter & McCarthy (1999), discovered that the negative sense of *get*-passives is neutralized when accompanied by verbs with a neutral or positive meaning. To be more precise, out of the top-20 verbs used in the *get*-passive in the BNC (British National Corpus) and COCA, only 12 verbs express negative senses, namely *caught, smashed, hit, damaged, killed, hurt, shot, beaten, stopped, sacked, accused,* and *destroyed*. Four of these verbs are positive in meaning, namely *paid, promoted, invited,* and *served*. The verbs *played* and *written* are semantically neutral, while the meanings of *eaten* and *fucked* are uncertain. Consequently, constraints on the use of *get*-passive with positive words have weakened.

In search of the *get*-passive and the *be*-passive in the Brown family of corpora, Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith (2009) reported on approximately 400 occurrences of the *be*-passive than

the *get*-passive in written and formal spoken English. Furthermore, the frequency of *get*-passives doubled from the 1960s to 1990s in American English. More specifically, occurrences of *get*-passives were found most frequently in fiction, with press and general prose occupying the middle ground, and academic prose containing the fewest. Even in colloquial English, the *get*-passive is largely restricted to informal face-to-face conversations. Due to the fact that there was no sharp increase in *get*-passives in British English in comparison with American English, it can be concluded that American English was in the lead of an ongoing change. With regard to semantics of the *get*-passive, the slight rise from the 1960s to the 1990s has still not exhibited a marked shift towards a more neutral meaning. It was further observed that "[t]he majority of *get*-passives are still adversative. On the contrary, the relative frequency of adversative *get*-passives has even increased slightly." (p. 156). They also cited some corpus examples to illustrate the typical adversative meaning of the *get*-passive, as in (9)-(10).

(9) Did they know how wealth from over-large estates ***gets misused***?
(Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009, p. 157)

(10) We've been through too much together to ***get killed*** now.
(Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009, p. 157)

Even though they also found some *get*-passives with non-adversative, neutral semantics, as in (11), as well as some with positive connotations, as in (12), "these are not beginning to make a major contribution to the neutralization of the semantics of the *get*-passive." (p. 157).

(11) …if people are to learn to live together and ***get trained*** to do things well,…
(Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009, p. 157)

(12) …those who deserve rewards ***get rewarded*** appropriately.
(Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009, p. 157)

Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith concluded that the non-neutral semantics of the *get*-passive is a strong reason why it is unlikely for the *be*-passive to be replaced by the *get*-passive in the near future. In other words, the *get*-passive is a very infrequent alternative to the *be*-passive in written and formal spoken English. Such a finding is consistent with Mair & Leech's (2006) study on major changes in English syntax, which showed that although an exploration of *get*-passives in four different corpora confirmed a significant increase in this particular passive structure in American and British English, the rise was so infinitesimally small that *get*-passives cannot compensate for the decline in *b*e-passives.

Wanner (2013) revisited the adversity effect expressed by *get*-passives, based on an analysis of the FROWN corpus of written American English. Data from the FROWN corpus do not suggest that the *get*-passive is inherently semantically adversative. That is, two-thirds of *get*-passives found in the corpus are negative in meaning, such as *get caught, get overrun, get overlooked, get squeezed, get zapped, get blown into pieces, get pressured into, get killed, get fired, get struck*, etc. The remaining *get*-passives are neutral, as exemplified in (13)-(14), in which *get passed* and *get elected* do not have any negative connotation. Wanner argued that the high frequency of adversative *get*-passives is "a by-product of the register in which the *get*-passive is used" (p. 58). Put simply, it is "the informal, colloquial character of the *get*-passive, rather than the construction itself, which favors colloquial expressions of someone or something being strongly affected" (p. 53).

(13) Much of the savings **get passed** along to consumers in the form of lower prices.
(Wanner, 2013, p. 52)

(14) An Rev Tillis will **get elected**.
(Wanner, 2013, p. 52)

Villalibre (2015) examined the *get*-passive in the spoken part of a series of corpora of the International Corpus of English (ICE), including British English, Indian English, Hong Kong English, and Singapore English. In line with Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith (2009), Mair (2006), and Wanner (2013), the study revealed that the *get*-passives in the corpora are mixed between adversative and non-adversative types. It is noteworthy that in three of the subcorpora, namely British, Hong Kong and Singapore English, the neutral implications are almost as common as the adversative connotations. The semantic adversity of *get*-passives appears to be strongly associated with [+human] subjects. A drastic increase in inanimate subjects in American English, together with a slight inanimate-subject rise in British English, which correlates with a drop in [+human] subjects in the current English may explain a change in meaning of *get*-passives, "shifting from primarily adversative semantics to more neutral contexts" (p. 22).

Some diachronic studies on *get*-passives revealed increasing frequencies of this passive construction in American English. Schwarz (2017) reported on far higher number of *get*-passives in newspapers from the second half of the 20th century. The rise in *get*-passives use is attributed to colloquialization, which means features of spoken language are increasingly accepted in written language. A more recent study by Schwarz (2019) looked at *get*-passives in different genres and time periods based on the data from the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA). It was clear that *get*-passives increased dramatically between the 1870s and the 1990s and this passive structure continues to grammaticalize over the period. In other words, the verb *get* as the main component of *get*-passives undergoes a shift from a more lexical function to a more grammatical one as there seem to be more contexts in which the use of *get*-passives is allowed. Furthermore, according to the data from COHA, Fiction and Popular Magazines, i.e. the text types representing informal written language, are the two genres in which the highest frequencies *get*-passives were identified.

As can be seen in the reviewed studies, several attempts have been made to either analyze the English *get*-passive in terms of semantics and syntax or to compare and contrast it with the *be*-passive in different contexts. Although some studies devoted to an investigation of the *get*-passive in American English are based on a large corpus like COCA (e.g. Mair, 2006), those studies cover only the five conventional genres presented in COCA, i.e. Fiction, Spoken, Academic Journals, Newspapers, and Popular Magazines. This study aims to extend its scope to three new text types added to COCA in March 2020, i.e. TV and Movie Subtitles, Blogs, and Webpages, with emphasis on the verbs which frequently appear in the *get*-passive. The main findings will respond to two major research questions below:

1. What are the occurrences of *get*-passives across text types in American English?
2. What are the common verbs constituting *get*-passives in American English?

METHOD

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The current study is based on the data from a corpus of more than one billion words of text, representing American English, i.e. the Corpus of Contemporary American English or COCA (Davies, 2020). COCA is one of the most widely-known corpora used as a reference for both

TESOL practitioners and language researchers (Crawford & Csomay, 2016). At present, COCA contains texts of eight different genres, namely five traditional genres, i.e. Spoken, Fiction, Popular Magazines, Newspapers, and Academic Texts, and three new genres, i.e. TV and Movie Subtitles, Blogs, and Webpages.

It is useful to rely on data from COCA for the following reasons (Schmitt, 2010). First, COCA is considered an American-English corpus which is presumably larger than any other available American English corpus. It is comparable to the British National Corpus (BNC), which contains 100 million words of text from an extensive range of genres, such as spoken language, fiction, magazine, newspaper, and academic texts. Second, COCA is regarded as a genre-balanced corpus with data gathered from texts equally divided among various genres. This accounts for why COCA is one of the largest and best-developed corpora of current English. Finally, COCA is a monitor corpus, which means that it is constantly expanding as additional texts are added on a yearly basis.

With its primary goal to provide answers for the two aforementioned research questions, the present study focuses on the frequency and distribution of *get*-passives in the eight different text types. Furthermore, the top-30 verbs frequently constituting the *get*-passive were explored. To obtain all possible verb forms of the lemma GET, i.e. *get*, *gets*, *got*, and *getting*, followed by a verb in the past participle form, *[get]_vvn* was entered into the search box. To follow Mair's (2006) analytical framework, formulaic *get*-passives, i.e. those used in some idiomatic expressions, such as *get started, get married, get changed, get laid, get lost, get involved* or *get rid (of),* were excluded from the study. Moreover, any verbs that are potential components of phrasal verbs, e.g. *picked* (e.g. *picked up, picked on*), *called* (e.g. *called off, called on*), and *taken* (e.g. *taken over, taken up*), were considered beyond the scope of this study. Next, the common verbs as a constituent of *get*-passives were classified as adversative, positive, and neutral, in order to identify their meanings. When the meaning of *get*-passives is neutral or positive, the animacy of the subject was also taken into consideration. It has also been hypothesized that there is a strong relationship between inanimate subjects and non-adversative *get*-passives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As seen in Table 1, *get*-passives occur with the highest frequency in TV and Movie subtitles (50,926 tokens). The frequency of this construction in Blogs (34,353 tokens) and Spoken (33,009 tokens) are quite close. Such results lend support to past studies in that *get*-passives are characteristic of colloquial English, such as face-to-face informal conversations (e.g. Mair, 2006; Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009; Wanner, 2013). While Mair (2006) found that *get*-passives are most common in the spoken subcorpus of COCA due to the existing corpus data available at that time, the present study gives a clearer picture of the distribution of this passive structure in American English. The high frequency of *get*-passives in TV and Movie subtitles, followed by Blogs and Spoken respectively, largely supports Mair (2006) in that all these genres characterize informal English. Evidently the language reflected in this genre in COCA is based on the American component of TV and Movies corpora and is claimed to be as informal as or sometimes even more informal than actual spoken data (Davies, 2020). The current trend in the occurrences of *get*-passives still confirms its high degree of informality in English. Conversely, the frequency of *get*-passives appear to be the lowest in Academic Texts, which also reaffirms that this particular passive structure is informal, and thus uncommon in formal, academic text types.

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TABLE 1. Distribution of *Get*-Passives across Genres

Genre	Frequency	Per Million
TV and Movie subtitles	50,926	397.63
Blogs	34,353	267.10
Spoken	33,009	261.69
Web pages	26,869	216.24
Fiction	21,756	183.87
Popular magazines	19,638	155.74
Newspapers	17,673	145.17
Academic texts	3,867	32.28
TOTAL	208,091	

Apart from the distribution of *get*-passives across different eight genres, verbs that frequently form the passive construction were also observed, as well as the meaning, i.e. adversative or non-adversative, expressed by *get*-passives.

Table 2 lists the most common verbs found in the construction of *get*-passives in COCA. The findings show that *get caught* and *get paid* rank first and second in the frequency list, which is consistent with Mair (2006), who examined only the subcorpus Spoken of COCA. Aside from the two verbs discovered to have the highest frequency, there are other common verbs that both Mair (2006) and this study found in COCA, namely *hit, promoted killed, hurt, eaten,* and *invited*. Since the present study deals with an extensive amount of data drawn from the eight genres, as opposed to Mair's more limited data obtained from only one subcorpus, i.e. Spoken, not all possible verbs as a constituent of *get*-passives are included in Table 2. Only the top 30 high-frequency verbs in all the genres are displayed here, while others with lower frequency or possibly restricted to Spoken, as reported by Mair (2006), are left unlisted, namely *smashed, damaged, fucked, shot, beaten, stopped, sacked, accused, served, written, played,* and *destroyed*. In contrast, the current study revealed additional verbs not found in Mair's, e.g. *elected, arrested, kicked, sent, passed, notified, published, raped* etc.

TABLE 2. Frequent Verbs Used in *Get*-Passives in COCA

Rank	Verb	Frequency
1	caught	10,803
2	paid	8,988
3	hit	4,597
4	fired	2,943
5	elected	2,939
6	arrested	2,153
7	killed	1,557
8	kicked	1,546
9	thrown	1,392
10	knocked	1,269
11	burned	970
12	sucked	941
13	sent	921
14	passed	809
15	hooked	769
16	asked	631
17	notified	630
18	left	616
19	invited	565
20	hurt	556
21	promoted	540
22	locked	509
23	tested	495

24	noticed	463
25	trapped	462
26	published	355
27	eaten	332
28	reelected	281
29	bitten	252
30	raped	246
TOTAL		**49,530**

Table 3 lists common verbs as a component of *get*-passives whose meanings are adversative. In this table, 17 out of 30 verbs, equal to 63.76% (31,581 tokens), refer to adversative contexts. The amount of the get-passives in all the genres in COCA, i.e. approximately two-thirds, is consistent with the proportion reported in Wanner's (2013) study of American English represented by the FROWN corpus. This accords with Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan (1999), who concluded that the *get*-passive typically co-occurs with verbs that have "negative connotations, conveying that the action of the verb is difficult or to the disadvantage of the subject" (p. 481). The findings also provide support for Villalibre (2015) in that more *get*-passives in the L1-English (i.e. British) and ESL (Hong Kong and Singapore) corpora convey adversative consequences for the subject. Some corpus examples of adversative verbs forming the *get*-passive are provided in (15)-(19).

(15) For example if you ***get caught*** by private security with drugs at a lot of places they'll just throw…
(16) …I got pulled over and charged for driving without a license on a scooter. I ***got arrested*** and everything…
(17) I haven't ever worked there but my gf's friend just ***got fired*** for failure to take mandated breaks.
(18) We Know It is a LOL eBook about a group of high school seniors who ***get locked*** in the basement during the biggest party of the year,…
(19) The bad news is that if she does ***get raped***, her chances of ***getting killed*** after the rape go up dramatically.

TABLE 3. Verbs with Adversative Meanings Used in *Get*-Passives

Rank	Verb	Frequency
1	caught	10,803
2	hit	4,597
3	fired	2,943
4	arrested	2,153
5	killed	1,557
6	kicked	1,546
7	thrown	1,392
8	knocked	1,269
9	burned	970
10	sucked	941
11	hooked	769
12	left	616
13	hurt	556
14	locked	509
15	trapped	462
16	bitten	252
17	raped	246
TOTAL		**31,581**

The COCA data indicates that the subjects of the *get*-passives are usually human or animate, who are involved in adversative situations, i.e. "a state of affairs that is signaled contextually by the conversational participants as unfortunate, undesirable, or at least problematic" (Carter & McCarthy 1999, p. 49). However, *get*-passives with non-human subjects in adversative contexts are occasionally seen in the corpus, as in (20)-(21). In fact, the affected entity of the *get*-passive is not always the inanimate subject but rather the person who possesses it (Collins, 1996). In (20), the *get*-passive is considered to be adversative because of the adverse effect of the 'burning' action upon the speaker. Likewise, *got sucked* in (21) affects the speaker as the owner of the phone, as opposed to the device itself. It seems that the type of verb determines its subject in such a way that some verbs, e.g. *get arrested, get fired, get raped*, require only human subjects, while some others have more flexibility, allowing for non-human or inanimate subjects as well, e.g. *get burned, get sucked, get thrown* etc.

(20) First, it didn't come out the way I wanted. The sauce ***got burned***. It's a pan-seared striped bass with a chocolate miso sauce.
(21) My GPS card - it must have stuck to Sputnik when my phone ***got sucked*** into it.

In addition to the adversity expressed by the *get*-passive as shown in COCA, non-adversative verbs also appear, accounting for approximately 36.29% (17,979 tokens). The one-third proportion of non-adversative verbs found in *get*-passives in COCA is similar to Wanner's (2013) findings from the FROWN corpus of American English. That around 2 in 3 of *get*-passives have negative connotations, while the remaining *get*-passives are non-adversative may indicate that "adversativeness is not built into the construction" (p. 52).

Non-adversative verbs are divided into two subcategories: beneficial and neutral verbs. The 7 verbs whose meanings are positive or 'beneficial' (Villalibre, 2015) are *paid, elected, passed, invited, promoted, noticed*, and *reelected*, all of which account for 29.45% (14,585 tokens) and listed in the frequency order in Table 4. The verbs are also reported in other American-English corpora, e.g. *elected* and *passed* in FLOWN (Wanner, 2013). Many of these verbs also exist in *get*-passives in other Inner Circle varieties of English, such as British English, e.g. *paid* (Carter & McCarthy, 1999; Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009) and *elected* (Gustafsson, 2014), and the Outer Circle varieties of English, such as Hong Kong English, e.g. *paid, passed, reelected* (Villalibre, 2015), Singapore English, e.g. *elected, paid, passed* (Villalibre, 2015), and Indian English, e.g. *elected, promoted* (Villalibre, 2015).

TABLE 4. Verbs with Positive Meanings Used in *Get*-Passives

Rank	Verb	Frequency
1	paid	8,988
2	elected	2,939
3	passed	809
4	invited	565
5	promoted	540
6	noticed	463
7	reelected	281
TOTAL		**14,585**

Some examples of beneficial *get*-passives from COCA are given in (22)-(25).

(22) They ***got paid*** two to five times their government salaries and produced half the product.
(23) …whoever they voted for is just as President as someone who ***got elected*** unanimously by every American voting….

(24) At the end of the day either progressive laws ***get passed*** or they don't and either wingnut rethug laws get passed or they do…
(25) but Martin Sheen was made of too much awesome, and ***got promoted*** to a member of the main cast.

The verb *noticed* appears to be interesting in the *get*-passive construction. By itself, the verb seems to be neutral in meaning, but when it is combined with *get* in this passive structure, the composite meaning becomes positive, as in (26)-(27), as they mean 'to get attention or become easier to be seen'. It is clear from the data that the occurrences of *get*-passives involve not only adversity but also benefit, as noted by Huddleston and Pullum (2002).

(26) There are always comedians who will work hard and ***get noticed*** by agents and managers and record labels.
(27) While tens of thousands of artists are self-releasing their music, their ability to ***get noticed*** in a meaningful way is stifled by the sheer volume of music.

Common neutral verbs in the *get*-passives shown in COCA, accounting for approximately 6.79% (3,364 tokens) are *asked, sent, notified, tested, published,* and *eaten*, as presented in Table 5. Some of the verbs also occur in other corpora representing different Englishes, e.g. *eaten* in British English, i.e. British National Corpus (Mair, 2006), and *sent* and *published* in Hong Kong English (Villalibre, 2015). Some instances of neutral verbs in the *get*-passives in COCA are presented in (28)-(31).

(28) The details I ***get asked*** about the most on this costume are the patches.
(29) Sign in to ***get notified*** via email when new comments are made.
(30) You can ***get tested*** for health problems that run in families before getting pregnant…
(31) And the point was made that you're more likely to ***get published*** as a legal scholar if you surround yourself with other legal scholars…

TABLE 5. Verbs with Neutral Meanings Used in *Get*-Passives

Rank	Verb	Frequency
1	asked	631
2	sent	921
3	notified	630
4	tested	495
5	published	355
6	eaten	332
TOTAL		**3,364**

The approximately one-third of non-adversative *get*-passives occurring in COCA provide some evidence that *get*-passives are not inherently semantically negative. In reality, the passive construction itself has nothing to do with adversity, but the negative senses frequently associated with *get*-passives reflect speakers' attitudes (Sawasaki, 2000; Villalibre, 2015). Due to the fact that the *get*-passive is considered a common feature of spoken English, its colloquial character appears to co-select expressions or environments in which persons or things are strongly affected (Wanner, 2013). This is why the subjects of adversative *get*-passives are often human or animate. Although the subjects of *get*-passives can sometimes be things, the effect of the adversative verbs is actually on the persons owning those things rather than the things themselves (Collins, 1996).

Regarding non-adversative *get*-passives found in this study, most of the subjects are still human or animate. Even though it was hypothesized that there might be a correlation

between neutral *get*-passives and inanimate subjects, this hypothesis was not borne out by the available data as most of the *get*-passive occurrences seem to have human subjects. However, the subjects are possibly pre-determined by the verbs since some verbs primarily require non-human subjects, e.g. *eaten*, while others allow both human and non-human subjects, e.g. *passed* and *sent*. The high frequency of human subjects may be related to the genres in which *get*-passives appear. That is, as *get*-passives in COCA occur with the highest frequency in TV and Movie subtitles, Blogs, and Spoken, all of which represent spoken, informal English, it is likely for human subjects to be used in *get*-passives, whereas non-human subjects are common in more formal contexts (Villalibre, 2015; Wanner, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The present study centers around the occurrences of *get*-passives in terms of text-type distribution and typical verbs in American English represented by COCA. The results indicate that *get*-passives are very common in formal, colloquial English with the highest frequency occurring in TV and movie subtitles, blogs, and spoken language, respectively, whereas the structure occurs with the lowest frequency in academic texts, i.e. a genre with a very high degree of formality. Such a clear distribution of *get*-passives across different text types, with their remarkably high rate of use in informal genres, confirms previous studies' findings as to the association between the *get*-passive and conversational English (e.g. Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009; Mair, 2006; Wanner, 2013).

Apart from the text types, this study also concentrates on verbs commonly used in constructing *get*-passives. These common verbs were classified according to the senses of meaning they convey. An analysis of verb meanings demonstrates that, as suggested by a number of studies (e.g. Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999; Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009; Mair, 2006), *get*-passives are mainly associated with adversative meanings, as can be seen in the verbs with negative connotations like *get arrested*, *get burned*, *get fired*, *get killed*, *get kicked*, *get bitten*, *get raped*, etc. The proportion of adversative *get*-passives in COCA, i.e. two-thirds, is also consistent with that reported in Wanner's (2013) study. More interestingly, the remaining *get*-passives are non-adversative, which means they are semantically positive (e.g. *get paid* and *get promoted*) or neutral (e.g. *get notified* and *get eaten*). The increasing use of non-adversative *get*-passives provides support for other studies that discovered non-adversative meanings of this passive structure in British English (e.g. Leech, Hundt, Mair & Smith, 2009), as well as Outer Circle Englishes, e.g. Hong Kong and Singapore English (Villalibre, 2015). The gradual rise in neutral and positive *get*-passives may correlate with the decrease in the adversity expressed by *get*-passives. It is anticipated that the adversative meaning of *get*-passives is in a downward trend (Villalibre, 2015).

The current study is not without limitations. The first concerns the types of verb being analyzed in this study. Since the study aims to investigate only single-word verbs as a constituent of *get*-passives, two-word or phrasal verbs were not included. Future research may take phrasal verbs into consideration so as to obtain a clearer picture of more verbs as a co-occurring element of *get*-passives. The second limitation pertains to the source of data. The present study drew data from COCA, which represents American English, as a standard variety of English. However, second language researchers might be interested in looking at *get*-passives in the interlanguage of EFL or ESL learners and conduct a comparative study between *get*-passives in learner language and those in native-speaker English. Ultimately, this study did not compare between *get*-passive and *be*-passives. Although a comparison between both types of passive constructions is not new, examining them in a vast corpus like COCA may yield additional results not evidenced in prior studies.

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