

Research Article

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Restrictions on past-tense passives in Late Modern Danish

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Abstract: This article investigates a case of lexical restrictions on a voice construction, specifically Danish past-tense passives. Present-Day Danish has both a periphrastic and an inflectional passive construction, but in the past tense, most ablaut (strong) verbs cannot form the inflectional passive (e.g. **skreves* ‘was written’, **bares* ‘was carried’). Various explanations for these restrictions have been proposed in the literature, but their historical background has not been investigated in any detail. This article focusses on the passive restrictions in Late Modern Danish, using various sources mainly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is shown that while lexical restrictions on the past-tense *s*-passive are already mentioned in eighteenth and nineteenth-century grammars, the grammaticality of the individual forms has changed; for instance, the now obsolete form *skreves* ‘was written’ is attested in several Late Modern Danish sources. Furthermore, the primary sources differ greatly with respect to their use of the passive in the past tense. I suggest that sociolinguistic variables, such as level of education and formality of the texts, must be taken into account when trying to explain the development of the Danish passive, and that the lexical restrictions on past-tense *s*-passives may in fact be a side effect of standardization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Keywords: lexical restrictions, voice, Late Modern Danish, historical sociolinguistics, standardization

1 Introduction

This article focusses on a case of lexical restrictions on passive constructions, specifically inflected past-tense passives in Danish and their historical development. In modern standard Danish, an inflected passive (the ‘*s*-passive’) alternates with a periphrastic passive, but in the past tense, this alternation is constrained by conjugation class. Whereas verbs with suffixal (‘weak’) past-tense forms can form the *s*-passive in the past tense, most ablaut (‘strong’) verbs cannot; in these cases, only the periphrastic passive is available. Compare the acceptable past-tense passive form *hørtes* in (1) with the unavailable form **skreves* in (2):

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----------------|------------|------------|--------|--------------|----------|
| (1) | Skuddet | {hørtes / | blev | hørt} | over | hele | byen. |
| | shot.DEF | hear.PST.PASS | become.PST | hear.PTCP | across | whole | town.DEF |
| | “The shot was heard across the whole town.” (constructed example) | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| (2) | Breve | {*skreves / | blev | skrevet} | af | ministeren. | |
| | letter.PL.DEF | write.PST.PASS | become.PST | write.PTCP | by | minister.DEF | |
| | “The letters were written by the minister.” (constructed example) | | | | | | |

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On the face of it, there is no obvious motivation for this restriction, either formal or functional: the unacceptable form **skreves* in (2) does not seem to violate any phonotactic, semantic, or other rules in the language, yet native speakers consistently avoid it and judge it to be ungrammatical. The same holds for most other strong verbs. Different explanations for these restrictions have been proposed, but their historical background has so far attracted only limited attention.

In this article, I will shed new light on the Danish passive restrictions by looking more closely at their historical development. This is a difficult endeavour for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the restrictions in question concern forms which are or were ungrammatical, and which are hence not expected to appear in historical texts. This calls for a more creative use of relevant sources, including older grammatical descriptions, which in some cases comment on the grammaticality of particular forms. For this study, I surveyed as many early grammars as possible (covering the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries) and carried out a small corpus investigation of a selection of Late Modern Danish texts, mainly from the nineteenth century. The findings show that while restrictions are already mentioned in eighteenth-century grammars, the acceptability of individual forms have changed – in the primary sources, several past-tense passives are attested which do not occur in the present-day language, such as *skreves* ‘was written’. At the same time, the use of the past-tense *s*-passive turns out to differ greatly between different texts, being almost entirely absent in two ego-documents by writers with limited education. I will suggest that the past-tense *s*-passive may actually be an artefact of the written standard language, which was absent or at least very infrequent in vernacular spoken Danish in the nineteenth century.

The article is structured as follows. In Section 2, I survey the alternation between inflectional and periphrastic passives in contemporary Danish and give a brief overview of some earlier works on the restrictions on the *s*-passive. This is followed by the presentation of the material and methods in Section 3 and the findings of the study in Section 4. Section 5 discusses how this investigation supplements the existing literature on the Danish passive and offers some suggestions for future work. Section 6 concludes the study.

2 Passives in Present-Day Danish

The following sections introduce the Danish passive constructions and the restrictions on the *s*-passive. In Section 2.1, I give a brief overview of the two main passive constructions in Danish and some of the existing literature on the differences between them. Section 2.2 then discusses the restrictions on past-tense *s*-passives and some earlier accounts attempting to explain them.

2.1 Periphrastic and inflectional passives

Finite verbs in contemporary standard Danish are inflected for tense (present vs past), mood (indicative vs imperative), and voice (active vs passive). Additional tense and modality distinctions are expressed by various periphrastic constructions, most of them consisting of a finite auxiliary plus an infinitive or past participle. Historically, the verb was also inflected for person and number, and a morphological subjunctive existed, but these forms are obsolete in the modern language (see e.g. Haugen 1976, 376–9; a brief sketch of verbal morphology in the present-day language may also be found in Herslund 2002, 63–5).

Like in the other Mainland Scandinavian languages, both an inflectional and a periphrastic passive are available. The inflectional passive is formed by adding *-(e)s* either to the stem or to the past-tense active form and is hence usually referred to as the ‘*s*-passive’ (on non-passive verbs with the *-(e)s* suffix, see below). The periphrastic passive consists of the auxiliary *blive* ‘become’ plus a past participle.¹ The latter construction is thus a parallel to the periphrastic passives found in most of the other Germanic languages

¹ In addition to the *s*- and *blive*-passives, there are two other Danish constructions which are usually described as passives. One is the resultative passive consisting of the copula *være* plus past participle (*træet er fældet* ‘the tree is/has been cut down’); the

(see Askedal 2010 for a comparative survey). Two examples with the verb *fælde* ‘fell, log, cut down’ are given in (3) and (4), one with the *s*-passive and the other with the periphrastic passive:²

- (3) Op mod 80 procent af det træ, der **fældes** i russisk fjernøsten, er ulovligt.
 up toward 80 pct. of DET wood REL fell.PASS in Russian far.east.DEF be.PRS illegal
 “As much as 80% of the wood which is logged in the Russian Far East is illegal.” (Twitter)
- (4) De gamle platantræer på markedspladsen **bliver fældet** i morgen
 DEF old plane.tree.PL on market.square.DEF become.PRS fell.PTCP tomorrow
 “The old plane trees on the Market Square will be cut down tomorrow” (sn.dk)

Unlike in English – but like most of the other Germanic languages (Askedal 2010, 91) – intransitive verbs in Danish may also be passivized (on passives from intransitive verbs, see also Keenan and Dryer 2007, 345–8). In this construction, the subject position is filled by one of the obligatory expletives *der* ‘there’ or *her* ‘here’. Both the *s*-passive and the periphrastic passive occur in this construction, as shown in (5) and (6) with the intransitive verb *danse* ‘dance’:

- (5) Der **danses** til det nyeste musik
 there dance.PASS to DEF newest music
 Description of a recurring dance class: “Dancing is [always] to the newest music” (hdfglostrup.dk)
- (6) Og så **bliver** der **danset** til god musik
 and then become.PRS there dance.PTCP to good music
 Description of a Christmas party: “And then there is dancing [i.e. people dance] to some good music” (grindstedseniorbowlings.dk)

The two passive constructions are not available in the same tense forms. Because past participles do not occur with the *s*-suffix, periphrastic tense forms using the past participle, such as the perfect, cannot form the *s*-passive, as shown by the starred forms **har hørt* and **har skrevet* in Table 1. Hence, in the perfect (and pluperfect), one can only use the periphrastic passive: *er blevet hørt* ‘has been heard’; *er blevet skrevet* ‘has been written’. In the past tense, on the other hand, the *s*-passive is possible, but only with some verbs. Most importantly, weak verbs like *høre* ‘hear’, which form their past tense with a suffix (*-ede* or *-te*), may also form a past-tense *s*-passive, as shown in Table 1 and in (1). Weak past-tense passive forms like *hørtes* ‘was heard’ are perfectly possible (even if they have a rather low discourse frequency, as discussed below). In this, they differ from the great majority of strong verbs, i.e. verbs with suffixless past-tense forms. These do not usually form a past-tense *s*-passive (but see Section 2.2). The hypothetical strong past-tense passive **skreves* ‘was written’ is impossible in modern standard Danish. In other words, the past-tense *s*-passive is lexically restricted in the terms of van Lier and Messerschmidt (2022): one set of lexical items (namely, weak and a few strong verbs) may form it, while another (the majority of strong verbs) may not. Note, however, that the restrictions on the Danish *s*-passive differ from the cases mentioned by van Lier and Messerschmidt (2022, 7–8), as they are limited to a particular tense form – the lexical restrictions concern strong verbs in the past tense, not strong verbs in general.³

other is the ‘affective’ passive (Nielsen 2018) with *få* ‘get’ (*de fik træet fældet* ‘they had the tree cut down’). This article only focusses on the alternation between the two ‘canonical’ passive constructions.

² The Present-Day Danish examples in the following were either found online, in the linguistic literature, or in the corpus KorpusDK. For online examples, the website is indicated; for examples from KorpusDK, I give the year and title of the original source. All interlinear glosses and translations are my own.

³ In the case of the perfect, there is of course no lexical restriction, as the (hypothetical) perfect *s*-passive is impossible with all verbs, i.e. all lexical items are treated in the same way.

Table 1: Conjugation of weak and strong verbs

	Weak verb, <i>høre</i> ‘hear’			Strong verb, <i>skrive</i> ‘write’		
	Active	s-passive	Periph. passive	Active	s-passive	Periph. passive
Infinitive	<i>høre</i>	<i>høres</i>	<i>blive hørt</i>	<i>skrive</i>	<i>skrives</i>	<i>blive skrevet</i>
Present	<i>hører</i>	<i>høres</i>	<i>bliver hørt</i>	<i>skriver</i>	<i>skrives</i>	<i>bliver skrevet</i>
Past	<i>hørte</i>	<i>hørtes</i>	<i>blev hørt</i>	<i>skrev</i>	<i>*skreves</i>	<i>blev skrevet</i>
Perfect	<i>har hørt</i>	<i>*har hørt</i>	<i>er blevet hørt</i>	<i>har skrevet</i>	<i>*har skrevet</i>	<i>er blevet skrevet</i>

The s-passive and the periphrastic passive also differ with respect to semantics, but the exact nature of this difference has been the object of some discussion in the literature, and for many speakers, it does not appear to be categorical. According to the traditional account, the distinction is primarily one of genericity vs specificity: the s-passive is preferred for habitual and generic situations, in normative statements, and with certain stative verbs, whereas the periphrastic passive is mainly used for specific (including future) situations; see e.g. Diderichsen (1962, 117, 136) or Lundskær-Nielsen and Holmes (2010, 355–61). Compare the use of the s-passive in the generic statements in (3) and (5) with the use of the periphrastic construction in (4), which concerns a specific plan for the future, and (6), where one particular situation is described.

An interpretation of the distinction in terms of mood has been proposed by Heltoft and Jacobsen (1996) and Heltoft (2006) (see also Hansen and Heltoft 2011, 741–51). According to this view, the s-passive can be described as expressing a kind of objective mood, the periphrastic passive a subjective mood. By using a periphrastic passive, the speaker makes a simple declarative statement which is ‘anchored’ in their own consciousness. By contrast, the s-passive ‘indicates the presence of another consciousness or intention located in the propositional layer’ of the clause (Heltoft and Jacobsen 1996, 208). This, the authors maintain, explains why the s-passive is often used in generic and normative statements – these do not reflect the speaker’s point of view alone, but depend on some other consciousness as well, e.g. people in general in the case of norms. According to Heltoft and Jacobsen (1996), this analysis also explains a well-known fact about the two passives, namely, that they lead to different interpretations when combined with modal verbs. In such cases, the periphrastic passive usually has a more subjective meaning than the s-passive, e.g. in the promise (‘subjective guarantee’) in (8) as opposed to the instruction in (7) (examples from Heltoft and Jacobsen 1996, 210):

- (7) Denne poste*j* skal **spises** inden ugens udgang
 this paté shall eat.PASS before week.DEF.POSS end
 “This paté has to be eaten before the end of the week [e.g. according to the sell-by date].”

- (8) Denne poste*j* skal **blive** **spist** inden ugens udgang
 this paté shall become.INF eat.PTCP before week.DEF.POSS end
 “This paté will be eaten before the end of the week (I promise).”

The alternation between the two passives has recently been investigated in detail by Laanemets (2009, 2012, 2013), who compares the use of passive constructions in four genres, two spoken and two written.⁴ I will only report some of her findings from the newspaper and conversation corpora here, since these are by far her largest written and spoken corpora, respectively. Laanemets finds that the s-passive is frequently used in newspaper texts, whereas it is much less frequent than the periphrastic passive in the conversation corpus; as she notes (Laanemets 2012, 96), similar observations have been made in the earlier literature (e.g. Hansen 1967, iii, 54, Rehling 1934), so the lower frequency of the s-passive in the colloquial spoken

⁴ Laanemets also studies the other national Mainland Scandinavian languages Swedish and Norwegian. Since my focus here is the Danish situation, I only discuss Laanemets’ Danish results in this summary; see footnote 5 for some brief remarks on Norwegian. Heltoft (2006) discusses the substantial differences between the Danish and Swedish s-passives; a book-length treatment of the history of the Swedish s-passive may be found in Holm (1952).

language is not an entirely new phenomenon. However, Laanemets's figures reveal an interesting detail when broken down according to the form of the passive verb (infinitive, present, or past): the difference between the newspaper texts and the conversations is mainly due to a difference in the use of the present tense. In the infinitive – e.g. in contexts with a modal verbs, as in (7)–(8) – the *s*-passive is more frequent than the periphrastic passive in both corpora (71.7% *s*-passive in the newspaper corpus, 76.4% in the conversation corpus). In the past tense, the periphrastic passive is much more frequent in both corpora (3.2% *s*-passive in the newspaper corpus, 0.6% in the conversation corpus). Compare the distributions of the two passive constructions in the two corpora in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of *s*- and periphrastic passive in Present-Day Danish (adapted from Laanemets 2012, 97)

	Newspaper corpus			Conversation corpus		
	<i>s</i> -passive	Periph. passive	Total (= 100%)	<i>s</i> -passive	Periph. passive	Total (= 100%)
Infinitive	418 (71.7%)	165 (28.3%)	583	551 (76.4%)	170 (23.6%)	721
Present	591 (73.3%)	215 (26.7%)	806	63 (8.9%)	647 (91.1%)	710
Past	14 (3.2%)	417 (96.8%)	431	6 (0.6%)	981 (99.4%)	987

The figures in Table 2 suggest that no matter how the semantic difference between the *s*-passive and the periphrastic passive is characterized, both genre and linguistic context (the tense of the clause) appear to be factors influencing their distribution. Laanemets's findings show that the *s*-passive is infrequent in the present tense in the spoken language, but frequently used in the written newspaper corpus. In the past tense, on the other hand, the *s*-passive is infrequent in both speech and writing. It should thus be kept in mind that the morphological restrictions discussed in the following section concern forms which are quite rare in contemporary Danish speech and writing. As the findings presented later in this article will show, this was not the case in all Late Modern Danish texts.

2.2 Restrictions on the *s*-passive

In this section, the restrictions on past-tense *s*-passives on strong verbs are described in more detail, and two attempts at explaining them are discussed. As already mentioned, most strong verbs can only form the periphrastic passive in the past tense, not the *s*-passive. This fact is generally acknowledged in descriptions of the language (see e.g. Herslund 2002, 72, Lundskær-Nielsen and Holmes 2010, 357, Hansen and Heltoft 2011, 629, 752–4), and a number of different explanations for it have been proposed in the literature. I return to these below.

As noted earlier, the *s*-passive is infrequent in the past tense in both the written and spoken language, but past-tense *s*-passives do occur. With weak verbs, i.e. verbs forming their past tense with one of the suffixes *-ede* and *-te*, the form is grammatical and productive, even if mainly encountered in the written language. The examples in (9) and (10) are from KorpusDK (Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab 2019), a large corpus of contemporary written Danish (c. 107 million words).

- (9) Derefter **spilledes** i henhold til reglerne 4 partier hurtigskak
 thereafter play.PST.PASS in accordance to rule.PL.DEF four game.PL fast_chess
 “After this, in accordance with the rules four games of fast chess were played”
 (KorpusDK, 2008 Wikipedia)

- (10) I løbet af angrebets første halve time **hørtes** omkring 12 eksplosioner
 in run.DEF of attack.DEF.POSS first half hour hear.PST.PASS around twelve explosion.PL
 i Beograd
 in Belgrade
 “During the first half hour of the attack, around twelve explosions were heard in Belgrade”
 (KorpusDK, 1999 Politiken)

A few weak verbs with the suffix *-te* have stem modifications in addition to the suffix, e.g. *bringe* ‘bring’ (PST *bragte*) and *sælge* ‘sell’ (PST *solgte*) (Hansen and Heltoft 2011, 652). This does not appear to be a problem for the formation of an s-passive in the past tense, as indicated by (11) and (12):

- (11) Den 16. juli 1945 **bragtes** den første atombombe til eksplosion i New Mexico
 DEF 16th July 1945 bring.PST.PASS DEF first atomic_bomb to explosion in N. M.
 “On 16 July 1945, the first atomic bomb was detonated [*lit.* brought to explosion] in New Mexico”
 (KorpusDK, 1988 Atomkraft og miljø)
- (12) et tidligt Dankvart Dreyer arbejde, ”Landskab med hjorte”, stod til 20.000 men
 INDF early D. D. work landscape with deer.PL stand.PST at 20,000 but
solgtes for 25.000
 sell.PST.PASS for 25,000
 ‘an early Dankvart Dreyer piece, “Landscape with Deer,” was valued at 20,000 [DKK] but sold for 25,000’ (KorpusDK, 1991 Berlingske Tidende)

The majority of strong verbs, i.e. verbs with a suffixless (usually ablauted) past tense, cannot form the past-tense s-passive. The ungrammatical example in (13) is from Hansen and Heltoft (2011, 755):

- (13) *tyvene **grebes** hurtigt af politiet
 thief.PL.DEF seize.PST.PASS quickly by police.DEF
 Intended: “The thieves were quickly seized by the police” (grammatical: *Tyvene blev hurtigt grebet af politiet*)

While descriptions of contemporary Danish agree that most strong verbs cannot form the s-passive in the past tense, the accounts differ in their level of detail. Some authors mention quite a number of exceptions to the generalization, while others mention only a few possible forms or none at all. Lundskær-Nielsen and Holmes (2010, 357) mention the four strong past-tense passives *sås* ‘was seen’, *gaves* ‘was given’ (said to have “an old-fashioned ring”), *afholdtes* ‘was held/organized’, and *vandtes* ‘was won’; according to the authors, the last two verbs allow an s-passive because their active past-tense forms end in *-t*. Herslund (2002, 72) only writes that “[m]ost strong verbs” have no past-tense s-passive, but gives no examples of strong verbs that do. In the reference grammar by Hansen and Heltoft (2011, 752–4), the exceptions to the generalization are discussed at greater length. According to the authors, the main exceptions are strong verbs historically belonging to the so-called sixth ablaut class, most of which have the stem vowel /o:/ in the past tense, e.g. *joges* ‘was chased’, *toges* ‘was taken’, and *lodes* ‘was let’. They also mention a few additional verbs, including some ‘prefixed strong verbs in the written language’ (“Sammensatte skriftsproglige stærke verber;” Hansen and Heltoft 2011, 752) belonging to other ablaut classes, e.g. *frigaves* ‘was released’ (from *give* ‘give’, fifth ablaut class). (See also Heltoft 2006, 276–8 for a brief overview in English.)

Three corpus examples of strong past-tense s-passives are given in (14)–(16): a verb belonging to the sixth ablaut class (*toges*), one of the verbs with *-t* mentioned by Lundskær-Nielsen and Holmes (2010) (*vandtes*), and a prefixed verb mentioned by Hansen and Heltoft (2011) (*frigaves*).

- (14) I 1941 **toges** et nyt radiohus i Kbh. i brug.
 in 1941 take.PST.PASS a new radio_house in Copenhagen in use
 “In 1941, a new headquarters of the public radio was opened [*lit.* taken in use] in Copenhagen.”
 (KorpusDK, 1988 Fakta)
- (15) Etapen **vandtes** af den 30-årige italiener Davide Bramati.
 stage.DEF win.PST.PASS by DEF 30-y.o. Italian D. B.
 “The stage was won by the 30-year-old Italian Davide Bramati” (KorpusDK, 1999 Politiken)
- (16) Han **frigaves** og sendtes i eksil i San Casciano.
 he release.PST.PASS and send.PST.PASS in exile in S. C.
 “He [Niccolò Machiavelli] was released and sent into exile in San Casciano” (KorpusDK, 2008 Wikipedia)

In Table 3, I have attempted to compile a comprehensive list of the strong past-tense *s*-passives attested in contemporary Danish. The list is organized according to the historical ablaut classes, like the list compiled by Heltoft (2006, 277–8), but gives more forms than Heltoft’s overview. Note that I only list a small selection of the hypothetical ungrammatical *s*-passives; the total number of strong verbs is much larger (about a hundred; Hansen and Heltoft 2011, 656–9 list 104 underived strong verbs in the present-day language). The overview in Table 3 was compiled from the grammatical descriptions discussed earlier and supplemented with forms found in KorpusDK; a question mark before a form indicates that the verb is mentioned in the literature but that the simplex form was not found in the corpus. A number of verbs, such as *-fandtes*, *-lodes*, and *-stodes*, are attested only with prefixes, as pointed out by Hansen and Heltoft (2011). Some examples of such forms are listed in the last column. As the table suggests, the past-tense *s*-passive is indeed more frequent with verbs of the sixth ablaut class, but is also found with a few other strong verbs.

Note that some strong verbs which do not allow the past-tense *s*-passive are found as past-tense deponents (middles). As discussed by Heltoft (2006, 274–5), the *s*-passive historically developed from an earlier reflexive construction, following the well-attested pathway REFLEXIVE → ANTICAUSATIVE (‘intransitive’ in Heltoft’s terms) → PASSIVE (see Haspelmath 1990; Heltoft and Nielsen 2019, 212–5). Such reflexive and anticausative verbs are still relatively frequent in the language, such as *enes* ‘agree’, *skændes* ‘argue’, *slås* ‘fight’, *længes* ‘long, miss’, or *findes* ‘be, exist’. These occur in past-tense and participial forms without any of the restrictions applying to passives. Hence, a strong deponent verb like *slås* ‘fight’ (from *slå* ‘beat’) may form the past tense *sloges*, as shown in (17). This would also hypothetically be the past-tense *s*-passive of *slå* ‘beat’, but the form is not available with this meaning – the past-tense passive of *slå* has to be formed with the auxiliary *blive*, as in (18):

- (17) Inden den økonomiske krise kom, **sloges** vi allerede med en fødevarekrise.
 before DEF financial crisis came fight.PST we already with INDF food_crisis
 “Before the financial crisis arrived, we were already fighting a food crisis.”
 (KorpusDK, 2009 Politiken)
- (18) I 1934 **blev** Cuba **slået** i VM-kvalifikationen af Mexico
 in 1934 become.PST C. beat.PTCP in World_Cup-qualification.DEF by M.
 “In 1934 Cuba was beaten by Mexico in the World Cup qualification” (not: **I 1934 sloges Cuba...*)
 (KorpusDK, 1998 Jyllands-Posten)

Such examples show that the restrictions on the *s*-passive cannot be due to phonotactic or other purely formal constraints: a form like *sloges* is perfectly possible in Present-Day Danish, it is just not available as a past-tense passive form, only as a deponent (as also noted by Heltoft 2006, 278).

A number of different explanations for these restrictions have been proposed. I will only discuss the two most recent ones here; for a concise discussion (and criticism) of some earlier proposals see Laanemets

(2012, 29–32). In both of the most recent accounts, syncretism within the verbal paradigm plays a crucial role, but the accounts differ in important respects. Whereas Heltoft (2006) proposes a historical-functional explanation, the account in Lundquist (2016) only makes reference to the synchronic grammatical system.

According to Heltoft (2006) (see also Hansen and Heltoft 2011, 753–7), the ‘gaps’ in the past-tense paradigms in Present-Day Danish are to be explained by the historical development of the system and the meaning of the *s*-passive. Very briefly stated, according to the author, only verbs which had identical past indicative and past subjunctive stems in Middle Danish (c. 1100–1500) can form a past-tense *s*-passive in the contemporary language. This includes all weak verbs as well as strong verbs of the sixth ablaut class. The reason for this, according to Heltoft, can be found in the modal character of the *s*-passive, which precluded it from being combined with indicative stems in Middle Danish. Since most of the strong past-tense forms in Present-Day Danish go back to Middle Danish indicative forms, these never allowed a past-tense *s*-passive. However, because weak verb and strong verbs of the sixth ablaut class had indicative–subjunctive syncretism in the past tense (i.e. no formal mood opposition), the past-tense *s*-passive could be formed in these conjugation classes without any problems. Hence, under this view, the present-day situation is a historical accident, as it were, owing to the patterns of syncretism in the Middle Danish verbal paradigm.

Lundquist (2016) also accounts for the restrictions by referring to syncretism, but in the paradigms of the present-day language. According to this explanation, the past-tense *s*-passive in contemporary Danish (and Norwegian Bokmål⁵) is licensed by the partial syncretism between the past active forms and the participle. The reason for this, in Lundquist’s view, is that the morphological passives in the two languages are underlyingly tenseless; finite passives in a sense ought not to be grammatical at all, but are acquired by the language learner because of ‘form-parasitism’ on other forms in the paradigm. In other words, a present-tense passive form like *bruges* ‘is used’ is possible because it is syncretic with the passive infinitive, and a past-tense passive like *brugtes* ‘was used’ is only possible because the participle *brugt* with the same stem exists. If there is no syncretism between the simple past (e.g. *sang* ‘sang’) and participial stem (*sunget* ‘sung’), no past-tense *s*-passive is possible (see in particular Lundquist 2016, 206–9).

Although my material from Late Modern Danish will not be able to confirm or disprove either of these accounts unequivocally, I note here that they both have a number of potential weaknesses – and that my Late Modern Danish findings may at least cast some doubt on both of them. As for Heltoft’s historical explanation, it should be noted that it depends on a particular ‘modal’ analysis of the Danish passive alternation (outlined in Section 2.1) and further assumes that the same semantic distinction between the *s*-passive and the periphrastic passive already applied in Middle Danish; while this might turn out to be the case, it is an empirical question which remains to be investigated in detail.⁶ In addition, Heltoft’s account presupposes that there has also been morphological stability between the late Middle Ages and the present day: the past-tense *s*-passives which are possible in the contemporary language, according to Heltoft, are the ones which were possible in Middle Danish. As the findings presented in Section 4 will show, however, quite a number of past-tense *s*-passives are attested in Late Modern Danish texts which are not expected according to Heltoft’s account, e.g. of verbs belonging to the first and second ablaut classes.

As for Lundquist’s synchronic explanation, it should be stressed that it only attempts to explain why weak past-tense *s*-passives are possible – it does not account for the existence of strong past-tense forms like *toges* ‘was taken’ or *frigaves* ‘was released’, which have no syncretism with the corresponding past participles (*taget*, *frigivet*) and are therefore unexpected in Lundquist’s account. The author acknowledges

⁵ Lundquist treats both the Danish and Norwegian *s*-passives, where similar – though not identical – restrictions apply. As already mentioned, I focus only on Danish in this article. While the Danish and Norwegian situations are clearly somehow connected, there are indications that the Norwegian restrictions may to some extent have been ‘imported’ from Danish, the historical *Dachsprache* of this language (see Enger 2000, 21–8). If this is correct, the Norwegian restrictions are better treated as a result of language contact than as an internal development, no matter the ultimate cause of the Danish restrictions.

⁶ Note that it is of course entirely possible that the ‘modal’ analysis is appropriate for the modern language, but that this distinction between the *s*-passive and the periphrastic passive only developed after the Middle Danish period. One author has in fact suggested that the semantic distinction only developed “[d]uring the 20th c.” (Hansen 2005, 1633).

Table 3: Past-tense forms of strong conjugation classes

	Infinitive	Past act.	Past pass.	Comments
I	<i>bide</i> ‘bite’	<i>bed</i>	* <i>bedes</i>	
	<i>gribe</i> ‘catch’	<i>greb</i>	* <i>grebes</i>	
	<i>skrive</i> ‘write’	<i>skrev</i>	* <i>skreves</i>	
II	<i>bryde</i> ‘shoot’	<i>brød</i>	* <i>brødes</i>	
	<i>lyve</i> ‘lie’	<i>løj</i>	* <i>løjes</i>	
	<i>skyde</i> ‘shoot’	<i>skød</i>	* <i>skødes</i>	
III	<i>drikke</i> ‘drink’	<i>drak</i>	* <i>drakkes</i>	
	<i>finde</i> ‘find’	<i>fandt</i>	* <i>fandtes</i>	Attested with prefixes, e.g. <i>frifandtes</i> ‘was acquitted’, <i>opfandtes</i> ‘was invented’
	<i>hjælpe</i> ‘help’	<i>hjalp</i>	* <i>hjalpes</i>	
	<i>tvinge</i> ‘force’	<i>tvang</i>	* <i>tvanges</i>	
	<i>vinde</i> ‘win’	<i>vandt</i>	<i>vandtes</i>	Also <i>genvandtes</i> ‘was reclaimed’, <i>overvandtes</i> ‘was conquered’, <i>udvandtes</i> ‘was extracted’
IV	<i>bære</i> ‘carry’	<i>bar</i>	* <i>bares</i>	
	<i>skære</i> ‘cut’	<i>skar</i>	* <i>skares</i>	
	<i>stjæle</i> ‘steal’	<i>stjal</i>	* <i>stjales</i>	
V	<i>bede</i> ‘ask’	<i>bad</i>	* <i>bades</i>	
	<i>give</i> ‘give’	<i>gav</i>	? <i>gaves</i>	Attested with prefixes, e.g. <i>frigaves</i> ‘was released’, <i>overgaves</i> ‘was handed over’
	<i>se</i> ‘see’	<i>så</i>	<i>sås</i>	Apparently only with metaphorical (‘was considered’) and potential meaning (‘could be seen’); also prefixed <i>ansås</i> ‘was regarded’, <i>udsås</i> ‘be chosen’
VI	<i>drage</i> ‘draw’	<i>drog</i>	<i>droges</i>	Also <i>inddroges</i> ‘was included’, <i>opdroges</i> ‘was reared’, <i>overdroges</i> ‘was ceded’
	<i>fare</i> ‘go, rush’	<i>for</i>	* <i>fores</i>	
	<i>jage</i> ‘chase’	<i>jog</i>	? <i>joges</i>	Mentioned by Hansen and Heltoft (2011); only prefixed <i>forjoges</i> ‘was chased away’ in KorpusDK
	<i>lade</i> ‘let’	<i>lod</i>	? <i>lodes</i>	Attested with prefixes, e.g. <i>efterlodes</i> ‘was left’, <i>overlodes</i> ‘was ceded’, <i>tillodes</i> ‘was permitted’
	<i>slå</i> ‘beat’	<i>slog</i>	* <i>sloges</i>	Attested with prefixes, e.g. <i>ansloges</i> ‘was estimated’, <i>fastsloges</i> ‘was ascertained’, <i>foresloges</i> ‘was suggested’
	<i>stå</i> ‘stand’	<i>stod</i>	* <i>stodes</i>	Attested with prefixes, e.g. <i>afstodes</i> ‘was waived’, <i>tilstodes</i> ‘was granted’
	<i>tage</i> ‘take’	<i>tog</i>	<i>toges</i>	Also prefixed forms, e.g. <i>aftoges</i> ‘was taken off’, <i>modtoges</i> ‘was received’
VII	<i>få</i> ‘get’	<i>fik</i>	* <i>fikkes</i>	
	<i>gå</i> ‘go, walk’	<i>gik</i>	* <i>gikkes</i>	
	<i>holde</i> ‘hold’	<i>holdt</i>	<i>holdtes</i>	Also e.g. <i>afholdtes</i> ‘was held, celebrated’, <i>anholdtes</i> ‘was arrested’, <i>indeholdtes</i> ‘was contained’, <i>opreholdtes</i> ‘was maintained’

this in a footnote (Lundquist 2016, 208) and suggests that these might just be lexical exceptions to the general rule “or part of a more general pattern,” though he does not comment on the fact that strong past-tense *s*-passives appear to be more frequent in the sixth ablaut class.⁷ In any event, if such forms can be shown to have been more frequent in the past – in this case in Late Modern Danish – this suggests that Lundquist’s syncretism analysis cannot be extended to earlier stages of the language, but only works (with several exceptions) for Present-Day Danish.

As this overview has shown, one of the Danish passive formations is severely restricted in the past tense. While the overall discourse frequency of the *s*-passive is low in the past tense both in speech and writing (see Laanemets’s findings), some forms are clearly felt to be grammatical and are used at least in the

⁷ A further problem for Lundquist’s account is that quite a few weak verbs have no syncretism between the past-tense and participial forms, but may still form a past-tense *s*-passive. Examples include *sige* ‘say’ (PST *sagde* /sæ:æ/, PTCP *sagt* /sakt/), *lægge* ‘lay’ (PST *lagde* /læ:æ/, PTCP *lagt* /lakt/), *høre* ‘hear’ (PST *hørte* /høɐ̯tə/, PTCP *hørt* /høɐ̯t/), and *vise* ‘show’ (PST *viste* /vi:stə/, PTCP *vist* /vi:st/). Note the presence of *stod* in the participles *hørt* and *vist* (transcribed /ʔ/ here; not reflected in standard Danish orthography), but not in the corresponding past-tense forms *hørte* and *viste*.

written language. A past-tense *s*-passive can be formed from weak verbs (see [9]–[12]) and a minority of strong verbs (e.g. [14]–[16]). There is no agreement on why this would be the case, and there are few empirical investigations of the restrictions. In the following section, I will discuss the reasons for looking at their historical development and present the methods used in this study.

3 Goals and methods of this article

The initial point of departure for this investigation was the observation that some older Danish texts contain *s*-passives which are not possible today. For instance, a form like *skreves* ‘was written’ in (19), which is not current in contemporary Danish (see Table 3), is not at all rare in nineteenth-century texts, suggesting that the restrictions on past-tense passives must have changed in the recent history of the language (for some additional examples, mainly from literary texts, see Hansen 1967, iii, 46).

- (19) i disse Sprog **skreves** utallige Commentarer
 in these language[PL] write.PST.PASS innumerable commentary.PL
 “in these languages innumerable commentaries [on the Pāli canon] were written” (Larsen 1866, 40)

I thus decided to investigate how the restrictions have changed in the history of the language, focussing on Late Modern Danish (taken here to refer to the period c. 1700–1900). This is an interesting question for several reasons. First, one of the accounts discussed above, i.e. Heltoft (2006), explicitly states that the modern restrictions on the *s*-passive continue the Middle Danish situation. However, what happened between Middle Danish and the present day is an open question; while Hansen and Heltoft (2011, 756) suggest that strong verbs outside of the sixth ablaut class have probably never been able to form a past-tense *s*-passive,⁸ this matter does not appear to have been investigated empirically. Second, as mentioned in footnote 5, it has been suggested that the restrictions found in Norwegian are the result of historical contact with Danish; a better understanding of the development of the Danish restrictions is thus also of interest for the history of Norwegian. Finally, as noted by Laanemets (2012, 231), more research is needed on the historical development of Danish passive constructions in general. While this study will of course not tell the full story, I hope that it will at least shed some new light on the history of the *s*-passive, specifically how this form was used in Late Modern Danish. The following two general research questions will be addressed:

- (1) Have the restrictions on past-tense *s*-passives changed historically?
- (2) Has the use of inflected vs periphrastic passives in the past tense changed, and what (if anything) might this tell us about the restrictions?

I will attempt to answer these questions with a two-part investigation looking at both primary and secondary sources. To begin with the latter, I have scrutinized a number of early grammars of Danish to see what they may tell us about the restrictions: Are any restrictions mentioned by earlier grammarians, which forms are said to be ungrammatical, and do the grammars contain any other clues with respect to the history of the *s*-passive? The earliest available grammars are from the seventeenth century, the majority from the nineteenth century. A full list of these and a discussion of their treatment of the *s*-passive are presented in Section 4.1.

As for the primary sources, I decided to carry out a small corpus investigation of Late Modern Danish material in order to see how different writers used passives in the past tense: Did they prefer the *s*-passive or the periphrastic passive, and which past-tense forms of the *s*-passive are attested? As mentioned in Section 2.1, the use of the passive in Present-Day Danish has been observed to differ between different genres and modes of communication, the (finite) *s*-passive being less frequent than the periphrastic passive in the colloquial spoken language. Since we have no direct sources of the spoken language before the twentieth

⁸ “Dansk har næppe nogensinde dannet *s*-modus præteritum af stærke verber med indikativisk betydning i præteritumsstammen” (Hansen and Heltoft 2011, 756).

century, I instead compiled a small corpus of Late Modern Danish (mainly nineteenth-century) texts belonging to different genres and written by people with different levels of education. As the findings presented in Section 4.2 will show, such extralinguistic variables have a significant influence on the use of the *s*-passive. Some of the texts contain large numbers of past-tense *s*-passives, including strong forms not possible in the present-day language; other texts use no or only very few *s*-passives in the past tense.

Because there are no grammatically annotated corpora of historical Danish, the material for the second part of the study had to be gathered and searched manually. I selected a variety of texts, most of which were available in digital format. A few texts were scanned from printed editions. The sources, with hyperlinks where relevant, are listed in the Appendix. They will also be discussed in greater detail in Section 4.2. From these sources, I excerpted all examples of past-tense passive constructions, using the concordance program AntConc (Anthony 2014). To extract examples of periphrastic past-tense passives, I searched for the past-tense forms of the passive auxiliary *blive* (SG *blev* and PL *bleve*, the latter obsolete in Present-Day Danish) and exported the concordances to a spreadsheet. I then checked these manually, excluding all instances where *blive* did not function as a passive auxiliary, such as when it is used as a change-of-state verb ('become, turn'). To find examples of past-tense *s*-passives, I searched for all word forms ending in *-s* and exported these concordances to a spreadsheet.⁹ These were then filtered so that only potential past-tense passive forms were listed, i.e. all other word forms ending in *-s* were removed (e.g. *deres* 'their', *hvorledes* 'how', and so on). After doing this, I checked manually whether the *s*-forms were passives or deponents, e.g. whether a form like *sloges* (from *slå* 'beat') had passive ('was/were beaten') or reciprocal meaning ('fought'). A few uncertain examples will be discussed in Section 4.2.

For this investigation, I have surveyed 17 early grammars and analysed the past-tense passives used by 11 writers. I will suggest in Section 5 that text genre and level of education has a significant impact on the use of past-tense passives in the material, and that the past-tense *s*-passive may in fact be an artefact of the written standard language. This hypothesis of course needs to be tested against more material than the limited corpus I have used here, but the rather simple search method can easily be extended to more texts. In Section 5, I discuss some other text types which I think would be worth investigating to provide a fuller picture of the Danish *s*-passive and its history.

4 Historical investigation

In the following, I present the findings from the historical investigation. First, in Section 4.1, the treatment of *s*-passives in the historical grammars is discussed. It is shown that restrictions on past-tense *s*-passives are mentioned in several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammars, but also that some grammarians seem to have favoured the *s*-passive over the periphrastic alternative. In Section 4.2, the use of the two alternative constructions in the primary sources is investigated.

4.1 Restrictions according to early grammars

The grammars surveyed for this part of the study are listed in Table 4. The authors, titles, and years of publication are given, and in the final column, I indicate whether the grammars mention any restrictions on past-tense passives of strong verbs. For the ones that do, the forms said to be ungrammatical are listed.¹⁰ Note that the grammars included in the survey were all written either by native speakers of Danish or by

⁹ Note that two texts, by Rask and Schiern, were only available in versions with rather poor text recognition (OCR), meaning that some characters were not correctly identified. It thus cannot be ruled out that some word forms ending in *-s* were overlooked in these texts. However, having read a number of excerpts and manually noted all word forms ending in *-s*, I am confident that the number of overlooked forms is very limited, as the letter <*s*> is usually correctly identified by the OCR.

¹⁰ In the original orthography, but this differs little from Present-Day Danish. Most notably, <aa> and <ö> correspond to contemporary <å> and <ø>, respectively, and <i> is used by some writers instead of present-day <j>.

Table 4: Surveyed historical grammars

Author	Title	Year	Restrictions mentioned?
E. Pontoppidan	<i>Grammatica Danica</i>	1668	None
H. Gerner	<i>Orthographia Danica</i>	1679	None
J. P. Høysgaard	<i>Accentuered og Raisonnered Grammatica</i>	1747	None
J. P. Høysgaard	<i>Methodisk Forsøg til en Fuldstændig Dansk Syntax</i>	1752	*bødes, *drakkes, *hjalpes, *sanges, *skødes, *stakkes, *stjales, *tvanges, *aades
J. Baden	<i>Forelæsninger over det Danske Sprog</i>	1785	*bødes, *drukkes, *hialpes, *sanges, *skiødes, *stiales, *stakkes, *tvanges, *aades
J. Werfel	<i>Dansk Brevbog</i>	1795	None
J. C. Tode	<i>Neue dänische Grammatik für Deutsche</i>	1797	None
F. Schneider	<i>Danish grammar, adapted to the use of Englishmen</i>	1803	None
F. Høegh-Guldberg	<i>Grundlæg ved grammaticalske Forelæsninger for Ungdommen</i>	1814	*brakkes, *hjalpes, *sanges
N. L. Høyer	<i>Veiledning i dansk Sproglære</i>	1823	None
R. Rask	<i>A Grammar of the Danish Language</i>	1830	*fikkes
J. Jensen	<i>Forsøg til en dansk Sproglære</i>	1833	‘hardly used in the past tense of the last [i.e. strong] conjugation’
E. Bojesen	<i>Kortfattet dansk Sproglære</i> (3rd edn)	1848	*bedes, *drakkes, *stjales, *tvanges
J. Heckscher	<i>Anleitung zur Erlernung der dänischen Sprache</i>	1862	*drakkes
E. C. Otté	<i>A simplified grammar of the Danish language</i>	1883	None
E. Jessen	<i>Dansk Grammatik</i>	1891	*sanges
M. Matzen	<i>Modersmaalets Sproglære</i>	1893	*drakkes, *grædes, *hjalpes, *løjes, *sanges, *stakkes, *stjales, *sankes, *traffes, *trakkes, *tvanges

people living and writing in Denmark, who we can assume must have had a good knowledge of the language; a few grammars written by non-native speakers living elsewhere were excluded. It should also be noted that all of the grammars must to some extent be considered prescriptive by today’s standards. The target audience was of course not modern linguists, but contemporaries of the authors who needed to learn (standard) Danish, such as foreign language learners (e.g. the grammars by Tode, Schneider, Otté) or students in the Danish school system (e.g. Høyer, Jensen, Bojesen). It cannot be ruled out that some judgements in the grammars reflect the author’s ideas of ‘proper’ language rather than actual usage at the time. With these caveats in mind, let us now look more closely at the restrictions mentioned in the grammars.

As Table 4 shows, about half of the surveyed grammars mention restrictions on past-tense passives. The two (short) seventeenth-century descriptions contain no information on any restrictions. Of the eighteenth-century grammars, Høysgaard (*Methodisk Forsøg*, 1752) and Baden (*Forelæsninger*, 1785) mention restrictions, but Baden’s list of ungrammatical past-tense passives is clearly copied almost verbatim from Høysgaard’s. Seven of the nineteenth-century grammars mention restrictions. In the grammars that mention restrictions, the level of detail and the number of examples differ greatly. For instance, in Rask’s *Grammar of the Danish Language* (1830), there is only a very oblique reference to any restrictions. In the verbal paradigms, various forms are given, including the strong past-tense passives *gaves* ‘was given’, *droges* ‘was drawn’, *fandtes* ‘was found’, *dreves* ‘was driven’, and *strøges* ‘was stroked’. However, in the paradigm for *faa* ‘get’, the past-tense passive form *fikkes* is given between brackets (p. 51). While Rask uses brackets for somewhat different purposes, e.g. to indicate obsolete forms or innovations not belonging to the ‘cultivated’ language, the common denominator is

that he did not consider the bracketed forms part of the standard language. The brackets around *fikkes* most likely indicate that the form is hypothetical and was not actually used in Rask's day.

Other grammarians discuss passive morphology at greater length, including the restrictions in the past tense. Høysgaard (1752) writes that 'in particular, there are many passives whose simple imperfect [past] is never used' ("I sær ere der mange Passive, hvis Enkelte Imperfectum aldrig bruges," § 1649) and gives several examples of past-tense *s*-passives 'which no one uses'. For instance, the periphrastic forms in (20) are said to be used instead of the *s*-passives *sködes* 'was shot' and *stakkes* 'was stabbed':

- (20) Han BLEV SKUDT i Krig. Han BLEV STUKKEN i Armen.
 he become.PST shot.PTCP in war he become.PST stab.PTCP in arm.DEF
 "He was shot in battle. He was stabbed in the arm."

Similarly, Matzen's *Modersmaalets Sproglære* (1893) gives a number of examples of periphrastic passives in the past tense, noting explicitly that the *s*-passive form is not used, e.g. in (21):

- (21) Frakken blev stjaalen (ikke: stjales); han blev tvungen (ikke: tvanges)
 coat.DEF become.PST steal.PTCP not steal.PST.PASS he become.PST force.PTCP not force.PST.PASS
 "The coat was stolen (not **stjales*); he was forced (not **tvanges*)"

The material surveyed here is obviously too limited for any statistical analysis, and it should also be kept in mind that the observations in the grammars may not be entirely independent – some of the grammarians certainly read each other's works and may have borrowed examples from each other (cf. the comment above on Baden borrowing his examples from Høysgaard). Hence, the fact that the verbs *drikke* 'drink' (**drakkes*) and *synge* 'sing' (**sanges*) are often singled out as having restrictions on the *s*-passive may just be coincidental. On the other hand, it indicates that many grammarians at least agreed on the unacceptability of these *s*-passives. Among the forms listed in Table 4, the third and fourth ablaut classes seem to be especially frequent (e.g. *drikke* and *synge*, but also *hjælpe* 'help', *tvinge* 'force', *stjæle* 'steal'). From the first and fifth classes, on the other hand, only a single example of each is mentioned in the surveyed grammars (*bide* 'bite' and *æde* 'eat', respectively), whereas no verbs from the sixth class are mentioned as having restrictions. This could be coincidental, but it might also indicate that past-tense *s*-passives of these ablaut classes were generally more acceptable. Unfortunately, only few of the grammars explicitly mention past-tense *s*-passives that do occur. Among these, *skreves* 'was written' from the first ablaut class is the most commonly cited form (Werfel, Tode, Høyer, Matzen). The first-class form *dreves* 'was driven' is mentioned in two grammars (Rask, Jensen), as is *grebes* 'was seized' (Jensen, Jessen). None of these forms are used in Present-Day Danish, but as the corpus study in Section 4.2 will show, at least two of them are attested in other nineteenth-century texts.

It is also worth noting here that the grammars which mention restrictions do not generally venture any explanations for them.¹¹ The discussions are often rather short, and as Table 4 shows, many of the grammars give only a few examples of ungrammatical past-tense forms. One grammarian (Heckscher, p. 158) explicitly states that there are no rules for the choice between *s*-passive and periphrastic passive ("darüber lassen sich keine Regeln aufstellen"), as this depends entirely on euphony ("vom Wohnklange"). Others advise that a past-tense *s*-passive should be avoided if the form could be confused with another verb, such as a present-tense *s*-passive or a deponent verb. This is mentioned by Høysgaard (*Methodisk Forsøg*), Baden, Høegh-Guldberg, Jensen, and Matzen. For instance, a number of these grammarians point out that the potential past-tense passive form *sloges* 'was beaten' is identical to the deponent verb ('fought', cf. Section 2.2), and that the periphrastic passive with *blive* is thus preferable. Another example, mentioned by Høegh-Guldberg, Jensen, and Matzen, is the potential past-tense *s*-passive *saaes/saas* 'was seen' (modern spelling *sås*), which according to these authors might be confused with the present-tense *s*-passive

¹¹ I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for prompting me to look into this question. The reviewer also asks if any of the grammars discuss the lack of an *s*-passive perfect form (**har hørt*, etc.). This does not appear to be the case in the sections dealing with passives, although I cannot rule out that the phenomenon might be mentioned elsewhere in some of the grammars.

of the verb *så* ‘sow’; Matzen (p. 302) gives the example *Frøet saas i August*, which he states would be ambiguous (‘The seed is sown in August’ or ‘The seed was seen in August’) if the past-tense *s*-passive of *se* ‘see’ was allowed. However, I think these comments must be interpreted as prescriptive advice rather than serious attempts to explain the restrictions. As the grammarians in question must have realized, most of the ungrammatical past-tense *s*-passives (e.g. **drakkes*, **hjælpes*, **sanges*, **aades*, and so on) are never subject to any ambiguity, so the majority of the verbs would still be unaccounted for. It is probably also rather doubtful that a form like *sås* ‘was seen’/‘is sown’ ever resulted in ambiguity in actual linguistic usage, and in any event, this is actually one of the strong past-tense *s*-passives which is attested – both in Present-Day Danish (see Table 3) and in my Late Modern Danish material.

Before turning to the primary sources, I will briefly discuss an important finding concerning the socio-linguistic status of the *s*-passive in the period. Although many of the grammars surveyed here mention *s*-passive forms which they judge to be ungrammatical, some of them also explicitly advise readers to use the *s*-passive as much as possible. Two different reasons are given for why the *s*-passive is preferable to the periphrastic passive. In Jensen’s *Forsøg til en dansk Sproglære* (1833), the argument is that the *s*-passive is more ‘characteristic’ of Danish because many other languages have only periphrastic forms:

[...] the two expressions [*s*-passive and periphrastic passive] are usually employed without any distinction; but it should be noted in this connection that, where the simple form is possible, it would seem that it, as more characteristic of our language, is to be preferred¹² (Jensen, p. 338; my transl.)

In Tode’s Danish grammar for speakers of German (1797), the argument is that the synthetic formation gives the language more ‘brevity and strength’ compared to a periphrastic construction. Tode also observes that the periphrastic passive is more frequent than the *s*-passive in the spoken language, in his view clearly a regrettable state of affairs:

Such a simple and unparallelled most important transformation, i.e. that of an active into a passive, through the addition of a single letter [i.e. *-s*], gives the language an extraordinary brevity and strength, and I therefore hold it against the Danes that they do not make use of this peculiar passive every day, but usually, at least in the spoken language, and sometimes even in formal speech, make use of an auxiliary.¹³ (Tode, § 543; my transl.)

Finally, Høegh-Guldberg uses a combination of these two arguments: most other modern languages lack such a convenient formation as a synthetic passive, and hence, Danish has an advantage over these languages. He explicitly advises his readers to use the *s*-passive as much as possible:

Because our language, unlike many other modern ones, can usually form a passive in the present and imperfect without an auxiliary, we should not let this advantage and convenience pass into oblivion, by too often using the also permissible formation with the auxiliary *blive*. We should therefore preferably say: *ledes* and *lededes*, *mættes* and *mættedes*, *frelses* and *frelsedes*, rather than: *bliver* and *blev ledet*, *bliver* and *blev mættet*, *bliver* and *blev frelset*!¹⁴ (Høegh-Guldberg, p. 224; my transl.)

At the same time, Høegh-Guldberg goes on to concede that one must ‘resort to the auxiliary’ in the case of some irregular (i.e. strong) verbs. There is thus a clear tension in the advice given here. On the one hand, the *s*-passive is considered the preferable Danish form which one should use whenever possible; on the other

¹² “begge Udtryksarter bruges for det meste i Flæng; dog maa herved bemærkes, at hvor den enkelte Form er i Brug, synes den, som meest eiendommelig for vort Sprog, at fortjene Fortrinnet”

¹³ “Eine so leichte und so beispiellose höchst wichtige Verwandlung als die eines Activi in ein Passivum, durch Zulegung eines einzigen Buchstaben, giebt der Sprache eine ungemeine Kurze und Kraft, und ich verdenke es daher den Dänen, daß sie von diesem so ganz eigenthümlichen Passivo nicht täglichen Gebrauch machen, sondern sich gewöhnlicherweise, wenigstens im Reden, und so gar im feyerlichen Reden auch öfters, eines Hülfswortes bedienen.”

¹⁴ “Da vort Sprog, fremfor saa mange nyere, kan som oftest i Passiv danne Præsens og Imperfect uden Hjælpeverber, bør vi ei, ved for hyppig en Brug af den os ogsaa tilladelige Dannelsesmaade med Hjælpeverbet *blive*, bringe hiin Fordeel og Nemhed næsten i Forglemmelse. Vi sige derfor hellere: *ledes* og *lededes*, *mættes* og *mættedes*, *frelses* og *frelsedes*, end: *bliver* og *blev ledet*, *bliver* og *blev mættet*, *bliver* og *blev frelset*!”

hand, Høegh-Guldberg agrees with several of his contemporaries that not all potential *s*-passive forms are actually grammatical.

It is of course impossible to know exactly what the impact of such prescriptive statements may have been. Perhaps some readers of these grammars actually followed the advice and deliberately attempted to increase their use of the *s*-passive; for others, such advice may have had little or no effect. The statements are interesting, however, because they suggest that a particular linguistic ideology was at work in the Late Modern Danish period: the synthetic *s*-passive seems to have been valued over its periphrastic alternative, even though some of the grammars also mention that the periphrastic passive was the more usual construction in the spoken language. (I will discuss a very similar example from the history of German in Section 5.) The findings presented in the following section will indeed suggest that such prescriptive attitudes may have had an effect on linguistic behaviour.

4.2 Past-tense passives in primary sources

As mentioned in Section 3, I carried out a search for past-tense passives in the writings of 11 Late Modern Danish individuals. Some of these are well-known writers, others are more obscure historical figures. The texts may be divided roughly into three types, namely, academic texts, fiction of various kinds, and autobiographical texts and letters (ego-documents). The texts are listed in Table 5. Together they run to more than 700,000 words, but the length of the individual texts varies greatly. The shortest texts are the autobiography (“Levnetsbeskrivelse”) of the soldier Hans Pedersen and a collection of letters by the socialite and writer Kamma Rahbek. By far the longest text is the autobiography of the criminal Ole Kollerød.

In order to have a degree of control over regional background as a possible variable, I only included writers from Zealand or Funen, i.e. the central Danish islands.¹⁵ Standard Danish originated in this dialect area, and most of the writers included here had a strong command of the standard written language. The academic and fictional texts all appear to conform closely to the standard written language of the period, as does the published autobiography of the naval officer Carl van Dockum. The other autobiographies (S. Pedersen, H. Pedersen, and Kollerød) were not written to be published, however, and the authors had a varying degree of proficiency in the standard written language. The findings presented later suggest that this correlates with the use of past-tense *s*-passives. One author, Jens Baggesen (1764–1826), is represented by two texts in the corpus. One is a translation of Ludvig Holberg’s *Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum* (‘Niels Klim’s Subterranean Journey’), a fantasy novel originally published in Latin (1741); the other is Baggesen’s own *Labyrinten* (‘The Labyrinth’), a travelogue describing the author’s journey from Copenhagen to Basel in the year 1789. The differences between these two texts will be discussed briefly in the following section.

Table 6 gives an overview of the use of the two past-tense passive constructions in the texts. The three columns in the middle give the number of past-tense *s*-passives, past-tense periphrastic passives, and past-tense passives in total. The shares of the two constructions are given between brackets. So, for instance, in Baggesen’s translation of *Niels Klim*, there are 62 (=25.4%) *s*-passives and 182 (=74.6%) periphrastic passives in the past tense, giving a total of 244. As the table shows, in the letters by Rahbek, only four past-tense passives were found (not too surprisingly, as the letters are mainly written in the present tense); because of this low number, I will not consider these letters further here.

In the final column of Table 6, I have listed the strong *s*-passives attested in the texts, including the number of attestations of each form. A hyphen before a form indicates that it is only attested with a prefix;

¹⁵ Although there is almost no work comparing passive constructions across traditional Danish dialects, it is clear that the use of the *s*-passive is subject to dialectal variation. As discussed by Pedersen (2013), the dialect of Bornholm (Eastern Danish) traditionally used the *s*-passive much more freely than standard Danish, in a way more similar to standard Swedish (see also Pedersen 2019, 280–3). On the other hand, at least one traditional Jutlandic (Western Danish) dialect is reported not to have had finite *s*-passives at all, this inflectional form being restricted to the infinitive (Bjerrum and Bjerrum 1974, I, 27). These differences are outside the scope of this contribution, but certainly deserve to be investigated in more detail.

Table 5: Text corpus

Author	Title	Year	Genre	Word count
J. Baggesen (tr.)	<i>Niels Klims underjordiske Rejse</i> (NKL.)	1789 (1741)	Fiction (novel)	72,000
J. Baggesen	<i>Labyrinten</i> (Lab.)	1792–93	Travelogue	95,000
K. Rahbek	12 letters to J. P. Mynster	1805–20	Letters	9,000
S. Pedersen	<i>En fæstebondens liv</i>	1809–11	Autobiography	49,000
R. Rask	<i>Undersøgelse om det gamle Nordiske eller Islandske Sprogs Oprindelse</i>	1818	Academic (linguistics)	70,000
H. C. Andersen	<i>Eventyr</i> , vol. 1	1835–42	Fiction (fairy tales)	73,000
O. Kollerød	<i>Min Historie</i>	1840	Autobiography	150,000
S. Kierkegaard	<i>Forførelers Dagbog</i>	1843	Fiction (diary)	52,000
Th. Gyllembourg	<i>To Tidsaldrer</i>	1845	Fiction (novel)	61,000
H. Pedersen	“Levnetsbeskrivelse”	1849	Autobiography	4,800
F. Schiern	“Vestmagterne mod Rusland i Østersøen”	1854	Academic (history)	40,000
C. van Dockum	<i>Gamle Minder</i>	1888 (1877)	Autobiography	52,000

for instance, in Kierkegaard’s *Forførelers Dagbog* a prefixed form (*oplodes* ‘was opened’) is used once, but not the corresponding simplex verb (*lodes* ‘was let’). A hyphen between brackets indicates that both simplex and prefixed s-passives are attested; for instance, in the writings of Baggesen, simplex *fandtes* ‘was found’ is found alongside a prefixed form (*befandtes* ‘was found, judged’).

From the perspective of Present-Day Danish, some of the strong s-passives found in the texts are surprising. Compare the forms in Table 6 with the ones listed for the contemporary language in Table 3. As I discussed earlier, in Present-Day Danish strong past-tense s-passives mainly seem to occur with verbs belonging to the sixth ablaut class, e.g. *droges*, *toges* and prefixed forms like *overlodes* and *fastsloges*. These verbs also occur in the Late Modern Danish texts, as do (-)*saaes* ‘was seen’ (modern spelling *sås*), -*gaves* (from *give* ‘give’), and *vandtes* ‘was won’. But the historical material also contains forms which are no longer current in the language. These include *grebes* ‘was seized’ and *skreves* ‘was written’ (both ablaut class 1), (-)*bødes* ‘was bidden’ and *brødes* ‘was broken’ (class 2), and the prefixed form *ombares* ‘was carried around’ (class 4, from *bære* ‘carry’). The simplex forms *fandtes* ‘was found’ (class 3), *gaves* ‘was given’ (class 5), and *sloges* ‘was beaten’ are also found, which in the present-day language are only attested with prefixes. In other words, while some forms found in the historical material still occur in the present-day language, a number of forms in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts have since become obsolete.

Table 6: Past-tense passives in the corpus

Text	s-passive	Periph. passive	Total	Strong s-passives
Baggesen NKL.	62 (25.4%)	182 (74.6%)	244	(-) <i>fandtes</i> (2), <i>saaes</i> (1), - <i>toges</i> (1)
Baggesen Lab.	49 (60.5%)	32 (39.5%)	81	(-) <i>fandtes</i> (2), - <i>gaves</i> (1), - <i>holdtes</i> (1), <i>saaes</i> (1), <i>skiødes</i> (1)
Rahbek	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	4	—
S. Pedersen	35 (17.2%)	169 (82.8%)	204	<i>saaes</i> (1), - <i>toges</i> (1)
Rask	47 (79.7%)	12 (20.3%)	59	- <i>gaves</i> (1), <i>skreves</i> (2), (-) <i>toges</i> (3), <i>vandtes</i> (1)
Andersen	14 (15.9%)	74 (84.1%)	88	<i>brødes</i> (1), - <i>droges</i> (1), <i>sloges</i> (1)
Kollerød	3 (2.8%)	175 (97.2%)	180	? <i>fandes/fantes</i> (2)
Kierkegaard	7 (20.6%)	27 (79.4%)	34	- <i>lodes</i> (1)
Gyllembourg	10 (14.9%)	57 (85.1%)	67	- <i>brødes</i> (1), <i>grebes</i> (1), <i>saaes</i> (1)
H. Pedersen	0 (0%)	50 (100%)	50	—
Schiern	132 (66.7%)	66 (33.3%)	198	<i>brødes</i> (2), - <i>bødes</i> (1), - <i>droges</i> (2), (-) <i>gaves</i> (4), - <i>saaes</i> (1), - <i>sloges</i> (1), (-) <i>toges</i> (8)
Van Dockum	96 (22.5%)	331 (77.5%)	427	- <i>bares</i> (1), (-) <i>bødes</i> (2), <i>fandtes</i> (4), (-) <i>gaves</i> (3), - <i>lodes</i> (1), - <i>saaes</i> (1), (-) <i>toges</i> (3)

The situation in the Late Modern Danish material is thus clearly not identical to the present-day state of the language.

It should be noted that in a small minority of cases, a past-tense form may be interpreted either as an s-passive or a deponent ('middle') verb, as the suffix *-(e)s* is shared by the two constructions (cf. also the languages discussed by Keenan and Dryer 2007, 352–3). As mentioned in Section 2.2, the distinction between s-passives and deponents is important in Present-Day Danish because past-tense deponent verbs are not subject to the same restrictions as s-passives. For instance, the deponents *slås* 'fight' and *findes* 'be, exist' may readily be used in the past tense (*sloges* and *fandtes*). Two possible deponents from the corpus are *fødtes* 'was born' (22) and *kaldtes* 'was called' (23), from the weak verbs *føde* 'bear, give birth' and *kalde* 'call'. These could be interpreted as deponent one- and two-place predicates, respectively, rather than true passives with an implied agent. In (22), the focus is not on the process of being born, but on the fact that some people in ancient Albania, according to the author, had grey hair from early childhood. The verb in this context could perhaps simply be paraphrased 'existed'. In (23), *kaldtes* means 'was called' in the sense 'went by the name of', i.e. the focus is on the name of this fairy-tale character rather than on the act of calling her by this name.

- (22) I ALBANIEN fødtes Mennesker, som i deres Barndom havde graae Haar.
 in Albania bear.PST.PASS human.PL REL in their childhood have.PST gray hair[PL]
 "In Albania some people were born [or existed] who had grey hair (already) in their childhood"
 (Baggesen *NKL*)
- (23) hun var ikke uden en Tomme lang, og derfor kaldtes hun Thumbelise.
 she be.PST not without INDF thumb long and therefore call.PST.PASS she Thumbelina
 "she was no bigger than a thumb, and so she was called [or her name was] Thumbelina" (Andersen)

However, since both of these forms are still transparently related to their active counterparts (and may in fact be substituted by periphrastic passives, at least in the present-day language), they were counted as past-tense s-passives and included in the count in Table 6.

A tricky case is the use of *fandtes* in Ole Kollerød's autobiography (spelt *fandes* or *fantes* in his non-standard orthography). Interpreted as a passive, this form means 'was found'; as a deponent, it means 'was, existed'. Only the latter meaning is found in Present-Day Danish, and the verb frequently occurs with this sense in Kollerød's text, but there are a few examples where a passive interpretation seems quite likely. In (24), Kollerød relates an episode where he was arrested and searched because he had been accused of theft. Because none of the stolen goods were in his possession any longer, he of course denied this:

- (24) Men da der ikke fandtes noget af di genstande, saa benægte ieg det
 but because there not ? something of those item.PL then deny.PST I it
 "But because none of those items were found [in my possession], I denied it" (Kollerød)

This might also be interpreted as a deponent, with *fandes* meaning 'were (in a certain place)', but the situation described here makes a passive interpretation seem quite likely to me. I have counted (24) and one other example (*den fantes hos mig* 'it was [found] in my possession') as passives, but it must be noted that they could also be interpreted as deponents; hence the question mark next to *fandes/fantes* in Table 6. In any event, as the table shows, the number of past-tense s-passives in this text is very low no matter how these individual examples are analysed.

Turning to the overall frequency of past-tense passives, the analysis reveals great differences in the shares of s-passives versus periphrastic constructions. For the sake of clarity, the relative frequencies from Table 6 are shown on a bar chart in Figure 1. As the chart suggests, the texts cluster in three groups. In the first group, consisting of the autobiographies by Hans Pedersen and Ole Kollerød, the s-passive is never or hardly ever used in the past tense. Pedersen has no past-tense s-passives at all (i.e. 0%), Kollerød only very few (2.8%). The second group consists of all the fictional texts and two autobiographies, by the copyholder

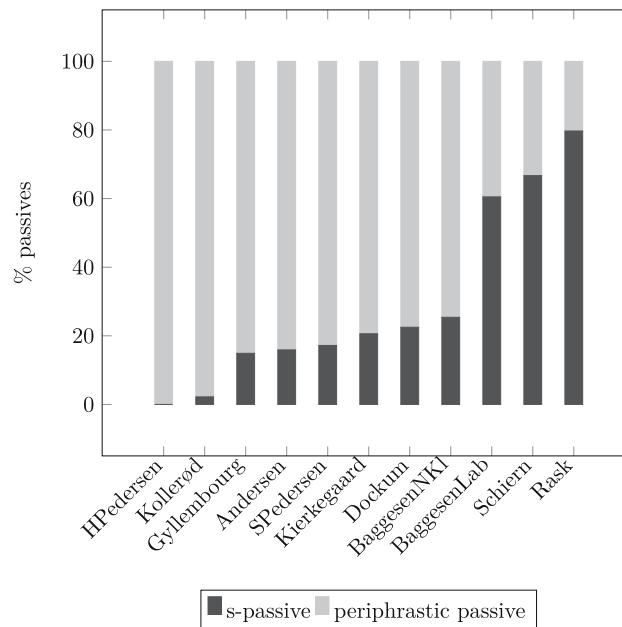


Figure 1: Shares of past-tense passives in the texts.

Søren Pedersen and the naval officer Carl van Dockum. In these, the *s*-passive is clearly in the minority in the past tense, but cannot be described as marginal: its share ranges from 14.9% (Gyllembourg) to 25.4% (Baggesen *NKL*). In the third and final group, the *s*-passive is in the majority in the past tense compared to the periphrastic construction. These are Baggesen's travelogue *Labyrinten* (60.5% *s*-passives) and the two academic texts, Rask's treatise on the origins of the Old Norse language (79.7% *s*-passives) and an article by the historian F. Schiern (66.7% *s*-passives). The implications of these frequency differences will be discussed in the following section.

5 Discussion: past-tense *s*-passive as a standardization effect?

The material presented in Section 4 may at first glance seem to present a conflicting picture. On the one hand, it has been observed at least since the middle of the eighteenth century that there are restrictions on the *s*-passive in the past tense, and some forms (e.g. **drakkes* 'was drunk') are consistently described as ungrammatical in the older grammars, pointing to continuity from Late Modern Danish to the present day. On the other hand, some forms are recorded in both grammars and primary texts which are not in use anymore (e.g. *grebes* 'was seized'), and in certain nineteenth-century texts, the overall share of past-tense *s*-passives is much larger than we would expect on the basis of the Present-Day Danish figures reported by Laanemets (2012). This points to the opposite conclusion: the situation has not been entirely stable from Late Modern to Present-Day Danish.

As discussed in Section 4.2, the findings from the primary texts suggest that the use of the past-tense *s*-passives in the period varied according to text genre and level of education. The *s*-passive dominates over the periphrastic passive in the two academic texts and in Baggesen's *Labyrinten*, while it is almost entirely absent in two autobiographical texts by authors with limited formal education. In a larger group in the middle, consisting mainly of fictional texts, the *s*-passive is clearly present, but is in the minority compared to the periphrastic passive. Note also that the two texts by Baggesen clearly differ in their use of the two passive constructions; the novel *Niels Klim*, a translation from Latin, contains far fewer past-tense *s*-passives than the travelogue *Labyrinten*. This may suggest that text genre and formality is a better predictor of the use of the *s*-passive than the level of education of the author, i.e. that the variation is

primarily intra- rather than inter-individual, but this of course needs to be corroborated by a larger corpus study. It would be interesting to see, for instance, whether the academics Rask and Schiern always have high shares of past-tense *s*-passives, or whether they used this construction less frequently in less formal texts, such as private letters.

Various explanations have been proposed for the lexical restrictions on past-tense *s*-passives in Present-Day Danish. The two most recent ones, which I discussed in Section 2.2, both appeal to system-internal factors, specifically syncretism in the verbal paradigms of Middle Danish and the contemporary language. I would like to propose an alternative – sociolinguistic – hypothesis, namely, that the restrictions arose in a conflict between two competing norms: on the one hand, a vernacular language where the past-tense *s*-passive had become obsolete, and on the other hand, a developing written standard which had a preference for synthetic forms. There are a couple of indications that the past-tense *s*-passive was hardly if ever used in vernacular Late Modern Danish. As already mentioned earlier, the form is almost entirely absent from the two primary texts written by authors with little formal education, a finding similar to the Present-Day Danish results reported by Laanemets (2012). Of course, it is possible that these texts just happen to have a low share of past-tense *s*-passives, and the results should obviously be checked against a larger corpus of comparable texts. Note, however, that some Late Modern Danish grammarians also comment on the infrequency of the past-tense *s*-passive in the spoken language; see the quotation from Tode in Section 4.1 or Baden's comment in 1785 that 'in general, one may say that the periphrastic form is more usual in the imperfect [past tense] than the simple form' ("overalt kan man sige, at den sammensatte Form er brugeligere i Imperfectet, end den enkelte," p. 203).

Against this apparent obsolescence of the past-tense *s*-passive in the spoken vernacular, another tendency pulled in the opposite direction, namely, a preference for synthetic forms in the developing standard language (on the standardization of Danish, in particular in the nineteenth century, see Pedersen 2005). The synthetic form was found to be most frequent in the academic texts in my corpus, amounting to almost 80% of past-tense passives in the text by Rasmus Rask. A linguistic ideology favouring the synthetic form over its periphrastic alternative is especially apparent in some of the surveyed grammars, as discussed in Section 4.1. This kind of ideology was by no means unique to Late Modern Danish grammarians. In the English prescriptive tradition, Milroy and Milroy (2000, 71–3) observe a tendency to uphold morphological distinctions which had sometimes become obsolete in the spoken language. Writing on German, Salmons (2018, 338) describes "a deep-seated feeling among prescriptivists that inflection-heavy forms are somehow better than ... periphrastic ones." In fact, a close parallel to the Danish passive alternation can be observed in the history of German, namely the variation between a synthetic subjunctive (usually termed the 'Konjunktiv II') and a periphrastic subjunctive with the auxiliary *würde*. As documented by Durrell (2007, 2014), in the early nineteenth century, prescriptivists began to advocate the use of the synthetic subjunctive, arguing for its inherent superiority over the periphrastic construction.¹⁶ Some of the arguments given are quite similar to the ones found in the Danish grammars, i.e. that synthetic forms are more efficient than periphrastic ones and that preference should be given to forms which are more characteristic of the language (see especially Durrell 2007, 249–51).¹⁷

The hypothesis proposed here can also help explain a curious fact mentioned in passing in Section 2.2, namely, that some prefixed verbs in the Present-Day Danish allow a past-tense *s*-passive although the

¹⁶ On the historical development of the periphrastic subjunctive, see also Durrell and Whitt (2016). A notable difference between the German and Danish situations is that some Present-Day German prescriptivists still argue against the periphrastic construction (see the examples discussed by Durrell 2014, 23–6). To the best of my knowledge, there is no comparable bias against the periphrastic passive among contemporary Danish language users.

¹⁷ Another interesting parallel was pointed out to me by Pegah Faghiri (pers. comm.), namely an aversion to so-called compound verbs or light verb constructions among some Modern Persian prescriptivists, who argue that synthetic verb forms would be superior (even though these are of limited productivity in the modern language). According to Faghiri (2020, 255–8), this attitude stems both from linguistic purism – the light verb construction is thought by some to have developed because of Arabic influence – and a linguistic ideology favouring synthetic over analytic forms, which Faghiri suggests may be inspired by nineteenth-century European linguistic thinking (see especially Faghiri 2020, 257–8).

corresponding simplex verbs do not. As Hansen and Heltoft (2011, 752) mention, this is especially the case with a number of more formal prefixed verbs which are mainly used in the written language. Compare forms like *frifandtes* ‘was acquitted’ and *fastsloges* ‘was ascertained’, which are attested in written texts, with the corresponding simplex forms **fandtes* (intended: ‘was found’) and **sloges* (intended: ‘was beaten’). If the past-tense *s*-passive is essentially a written-language feature, this might explain why language users are more likely to accept it with verbs belonging to a more formal, usually written, register. My findings from the Late Modern Danish primary texts also revealed a large number of prefixed verbs used in the *s*-passive, but it would have to be investigated in a larger corpus whether prefixed verbs were already more frequent in the past-tense *s*-passive in this period.

One possible objection to this ‘standardization’ account of the Danish passive alternation is that it does not explain the individual restrictions: Why, for instance, are the strong past-tense *s*-passives *vandtes* ‘was won’ and *toges* ‘was taken’ acceptable in the contemporary (written) language, whereas forms like **tvanges* ‘was forced’ and **grebes* ‘was caught’ are not? This might be considered a major disadvantage of the hypothesis proposed here compared to the proposals by Heltoft (2006) and Lundquist (2016), which both attempt to account for the grammaticality of particular verbs. Note, however, that both of these accounts have to reckon with many exceptions to the proposed rules. According to Heltoft’s explanation, past-tense *s*-passives ought to be possible only with weak verbs and strong verbs of the sixth ablaut class, but the form is also found with other strong verbs, both in Present-Day Danish (Table 3) and in my Late Modern Danish material (Table 6). On a similar note, if one accepts Lundquist’s explanation, it is unexpected why some strong verbs allow past-tense *s*-passives at all, and why the form is also possible with weak verbs without syncretism between the past-tense and participial forms (see footnote 7). I suspect that a usage-based approach may provide a more realistic account of the restrictions seen in the present-day language. Under such a perspective, attention must be paid both to the frequency of the individual verbs and of the various conjugation classes. It is possible that weak verbs continue to occur productively in the past-tense *s*-passive in contemporary texts because of the high frequency of this conjugation class, but whether such an explanation can be extended to the other verbs occurring in the construction would require a much larger quantitative investigation. Such an investigation would also be necessary to confirm (or disprove) some of the other proposals made earlier.

6 Concluding remarks

This contribution has tried to shed more light on the restrictions on the Danish *s*-passive by investigating the situation in Late Modern Danish. After the introduction, I gave a brief overview of the alternation between inflectional and periphrastic passives in Present-Day Danish (Section 2.1) and the restrictions on the inflectional *s*-passive in the past tense (Section 2.2). Section 3 then laid out the goals, materials, and methods of the investigation, the results of which were presented in Section 4. I first showed that a number of earlier grammarians starting in the eighteenth century were aware of the restrictions on past-tense *s*-passives, but also that some of them advised readers to use the *s*-passive as much as possible. Using a small corpus of texts by eleven Late Modern Danish writers, it was then found that some *s*-passive forms were used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which are no longer current in the language, but also that the share of *s*-passives in the past tense differs greatly between the individual texts. I have suggested that the *s*-passive was mainly a feature of the written language already in Late Modern Danish, and that past-tense *s*-passive may be ‘artificial’ in the sense that it was not actually used in the vernacular spoken language.

If the proposal presented above is on the right track, this has implications for the analysis of the lexical restrictions observed in Present-Day Danish. Rather than a ‘system-internal’ development, which one might explain by appealing to syntactic or semantic factors, the restrictions would have arisen as a kind of compromise between two competing linguistic norms: a vernacular language which avoided past-tense *s*-passives and a written standard which had a preference for synthetic forms. This would make the Danish

case rather different from the restrictions on voice constructions discussed by van Lier and Messerschmidt (2022) – unless some of these may turn out to have a sociolinguistic basis as well.

Of course, the limited corpus used here cannot definitively show that the past-tense *s*-passive was an artefact of the written language. This hypothesis thus needs to be investigated further, taking into account a wider variety of sources. More texts belonging to different genres ought to be searched, in particular more informal texts closer to the spoken language at the time, e.g. anecdotes, dialogues, or texts by less skilled writers. Beginning in the twentieth century, recordings in traditional dialects are also available, which may provide evidence of spoken language less influenced by the written standard. In addition, earlier evidence needs to be considered. I have focussed on the Late Modern Danish period in this investigation, but for a fuller picture, Middle and Early Modern Danish texts have to be scrutinized – how frequent are past-tense *s*-passives in texts from these periods, and are they subject to restrictions like Late Modern and Present-Day Danish? A full account of the restrictions will need to answer these questions as well.

To conclude this investigation, I return to the two research questions asked in Section 3, i.e. whether the restrictions on *s*-passives have changed historically, and whether the use of inflected *vs* periphrastic passives has changed. The answer to both of these questions was found to be positive. While restrictions on *s*-passives are already mentioned in eighteenth-century grammars, some forms were in use in Late Modern Danish texts which are not possible in the present-day language. The restrictions have thus clearly changed with respect to individual lexical items. As for the share of *s*-passives and periphrastic passives, it was found that some nineteenth-century texts use more *s*-passives than periphrastic passives in the past tense – in contrast to the present-day language – but also that there were significant differences between individual texts. Future work on the history of Danish passives would thus be well advised to take into account the role of standardization and the sociolinguistic status of the *s*-passive.

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Data availability statement: The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Appendix

Links to primary sources

Table A1: List of primary sources; hyperlinks last checked 10 June 2022

Author	Title	Year	Source
J. Baggesen (tr.)	<i>Niels Klim</i>	1789 (1741)	http://www2.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/holberg/klim/
J. Baggesen	<i>Labyrinten</i>	1792–93	https://tekster.kb.dk/text/adl-texts-baggesen06-root
K. Rahbek	12 letters	1805–20	https://danmarksbreve.kb.dk
S. Pedersen	<i>En fæstebondes liv</i>	1809–11	Schousboe (1983)
R. Rask	<i>Undersøgelse ...</i>	1818	https://archive.org/details/undersgelseomde00raskgoog
H. C. Andersen	<i>Eventyr</i> , vol. 1	1835–42	https://tekster.kb.dk/text/adl-texts-hcaeventyr01val-root
O. Kollerød	<i>Min Historie</i>	1840	Ransy (1978)
S. Kierkegaard	<i>Forførerens Dagbog</i>	1843	http://sks.dk/EE1/txt.xml
Th. Gyllembourg	<i>To Tidsaldre</i>	1845	https://tekster.kb.dk/text/adl-texts-gyllem14val-root
H. Pedersen	“Levnetsbeskrivelse”	1849	Rasmussen (1992)
F. Schiern	“Vestmagterne ...”	1854	https://archive.org/details/nyerehistoriske01schigoog
C. van Dockum	<i>Gamle Minder</i>	1888 (1877)	https://www.gutenberg.org/files/63908/63908-h/63908-h.htm