Get over time: a longitudinal variationist analysis of passive voice in contemporary English

by

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

The English voice system has two passive auxiliaries: the canonical *be*-passive, and the more recent *get*-passive. Accounts of the *get*-passive in the linguistic literature draw from descriptive, historical, corpus linguistic, and variationist perspectives. Much existing work on the *get*-passive from the former three traditions notes semantic dissimilarities from the *be*-passive, suggesting that these two forms are not interchangeable and therefore do not constitute a typical sociolinguistic variable. Nonetheless, variationist work has treated the *be*- and *get*-passives as alternants expressing the same function. This latter work has focused on social factors alone, setting aside purported linguistic differences. This thesis provides a variationist account of the *be*- and *get*-passives, considering not only social factors, but also operationalizing as linguistic factors previously noted semantic characteristics, demonstrating which factors constrain variation and providing a holistic picture of the *get*-passive in vernacular English. The speakers in this study span a birth range of 1865 to 1996, providing a longitudinal scope from which to view the grammaticalization of the feature. Following the principle of accountability (Labov, 1972), instances of *be*- and *get*-passives were extracted from 108 speakers born and raised in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada (N=1716). Distributional and inferential results show a substantial increase in rates of *get*-passive over the last 130 years, indicating an active and ongoing change in progress. Social and linguistic factors alike are shown to play meaningful roles in variant selection, revealing a (largely) longitudinally stable variable grammar. The longitudinal scope of the study illuminates grammaticalization pathways into the 20th century and reinforces attested semantic links between the contemporary *get*-passive and its proposed lexical source(s).

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The English voice system draws a distinction between active and passive voice, each of which differs in its semantic and syntactic properties. In an active voice construction, the syntactic subject corresponds to the semantic actor, as in (1a), where the actor, *Sam*, occupies the subject position. In a passive voice construction, the syntactic subject corresponds to the patient, as in (1b), where *the apple* is the undergoer of the action (Huddleston 1988:76).

(1) a. Sam ate the apple

b. The apple **was eaten** by Sam[1]

The canonical English passive construction is the *be*-passive, which uses the *be* copula to link the verb phrase to the syntactic subject, as in (1b). For most of the history of English, the *be*-passive was the only option available for passivization. It is believed to have developed from the stative-adjectival perfect construction of Old English (OE) (Toyota, 2008:32). The original OE perfect employed a *be* auxiliary. As illustrated by the example in (2), the *be*-perfect bore great resemblance to our Present Day English (PDE) *be*-passive, made up of the components *be* + past participle. Toyota also points out its undergoer-orientation, a result of its source construction from Proto-Indo-European. Early in the OE period, *have* emerged as a competing perfect auxiliary. As *have* generalized across perfect contexts, the two existed alongside one another as late as the 19th century, when *have* finally overtook *be* as the standard perfect auxiliary.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all examples are my own.

(2) as ha þreo weren ifolen onslepe...

when they three **were fallen asleep**...

'When the three of them **had fallen asleep**...'

(AncRl, II.272.440) (McFadden 2017)

According to Toyota, the shift from *be* to *have* in this context, beginning in OE, marked the beginning of the development of the *be*-passive out of the *be*-perfect, as it reduced association of *be* with the perfect context. The introduction of perfect auxiliary *have* allowed the perfect to express actor-orientation, while the *be*-perfect remained undergoer-oriented. This served to differentiate the *be*- and *have*- constructions, carving out a unique context for the *be*-perfect to develop qualities of the passive seen in (1)[2].

Since the Late Modern period, the *be*-passive has seen the emergence of a competitor. Specifically, in the last 200 years, a second passive construction has arisen: the *get*-passive, as in (3), wherein *get* is used in place of the *be* auxiliary. The emergence of this construction suggests the grammaticalization of lexical *get* into a passive auxiliary, where grammaticalization entails the "steps whereby particular items become more grammatical through time" (Hopper and Traugott, 2003:2).[3]

[2] See Toyota (2008) for a comprehensive history of the English *be*-passive.
[3] While *get* in these contexts behaves much the same as the passive auxiliary *be*, it must be noted that *get* fails all standard qualifying tests for an auxiliary verb, such as compatibility with negative contraction, incompatibility with *do*-support, subject-auxiliary inversion, and VP-deletion "stranding," among others (Downing, 1996:183). For that reason, it is not considered a 'true' auxiliary by many scholars (e.g., Quirk et al., 1985:160; Haegeman, 1985:54-6; Downing, 1996:183). Nonetheless, in keeping with previous variationist studies on this feature, and to better reflect passive *get*'s variable status with *be* for which this thesis argues, I refer to *get* in this context as a passive auxiliary (cf. Feagin, 1975; Weiner and Labov, 1983; Sneller and Fisher, 2015).

(3) The apple **got eaten** by Sam

Indeed, Givón and Yang (1994) note the structural similarity of the *be*- and *get*- passives. Both are promotional in nature, featuring a reordering of syntactic structure that promotes the patient to the grammatical subject role. Furthermore, both have the ability to appear with an actor, as in (4a), marked with the oblique preposition *by*, or without one, as in (4b). Such overarching similarities suggest that the *be-* and *get*-passives are variants of the same grammatical function, passive voice, and thus operate within a shared envelope of variation within the language.

(4) a. Marcus **got seated** by the hostess

b. Marcus **got seated**

However, Givón and Yang also note a remarkable range of dissimilarities between the two structures, echoed throughout the literature (e.g., Hatcher, 1949; Lakoff, 1971; Sussex, 1982). Citing Lakoff (1971), for example, they note that a *be*-passive implies the agent remains in control, whereas in a *get*-passive, it is the patient that is imbued with a sense of control. This difference is illustrated in (5): (5a) presents a more neutral reading, while (5b) implies the thief did something to cause themselves to get caught. Givón and Yang also note the tendency for the *get*-passive to occur more often with animate subjects, compared to the *be*-passive which occurs freely with animate and inanimate subjects alike. Such differences are potentially problematic for the treatment of the two structures as functionally equivalent, a defining characteristic of the sociolinguistic variable (Labov, 1972).

(5) a. The thief **was caught** by the police

b. The thief **got caught** by the police

It is important to note that, with a few exceptions from variationist traditions, the works outlining these differences draw on reflective processes rather than spontaneous, casual, unscripted speech. This is not trivial, as vernacular speech is the natural locus of linguistic change from below and provides the "most systematic data for linguistic analysis" (Labov, 1984:29). Moreover, speakers often neutralize fine semantic nuances between alternate ways of encoding a single function in conversation (cf. Sankoff and Thibault, 1981; Sankoff, 1988:153). As such, the nature of both the similarities and the dissimilarities between the *be*-passive and the *get*-passive has bearing on the synchronic and the diachronic variation between the two in natural speech—the major inquiry of this thesis. This work will explore a central question: How has the *get*-passive emerged in vernacular English, particularly in relation to the *be*-passive? By examining data from archival and contemporary recordings that span 130 years in Victoria, British Columbia, this study will investigate the factors conditioning variation between the *be*- and *get*-passives through real and apparent time, thereby problematizing questions of functional and developmental equivalence.

The major contribution of this thesis lies in its approach to this particular feature: a variationist investigation that considers not just social factors, but also operationalizes semantic observations from the descriptive literature to give a nuanced view to multiple factors operating simultaneously on variation, through a longitudinal lens.

In taking this approach, a more general contribution of this thesis relates to its focus on Late Modern English (LModE), a period of English defined varyingly as spanning 1700-1900

(Hundt, 2014), 1700-1945, or even 1700 to the present day (Beal, 2004). This period has been much overlooked in the literature of English historical linguistics, and, until relatively recently, it has received very little attention from scholars, particularly in the area of morphosyntactic change (Hundt, 2014:1). According to Kytö et al. (2006), the 19th century and first half of the 20th century in particular have been neglected by scholars of English linguistics, due to the perception that English has remained more-or-less stable for the last 200 years, and that LModE is so similar to PDE that it warrants no further examination—despite studies showing the Late Modern period to be an active period in the emergence and development of many features (including, as we will see, the *get*-passive). Kytö et al. point out the importance of reversing the resulting gap with research on the recent and immediate past, toward the aim of constructing a comprehensive account of the historical development of the English language.

This study responds to the imperative set by Kytö et al. (2006) and Hundt (2014) to increase research in historical (socio)linguistics and related disciplines on LModE. In contributing to our collective account of the history of English, this thesis helps to bridge that gap, spanning a continuous transitional period out of LModE and into PDE. It thus contributes to the emerging body of corpus-based research examining language change over the last 200 years, in this case at the level of morphosyntax.

Kytö et al. (2006:4) also note the significance of the 19th century in "the development of many extraterritorial varieties of English", including Canadian English, a settler colonial variety and the subject of the present study. Kytö et al. go on to say: "A full description of nineteenth-century English thus requires a broad regional scope: results valid for one regional variety of nineteenth-century English cannot safely be claimed to hold for the English language as a whole." Nonetheless, research in English linguistics is dominated by studies on British and

American varieties. However, there is a growing body of variationist work focusing on World Englishes, including Canadian English (CanE). Recent years in particular have seen a substantial increase of variationist research on CanE grounded in empirical data, both synchronic and diachronic, as opposed to strictly socio-political history (Dollinger, 2008:1; see, e.g., D'Arcy, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2015; Denis, 2017; Denis and Tagliamonte, 2016; Denis et al., 2019; Tagliamonte, 2005, 2006, 2008; Tagliamonte and D'Arcy, 2004, 2005, 2007; Tagliamonte and Denis, 2010; Tagliamonte et al., 2010; Brook, 2018, 2020; Buaillon et al., 2020, among many others). This study follows these scholars in contributing to a growing body of linguistic research on Canadian varieties of English.

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides background on the *get*-passive based on previous claims in the linguistic literature, and consists of two sections: first, a summary of the historical development of the *get*-passive, tracking its grammaticalization from a lexical verb to a passive auxiliary. This is followed by an outline of its synchronic status, focusing predominantly on semantic observations from the descriptive literature and corpus studies, with a brief discussion of findings from variationist studies regarding social variables like age and gender. Chapter 3 is methodological. It motivates a variationist approach to this feature, presents information about the corpora and speakers used in the study, and selects several of the semantic and social factors discussed in Chapter 2 to operationalize for testing. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study, both distributional and inferential, drawing on multivariate regression analysis. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the thesis, providing discussion of the results, noting limitations of the study, and pointing out directions for future research.

Chapter 2. Background

2.1 Historical Overview

As a lexical verb, *get* is a verb of acquisition, meaning *to obtain*. How, then, did it come to function as an auxiliary in a passive construction? To understand the way the *get*-passive functions in PDE, it is critical to first examine its historical trajectory through the language.

Examples of the *get*-passive can be found in written materials as early as the mid-17th century—the first attested instance, reproduced in (6), is dated 1652—but it occurs only sporadically until the late 18th century. Toyota (2008) notes that 17th century examples were isolated occurrences; Strang (1970) and Denison (1993) further note that earlier putative *get*-passive examples tended to have adjectival properties, interpretable as inchoatives, and that it was not until the 18th or 19th century that unambiguous verbal *get*-passives began to appear with frequency. Thus, scholars tend to agree that *get* had not grammaticalized for passive readings until at least the 18th century, with most citing the 19th or 20th century (Strang, 1970; Denison, 1993; Fleisher, 2006; Toyota, 2008).

(6) A certain Spanish pretending Alchymist...**got acquainted** with foure rich Spanish merchants. (1652 Gaule, Magastrom, as cited in Toyota, 2008:150)

Given the need to rely on surviving textual records, it is inevitable that gaps remain in our understanding of the historical development of the *get*-passive: Changes initiating in vernacular, spoken language are likely not reflected in textual sources for some time (Schwarz, 2019:200-201), and the chronology of surviving, accessible texts does not necessarily accurately reflect the stages of the *get*-passive's development. Nonetheless, historical texts present our best options for

glimpsing potential pathways of grammaticalization. Scholars such as Givón and Yang (1994), Gronemeyer (1999), Fleisher (2006), and Toyota (2008) have used such texts to construct possible accounts of the grammaticalization of lexical *get* into the *get*-passive of the present study.

Givón and Yang (1994) provide a detailed account of the development of the *get*-passive, using evidence from a textual data base consisting of the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, and their contemporaries, spanning a period from the 14th to 20th centuries. According to Givón and Yang, the first major grammatical change that paved the way for the development of the *get*-passive from its lexical meaning *to obtain* was the development of the bitransitive-locative construction, as seen in a late 14th century Chaucer example reproduced in (7), in which a patient is moved toward a location.

(7) Er that he myghte **gete** his wyf **to shipe**? (Chaucer, circa 1380s-1390s, cited in Givón and Yang, 1994:124)

This change likely evolved over four small steps, illustrated in (8):

(8) a. Externalization: 'obtain X' → 'obtain/take X for oneself'

b. Alienation: 'obtain/take X for oneself' → 'obtain/take X for another person'

c. Localization: 'obtain/take X for another person' → 'take/move X toward another person'

d. De-humanization: 'take/move X toward another person' → 'take/move X toward another thing' (Givón and Yang, 1994)

This bitransitive-locative construction established a causative function for *get*, moving away from the prototypical lexical sense *to obtain* and toward a causative construction whereby the patient is caused to change location by the agent of the clause.

Following this development, another major grammatical change is attested in writings from the 16th and 17th centuries: the development of causative *get* constructions with verbal complements. The locative object of the bitransitive-locative *get* construction began to be generalized, first to verbal locative complements, then to stand-alone motion verbs, and finally to unrestricted verbs, seen in (9a). From these types of causative *get* constructions with verbal complements, *be*-passive verbal complements began to appear in place of active verbal complements, as in (9b).

(9) a. Our youth **got** me **to play** the woman's part (Shakespeare, circa 1589-1593, cited in Givón and Yang, 1994:129)

b. Or by what means **got** thou **to be released** (Shakespeare, circa 1591, cited in Givón and Yang, 1994:130)

The de-transitivization of the causative + *be*-passive construction moved *get* away from performing a causative function and introduced an intransitive-inchoative function. Givón and Yang suggest that the de-transitivization of this type of construction occurred through the addition of a reflexive pronoun, as illustrated in (10). A reflexive pronoun was added to the causative get + *be*-passive complement construction (10a), which was then dropped, leaving behind an intransitive-inchoative construction (10b). Through a final step of morphological

simplification, the *be*-passive was dropped, leaving the *get*-passive construction as we know it today (10c).

(10) a. She **got** him **to be admitted** → She **got** herself **to be admitted**

b. She **got** herself **to be admitted** → She **got to be admitted**.

c. She **got to be admitted** → She **got admitted**

(Givón and Yang, 1994)

Toyota (2008) provides a similar account of the historical development of the *get*-passive, positing the reflexive-causative *get oneself* + past participle construction as its direct source. Like Givón and Yang, Toyota begins by demonstrating the transformation of *get* from its basic meaning of "denoting the onset of possession" (cf. (8a)) to one of causation of possession (cf. (8b)), eventually developing a typical causative meaning losing its strict meaning of possession (cf. (9a)), from approximately 1600 onward. According to Toyota, significantly aiding grammaticalization was the reanalysis of the adverbial phrase expressing purpose in causative *get* constructions, the *to*-infinitive, which became subcategorized as part of *get*.

Here, Toyota (2008) diverges from Givón and Yang (1994). Where Givón and Yang discuss the development of a causative + *be*-passive construction, this step has no role in Toyota's account. Around 1500, causative *get* began to appear with the past participle, shown in (11), which was subsequently followed by the addition of a reflexive pronoun, as in (12).

(11) I can **get** no such some **confessed**.

‘I cannot get such sum confiscated’ (1548 Invent. Ch. Goods (Surtees) 119, cited in Toyota, 2008:180)

(12) Poor Barty...had applied, and **got** himself **appointed** a writer to the…East India Company. (Graves, 1779, cited in Toyota, 2008:181)

It is from this latter reflexive construction, Toyota argues, that the *get*-passive arose. In sentences that have verbs with implied external agents, like *appointed* in (12), the presence of a reflexive pronoun results in characteristics similar to the middle voice or unaccusative: The grammatical subject of (12), *Poor Barty*, is simultaneously the agent of *got* and the patient of *appointed*. Loss of subject control in a reflexive construction like that seen in (12) led to the development of a passive reading (Croft et al., 1987, cited in Toyota, 2008:181). The final step to the *get*-passive, then, was the loss of the reflexive pronoun. Without the reflexive pronoun, a construction like (12) reads as a typical *get*-passive: *Poor Barty got appointed*.

Not all scholars agree, however, that the causative *get* is the historical source of the *get*-passive. Many argue that it is indeed the inchoative, not causative, *get* that served as the direct source of the *get*-passive, such as Gronemeyer (1999) and Fleisher (2006). Like Givón and Yang (1994) and Toyota (2008), Gronemeyer provides a historical account of the grammaticalization of *get*, detailing its pathway from lexical verb to passive auxiliary (in addition to its many other grammatical functions).

Gronemeyer (1999) posits the following pathway of change: main verb → locative → inchoative → passive. Like Givón and Yang (1994), Gronemeyer (1999) points out the first extension of main verb *get* to a locative construction in the late 14th century (see example (7) above).[4] Locative complements, which were restricted to prepositional phrases or particles before 1500, began to spread to spatial adverbs such as *ashore*, *aboard* and *home* between 1500 and 1640, and then to spatial adjectives like *farther*, *alone*, and *high* between 1640 and 1710. These spatial adjectival complements created an ambiguity between spatial movement and mental change of state that allowed for the generalization to other types of adjectives, including adjectival past participles, as in (13), giving rise to a truly inchoative sense of *get*.

(13) for when this Fellow of mine **gets drunk**, he minds nothing (Farquhar 1707, cited in Gronemeyer, 1999)

It is out of this inchoative construction, Gronemeyer (1999) argues, that the *get*-passive developed. As many early examples of *get* + an *-ed* participle can easily be interpreted as adjectival (and therefore inchoative), Gronemeyer (1999:29) agrees with scholars like Denison (1993) that the *get*-passive did not grammaticalize until the 19th or 20th centuries, when it began consistently taking unambiguous verbal passive complements. According to Gronemeyer, this change occurred when the matrix subject of the inchoative *get* was "reanalyzed as controlling the implicit internal argument of the participle, rather than the implicit external one as in the inchoative."[5]

[4] While Givón and Yang (1994) emphasize the role of the locative in establishing a causative function of *get*, Gronemeyer (1999:24) suggests causative *get* came instead from the benefactive variant of main verb *get*: "to provide somebody with something."
[5] See Fleisher (2006) for a detailed picture of the change from inchoative to passive *get*.

Both perspectives offer compelling evidence for either the causative or the inchoative *get* as the historical source of the *get*-passive. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to take a position on which construction indeed gave rise to the *get*-passive, each of these historical perspectives may offer insight into the present-day form and function of the *get*-passive. As we will see in the next section, synchronic descriptions of the *get*-passive characterize it as possessing strong connotations of agency, responsibility, and control for the subject-referent. Givón and Yang (1994:139) suggest that these connotations are a natural consequence of the *get*-passive's diachronic source, which they posit is the reflexive-causative *get* construction, contrasting it with the *be*-passive, "which both arose from a stative, intransitive, adjectival construction and has retained to this day an overwhelmingly non-agentive subject-patient".

We will also see that many scholars assert there is a clear adversative and/or beneficial sense for the subject of the clause or a related human participant of the event described. Fleisher (2006) argues that the pathway of change proposed by Gronemeyer (1999) and echoed in his paper, main verb → locative → inchoative → passive, might explain, at least in part, how this semantic property came to be. According to Fleisher, many of the crucial complements involved in the development of inchoative *get* out of locative *get* were adverbs or adjectives pertaining to loss or escape, which have clear adversative/beneficial connotations. Fleisher quotes Hopper's (1991:22) observation that "details of [a form's] lexical history may be reflected in constraints on its grammatical distribution," suggesting that the lexical semantics of the *get*-passive's earlier complements have bearing on its distribution to this day.

We have briefly glimpsed the historical development of the *get*-passive over the past four centuries—a relatively short history when compared to that of the *be*-passive, which emerged during the Old English period. This section has summarized two possible trajectories of the

development of the *get*-passive, both of which inspire compelling questions regarding the contemporary semantic functions of the construction. Let us now turn toward the synchronic status of the construction, reviewing what scholars have to say about the contemporary function of the *get*-passive in present-day English.

2.2 Synchronic Status

The literature is varied in what it considers a *get*-passive, a state of affairs that has implications for the synchronic status of the *get*-passive and how it varies with the *be*-passive, and for the constraints on variation that have emerged from diachronic factors. Works like Givón and Yang (1994), Gronemeyer (1999), Toyota (2008), and Schwarz (2019), which consider the broader pathways through which the *get*-passive has come to fit into the contemporary English voice system, include a variety of passive and related, passive-like constructions in their discussions. These authors discuss the diachronic relationship between the *get*-passive and other *get* constructions—the reflexive (e.g., *I got myself a coffee*) and inchoative constructions (e.g., *He got sad*) in particular. While these constructions are related to the *get*-passive in both form and function, and their historical relationships are important in understanding the development and contemporary features of the *get*-passive, they cannot be considered true passives, in that their subjects do not correspond with the semantic patient role (cf. example (1)). Nonetheless, Collins (1996) includes the reflexive *get* construction in his "fuzzy set" classification of *get*-passives, which describes the *get*-passive and passive-like *get* constructions as forming a gradient of related constructions. In addition to "central" *get*-passives, Collins's "fuzzy set" also includes psychological and adjectival *get* constructions, as in *She got frustrated*, in which *frustrated* may be interpreted as an adjective or a past participle.

These latter two types of constructions are considered semi-passives in Quirk et al.'s (1985:167-171) division of passives (both *get*- and *be*-) into three categories: central, semi-, and pseudo-. Central passives, the prototypical English passive, have corresponding active counterparts, and while they often occur without an agent phrase, they have the potential to be joined with a *by*-phrase expressing an overt actor or agent, as in (14) (optionality is represented by italics).

(14) Jesse **was hugged** *by his aunt*

Semi-passive constructions, as in (15a), contain both verbal and adjectival properties.

(15) a. Natasha **was annoyed**

b. Luisa annoyed Natasha

These constructions are ambiguous, interpretable as stative (i.e., Natasha was experiencing the emotional state of annoyance) or eventive (i.e., something happened causing Natasha to become annoyed), but they also have active analogues, as in (15b).

Pseudo-passives, in contrast, have neither an active counterpart nor the ability to occur with a *by*-phrase expressing an overt agent, as in (16), where there is no implied agent performing the action of dressing to David.

(16) a. David **got dressed**

b. *David **got dressed** by his stylist

As Quirk et al. note, a purely formal definition of the passive construction—a clause containing *be* or *get* + the *-ed* or *-en* participle—includes a broad scope of constructions with varying semantic and syntactic properties. For this reason, much of the literature about the *get*-passive only briefly considers constructions like the reflexive, the inchoative, or the semi- and pseudo-passives, despite their relatedness, and focuses instead on the central passive construction, seen in (14).

Downing (1996) establishes the following criteria for determining a true *get*-passive. It (i) has a *be*-passive counterpart, (ii) has an active counterpart, and (iii) has the potential for the addition of a by-phrase expressing an overt actor. An example is given in (17), where the overt agent is expressed with an optional by-phrase, represented in italics. The *get*-passive in (17a) has a *be*-passive counterpart (17b), as well as an active counterpart (17c).

(17) a. I **got stung** *by a wasp* (Downing, 1996)

b. I **was stung** *by a wasp*

c. A wasp stung me

This definition excludes ambiguous constructions (cf. examples (15-16)) and allows us to examine the *get*-passive in direct comparison with the *be*-passive.

Consistent with its longstanding status in the language, the *be*-passive is said to be far more common than the *get*-passive (Svartvik, 1966:149), although use of both varies according to factors such as style and register. Quirk et al. (1985:161), for example, state that while the *get*-passive is infrequent even in informal English, it is further avoided in formal style, a claim

echoed by Huddleston (1988:178). It appears this is true in both formal speech as well as written language. For example, Collins's (1996) corpus study of written British, Australian and American English finds the *get*-passive more frequent in fiction—particularly in passages of dialogue—and least frequent in expository texts of a more formal style. He also finds the *get*-passive to be far more frequent in spoken materials than in written ones. Kim (2012) similarly finds that the *get*-passive was least frequent in academic texts, increased in use in less formal expository texts like newspapers and magazines, and was most frequent in fiction writing. There is thus an apparent cline in *get*-passive usage, with rates of the *get*-passive increasing as texts become more informal. This would suggest that rates of the *get*-passive are higher in many genres of speech, which are typically (though not exclusively) less formal than written genres. Indeed, Kim and Collins both find the *get*-passive more frequent in spoken corpora than in any written texts. Schwarz (2019:200) describes the *get*-passive as "practically infamous for its association with spoken language," citing Biber et al.'s (1999:200) finding that the *get*-passive was almost exclusively attested in conversation. Within the domain of speech itself, the *get*-passive is said to be a colloquial alternative to the *be*-passive (Hatcher, 1949; Labov, 1975). Feagin (1979:96) describes the *get*-passive as contributing a "stronger, more lively, more intimate or more earthy" meaning to a sentence.

Variation in *get*-passive use is found across regional varieties as well. Sussex (1982) notes differences between British, Australian, and North American English, with *get*-passives occurring most frequently in North American English and least frequently in British English, Australian English falling in between the two. Collins (1996), too, finds rates of the *get*-passive higher in Australian English than in British English, and reports even higher rates in Indian English.

In terms of linguistic properties, early grammarians such as Curme and Jespersen claimed the *get*-passive is different from the *be*-passive only in its avoidance of ambiguity between a stative or actional reading (Curme, 1931; Jespersen, 1949; cited in Hatcher, 1949). The ambiguity present in a *be*-passive construction like (18a), in which *painted* can be interpreted as either a past participle or an adjective, is avoided by replacing the *be*-passive with a *get*-passive, as in (18b). Whereas (18a) may be read as a semi-passive (cf. (15) above), (18b) is an unambiguous central passive, taking only an eventive reading.

(18) a. The house **is painted**

b. The house **gets painted**

This difference is noted by several scholars, albeit in slightly different terms. While Jesperson and others (Hatcher, 1949; Downing, 1996; Givón and Yang, 1994) refer to the *get*-passive's unique *actional* property, other scholars refer to its *dynamic* (Chappell, 1980; Collins, 1996; Toyota, 2008; Kim, 2012) or *eventive* (Sneller and Fisher, 2015) property. Downing (1996:184) wonders, however, if the distinction between the actional *get*-passive and stative *be*-passive is overstressed in the literature, noting the capacity for the *be*-passive to occur with many unambiguously actional verbs, like *was fired*/*introduced*/*admitted*/*elected*/*arrested*. These verbs cannot be interpreted as adjectival, and they therefore avoid the ambiguity present in many *be*-passive constructions. While Downing may be correct in that the *be*-passive is not confined to exclusively stative clauses, sentences like (18) suggest that the *get*-passive can indeed function to disambiguate eventive from stative passives. If so, then the *get*- and the *be*- passives may only be functionally interchangeable variants in eventive contexts.

Perhaps the next most common observation regarding the semantic difference between *be*- and *get*- passives is the association of subject responsibility with the *get*-passive. Comparing the sentences in (19), Barber (1975:22) comments that (19b) implies that the "subject is somehow bringing the action onto itself," a property further demonstrated by the ability to add the reflexive pronoun to a *get*-passive, as in (19c)—although, in light of the discussion at the end of section 2.1, it may be more useful to consider this in terms of the *loss* of the reflexive pronoun in the recent history of the *get*-passive than the *addition*.

(19) a. The cat **was scratched**

b. The cat **got scratched**

c. The cat **got** itself **scratched** (Barber, 1975)

Barber is not alone in this observation. Huddleston (1988) notes that *get*-passives tend to occur when the subject-referent is not a purely passive participant, but takes some initiative, or is ascribed some measure of responsibility or intention. Lakoff (1971) compares the *get*- and *be*-passives with regard to control or purpose. She notes that while in the *be*-passive the agent retains control, the patient is in control in the *get*-passive, illustrated by the difference between (20a) and (20b). In (20a), the expected reading is that whoever shot Mary did it on purpose, whereas an expected reading of (20b) is that Mary intentionally caused herself to be shot.

(20) a. Mary **was shot** on purpose

b. Mary **got shot** on purpose (Lakoff, 1971)

It is not clear, however, if this difference in meaning is inherent in the choice of auxiliary or triggered by the purpose clause itself. Labov (1975) conducted an experiment to examine the degree to which subject responsibility, or causal meaning, is present in the *get*-passive as opposed to the *be*-passive in the absence of a purpose clause. 80 passers-by in downtown Philadelphia were asked to help with a "one question traffic survey," designed to elicit the participant's semantic interpretation of one of four passive forms: a *be*-passive + a purpose clause, a *be*-passive on its own, a *get*-passive on its own, and a *get*-passive with a purpose clause:

(21) a. He **was arrested** to test the law

b. He **was arrested**

c. He **got arrested**

d. He **got arrested** to test the law

When the purpose clause *to test the law* was present, participants were found more likely to interpret a causative meaning. However, participants did not detect any semantic difference between *get*- and *be*-passives without purpose clauses. Labov therefore concluded that the constructions are conditioned by both social and stylistic factors, not by any notable semantic difference. In the context of contradictory claims regarding the equivalence of the *get*- and *be*-passives, this conclusion is not trivial. It suggests that, despite the historical and oft-cited semantic-pragmatic differences between the two forms, they may in fact function as a typical sociolinguistic variable, a point to which I return at the end of this section.

Hatcher (1949) also comments on subject responsibility, connecting it with another common observation about the *get*-passive: the frequency of the *get*-passive in the absence of an

expressed agent. According to Hatcher, the infrequency of agent phrases in *get*-passive constructions deemphasizes the role of the implied agent, promoting instead the agency of the subject and resulting in the perceived quality of subject responsibility. While the *be*-passive has also been observed to occur more frequently without an expressed agent than with one (Svartvik, 1966), this tendency is even more pronounced with the *get*-passive (Quirk et al., 1985; Downing, 1996; Toyota, 2008). Downing (1996:192) makes a similar observation as Hatcher, noting that if the *get*-passive is indeed focused on the subject-referent as is often asserted, then an expressed agent would serve to "divid[e] attention between the two participants," and is therefore infrequent. Indeed, Downing found only 67 instances of an expressed agent out of 846 *get*-passive tokens found in the Bank of English Corpora, which contains both written and spoken data. Similarly, Toyota (2008) found an actor phrase expressed in less than 2% of *get*-passives in the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English, a corpus comprised of spoken British English from the latter 20th century, compared with 20-30% of *be*-passives. This low rate remains consistent in the written materials he analyzed, including data from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Another observation regarding *get*-passives related to subject responsibility concerns subject animacy. As inanimate subjects cannot hold responsibility, many scholars note the tendency for *get*-passives to occur with human, or at least animate subjects (Lakoff, 1971; Givón and Yang, 1994). Toyota (2008) confirms this observation on the basis of PDE patterns. He found the *get*-passive to occur with a human subject almost 85% of the time, compared with less than 25% of *be*-passive tokens.

However, Toyota's results also show an increase in the occurrence of the *get*-passive with inanimate subjects over time; indeed, many scholars note that it is possible for the *get*-passive to occur with inanimate subjects. When this is the case, Givón and Yang (1994) extend the idea of

subject responsibility toward a notion of *human involvement*: In cases where a *get*-passive subject is inanimate, and thus cannot assume any responsibility, a human associated with the event in question may retain responsibility or be otherwise involved with or affected by the results of the event (Lakoff 1971). Lakoff demonstrates this using the example reproduced in (22): She claims that (22a) implies that the possessor of the subject (the cache of marijuana) was remiss, while (22b) does not.

(22) a. My cache of marijuana **got found** by Fido, the police dog
b. My cache of marijuana **was found** by Fido, the police dog (Lakoff 1971)

Lakoff also comments on the use of the *get*-passive to signify the speaker's attitude toward the relayed events, especially when the speaker is involved in or affected by the events. Whether the speaker feels the outcome of the events described in the sentence are negative or positive, this attitude may be conveyed through the choice of the *get*-passive rather than the *be*-passive (Lakoff, 1971:154). Other scholars maintain the *get*-passive reflects a speaker's opinion on an event that does not directly involve them (Hatcher, 1949; Stein, 1979; Chappell 1980; Vanrespaille, 1991; Downing, 1996; cited in Toyota, 2008). Toyota (2008) refers to this property as *subjective viewpoint* and characterizes it as the ability for the *get*-passive to express a speaker's sentiment, sympathy, or other attitude, with or without their direct involvement, toward the reported event. The tendency for the *get*-passive to occur with human subjects, Toyota notes, may explain its ability to accommodate a subjective viewpoint, as it is easier for a speaker to associate themselves with a human subject.

A final semantic observation about the *get*-passive is its alleged capacity to suggest either an adversative or a beneficial reading for the subject, illustrated in (23):

(23) a. Nat **got hit** by the football

b. The new employee will **get promoted**

Hatcher (1949) claims the *get*-passive is, in fact, only possible when reporting events felt by the speaker to have either negative or positive consequences for the subject-referent. Chappell (1980) argues similarly that the *get*-passive is set apart from the *be*-passive in its ability to dichotomize passive events into fortunate or unfortunate. She proposes that this is a difference in fundamental semantic structure, and sets out to formalize these properties, providing a semantic analysis of the *get*-passive which differentiates the two variants despite their "formally-identical" syntactic properties. Other scholars emphasize the *get*-passive's adversative reading only: Downing (1996) found an adversative condition of the subject-referent as a result of the reported event "overwhelmingly predominant" in her sample compared with neutral, beneficial, or indeterminate conditions. Furthermore, Toyota (2008) presents diachronic evidence for the increasing association of the *get*-passive with adversative meaning.

Many of the characteristics said to distinguish the *get*-passive from the *be*-passive in contemporary English are related to emphasis on the subject-referent, such as subject responsibility, subject animacy, and the presence of adversative or beneficial consequences for the subject. Toyota (2008) attributes these characteristics to its development out of the reflexive-causative construction, and in particular, that construction's property of subject control over an event or action. The semantic links between the reflexive-causative construction and the

contemporary English *get*-passive account for the changes in the semantic quality of *get* and support Toyota's claim that this construction is the historical source of the *get*-passive. As noted at the end of section 2.1, exploring the extent to which the *get*-passive has retained nuances from its historical source in contemporary, vernacular usage is imperative to understanding the variable. Semantic vestiges from earlier stages of its grammaticalization might serve as conditioning factors in present day variation.

Nonetheless, despite claims of semantic and pragmatic non-equivalence between the two forms throughout the literature, variationist studies of this feature treat the two passive forms as interchangeable (Feagin, 1979; Weiner and Labov, 1983; Sneller and Fisher, 2015). Corpus studies acknowledge claims of difference, but do not directly address the question of functional equivalence in their methods, focusing on the *get*-passive alone. There seems, then, to be disagreement in the broader linguistic literature as to whether the *get*- and the *be*-passives are functionally equivalent. Labov's (1975) traffic survey experiment, described above, was explicitly designed to address this controversy, at least with regard to the potential causative function of the *get*-passive. In the absence of a purpose clause, Labov found no difference in participants' semantic uses and interpretations of the *be*- and the *get*-passives, suggesting, as noted above, that variation between the two is conditioned sociolinguistically rather than semantically.

As such, Weiner and Labov's (1983) variationist study on the agentless passive treats *be*- and *get*-passives as semantically equivalent where they occur with no purpose clause, excluding the *get*-passive only where it has an explicitly causative function. Like other variationist studies of this alternation, Weiner and Labov do not address any of the other semantic observations cited in the *get*-passive literature, such as subject animacy, speaker viewpoint, adversative or

beneficial reading, or the *get*-passive's potential to disambiguate between stative and eventive passives; they instead focus on the effects of social variables like class and gender on variation. Weiner and Labov found that not only did adolescents use the *get*-passive at a much higher rate than adults, adolescent males used the *get*-variant even more frequently than they used the *be*-variant. Furthermore, Black adolescent males were shown to use the *get*-passive more than any other group. White adolescent girls, on the other hand, retained a higher frequency of *be*-passive tokens than *get*-passive tokens. These results parallel, more or less, the results of Feagin's (1979) study of white Alabama English, in which she found a dramatic shift in the use of the *get*-passive, rising from a frequency of less than 30% in adults to almost 80% in adolescents, with teenage boys demonstrating the highest frequency of *get*-passive tokens. She also found, across age groups, a far higher rate of the *get*-passive in working class individuals than upper class individuals.

Taken together, these results are suggestive of ongoing change; indeed, Weiner and Labov comment that the shift to the *get*-passive "appears to be one of the most active grammatical changes taking place in English." The two studies differ, however, in their conclusions regarding the salience of social value attached to the variant. While Feagin claims the *get*-passive is not associated with any social stigma, Weiner and Labov suggest the variant is indeed stigmatized. It is unclear from these studies whether the social meaning associated with the *get*-passive was strong enough or salient enough to be accurately described as "stigma." However, high *get*-passive usage amongst men and speakers from lower socioeconomic strata suggest the variant carries some degree of covert prestige, in which members of a community place high value on a non-standard variant or dialect (cf. Trudgill, 1972).

A more recent study, Sneller and Fisher (2015), addresses the question of stigma while confirming the increase of the *get*-passive as an ongoing change in North American English. They demonstrate a steady increase in the use of the *get*-passive in both spoken and written English over the last two centuries, specifically in English spoken in Philadelphia in the 20th century. Their results show, however, a slight reversal in *get*-passive usage in speakers born after 1950, particularly among women and upper-class speakers. This leads them to suggest that the *get*-passive acquired some degree of stigmatization within the community just prior to this time, perhaps due to an emergence of salience around the variable.

While these variationist studies offer us keen insights into the *get*-passive and its contemporary relationship with the *be*-passive, they do not address directly the alleged semantic and pragmatic differences between the two that are cited throughout the literature. Nonetheless, the existence of super tokens, as in (24), suggests that any such differences that emerge as a result of their distinct source constructions in the language are neutralized in discourse (cf. Sankoff and Thibault, 1981; Sankoff, 1988).

(24) a. They **were posted** two weeks apart. The one I got, they'd both been interviewed for. I **got hired**. (LD60m/SCVE)

b. The only time I can remember **being grounded** was when I took my pants off and ran around the complex when there were other kids outside. Remember **getting grounded** for that (WJ15m/SCVE)

If the *get*-passive does, in fact, behave interchangeably with the *be*-passive in modern usage as variationist studies on the subject seem to suggest, then a longitudinal examination of the

variable, one that combines diachronic and synchronic views, will be useful in coming to understand how these purported differences have become neutralized in discourse over time.

Chapter 3. Data and Methods

3.1 Methodology

Chapter 2 has outlined the varied approaches to the *get*-passive found throughout the literature to date. Much of the work on the *get*-passive is descriptive, offering important insights that are based largely on intuition, observation, and theoretical apparatus rather than empirical evidence. Corpus studies have taken a quantitative approach, but they present results in terms of raw frequencies without a holistic consideration of the systematic relationship between the *be*- and *get*-passives. Furthermore, to now they have focused on language-internal conditions, not yet considering social factors like gender, education, and socioeconomic status; they also often rely on written data instead of, or in addition to, vernacular speech. A more fulsome understanding of the ways in which the *get*- and *be*-passives function in the grammatical system of English requires a quantitative approach that takes into account both linguistic and social factors, considering how those factors simultaneously operate on variation in isolation, as well as how they may interact with each other. Variationist methodology offers precisely these lenses. A variationist approach can not only demonstrate the effect of linguistic and social factors on the distribution of the *get*-passive, but it allows us to view explicitly its relationship with the *be*-passive, offering insight into whether the *get*- and *be*-passives are indeed functionally equivalent variants. Variationist methodology provides systematic parameters to view the complex interactions between the *get*-passive, the *be*-passive, and the various linguistic and social factors that play roles in actual everyday speech, giving a view to the way the variable fits into the English voice system.

Indeed, when partnered with the insights from other traditions, the variationist toolkit becomes a powerful analytic in assessing variation and change. As we have seen, descriptive,

historical, and corpus studies alike suggest differing semantic properties between the *get*- and the *be*-passives, a consideration imperative to understanding this variable. Indeed, this large body of work provides testable hypotheses that can be operationalized as quantitative predictors on variation. At the same time, previous variationist work has not fully addressed claims of substantial semantic difference between the *get* passive and the *be*-passive, nor have they given the diachronic scope necessary to tease out the role of grammaticalization on historical and contemporary use of the *get*-passive. To view the full picture of the *get*-passive in PDE, we must consider points of semantic and pragmatic difference between the *get*- and the *be*-passive, with particular regard to their variation with one another over the course of recent history.

This study thus adopts variationist methodology, assuming that the *get*-passive and the *be*-passive are indeed basically functionally equivalent in contemporary usage. However, to gain a fuller picture of the emergence of the *get*-passive over the last 130 years in both real and apparent time, and how it fits into the grammar alongside the *be*-passive, I will consider in depth the various semantic differences between the two forms claimed in the literature. Introducing a diachronic scope will give a view to the potential effects of historical semantics on contemporary *get*-passive usage.

3.2 Corpora

Data for this thesis was extracted from two corpora, *The Diachronic Corpus of Victoria English* (DCVE) and *The Synchronic Corpus of Victoria English* (SCVE), which together form the Victoria English Archive (VEA) (D'Arcy, 2017). Both corpora are comprised of interviews with lifelong residents of Victoria, B.C., and consist of spoken, vernacular English. The DCVE is composed of oral histories sourced from the University of Victoria Archives and the British

Columbia Archives and includes interviews with 43 individuals born between 1865 and 1936. The SCVE includes sociolinguistic interviews with 162 individuals born between the years 1913 and 1996. All speakers from the DCVE who produced tokens that fit within the variable context (see section 3.3) were included in the study. Rather than including all SCVE speakers—over three times as many speakers as in the DCVE—68 speakers were selected, to better balance the data across the time captured by the two corpora once combined. For each birth decade spanned by the SCVE, four men and four women were selected (excluding the 1910s, in which only four speakers from the total corpus were born; all four were included)[6]. The speakers used here were selected to represent the broadest possible scope of socioeconomic diversity, while also covering the span of the relevant decade. Table 3.1 outlines the sample of speakers included in this study.

[6] A post-hoc exclusion of categorical contexts after data extraction and coding resulted in the final inclusion of three women born in the 1940s, rather than four.

Table 3.1. Speaker sample[7].

Decade of birth	DCVE		SCVE		Total
	men	women	men	women	
1860s	1	1			2
1870s	3	4			7
1880s	5	5			10
1890s	3	6			9
1900s	5	0			5
1910s	1	4	2	2	9
1920s	0	1	4	4	9
1930s	1	1	4	4	10
1940s			4	3	7
1950s			4	4	8
1960s			4	4	8
1970s			4	4	8
1980s			4	4	8
1990s			4	4	8
TOTAL					108

The chronological breadth of this sample is important to note. The oldest speaker in the DCVE was born in 1865, and the corpus includes a full 27 speakers who were born before 1900. To now,

[7] Cells left blank indicate that the corpus does not include speakers born in those decades. For the DCVE, cells populated with 0 indicate that while speakers born in that particular decade are included in the corpus, the gender in question is not represented.

the oldest speakers represented in variationist studies on this variable were born in 1882 (Feagin, 1979). Corpus studies and studies on the grammaticalization of the *get*-passive include written data from as early as 700, but the nature of the questions they investigate mean that they cannot integrate insights about this variable in natural speech. The continuous and longitudinal birth span represented by the DCVE and the SCVE provide diachronic scope to track changes in the use of the *be*- and the *get*-passives over 130 years. Furthermore, social information about the speakers in these corpora, such as gender, education level, and socioeconomic status, is known and recorded, at least for the SCVE, allowing us to build on previous variationist research in terms of the social factors that condition the variation in passive constructions.

To now, accounts on the nature of the *get*-passive, both synchronic and diachronic, have dealt largely with varieties of English spoken and written in the United States and the United Kingdom (see Labov, 1975; Feagin, 1979; Weiner and Labov, 1983; Givón and Yang, 1994; Gronemeyer, 1999; Fleisher, 2006; Toyota, 2008; Kim, 2012; Sneller and Fisher, 2015; Schwarz, 2019; see Collins, 1996 for an account that includes Australian English alongside American and British varieties). As noted in section 1 and illustrated by the pre-existing body of work on the *get*-passive, Canadian English is an underrepresented variety in the study of English linguistics. Examining data from Victoria English, a Canadian variety, will add to the growing body of work noted in section 1, contributing to a fuller linguistic understanding of CanE.

On a national scale, CanE has been found to be a largely homogenous variety from Ontario westward, and Victoria English is no exception: By-and-large, it behaves like normative Canadian English. Nonetheless, the city of Victoria has a unique history and cultural character, leading to some linguistic peculiarities that must be noted (Denis and D’Arcy, 2019). Victoria, established as a trading post in 1843 and incorporated as a city in 1862, has always consisted of a

sizable British population, hence its reputation as "Canada's most British city" (D'Arcy, 2015:49). The city's founders emphasized British heritage and cultural legacy, which they reified by the establishment of a British education system featuring headmistresses, curricula, and pedagogy expressly from England itself (Roeder et al., 2018). Furthermore, Victoria sits at the southern tip of Vancouver Island, separated from mainland Canada by sea and mountains, and therefore remained relatively isolated until 1960 when a regular, year-round ferry service was established (around the same time that air travel became affordable and accessible to the general public). As such, Victoria was somewhat of a social and cultural bubble until the mid-20th century, maintaining a distinct British character in contrast with the rest of the region (see D'Arcy, 2015; Roeder et al., 2018; Denis and D'Arcy, 2019 for fuller discussions of Victoria as a "sociolinguistic entity" (Roeder et al., 2018:89)).

Even so, on a linguistic level, variationist studies of several features of Victoria English—phonetic, morphosyntactic, and discourse-pragmatic—have found it to pattern with the rest of the country, designating it "uncontroversial[ly] and incontrovertibl[y]" Canadian English (Buaillon et al., 2020:22; see Roeder et al., 2018; Denis and D'Arcy, 2019). However, these studies do observe longitudinal differences between Victoria English and other Canadian varieties that can be taken as a result of the city's history—namely, that Victoria English consistently lags behind in changes in the general variety, though it does invariably catch up. Variationist studies of Victoria English show the variety to have been relatively conservative until the mid-20th century, when the rate of change increases rapidly, putting Victoria English in line with the rest of the Western region.

3.3 Defining the variable context

To explore the question of variation between the *be*- and *get*-passives, we must first establish the variable context. This study adopts a basic criterion for determining passive constructions described in section 1, in which the syntactic subject of a clause corresponds to the patient, or the undergoer, of action. Moreover, this study considers only central passives, as defined by Quirk et al. (1985), excluding semi- and pseudo-passives, exemplified in (15-16). This is because semi- and pseudo-passives do not function as prototypical English passives.

The distinction between central, semi- and pseudo-passives can also be understood in terms of stativity. Quirk et al. (1985:168) describe semi-passives as having “both verbal and adjectival properties,” and points out the possibility of a stative reading inherent in all participial adjectives, despite the possibility of an eventive reading as well. Similarly, pseudo-passives refer to resultant states, not active events. Some variationist studies on this variable, such as Sneller and Fisher (2015), have therefore distinguished not between central, semi- and pseudo-passives, but instead between eventive, stative and resultative passives when discussing the variable context of this feature:

> The BE variant of stative passives, such as *We were married for forty years*, describes a long lasting state of being, whereas the GET variant is eventive: **We got married for forty years*. Likewise, resultative passives like *We got worried when you didn't call* fall outside the envelope of variation since the BE variant, *We were worried when you didn't call* can only take a stative reading. (Sneller and Fisher, 2015:1)

As such, the present study considers only eventive passives as part of the variable context. Determining eventive passives presents a challenge, however, when one considers the ambiguity inherent in many *be*-passive constructions. As mentioned in section 2.2, while the *get*-passive has an inherently eventive reading, the *be*-passive can invite either a stative or an eventive interpretation, as in (25a), where *painted* could be read as a past participle or an adjective. This ambiguity can be avoided in the *be*-passive by the presence of an overt actor phrase, as in (25b). Other *be*-passives occur with unambiguously eventive verbs, demanding an eventive interpretation, as in (25c).

(25) a. The house **was painted**

b. The house **was painted** by the painters

c. The man **was arrested**

To preserve the integrity of the variable context, *be*-passives were extracted only when their eventive function is clear. The simple present passive, demonstrated in (26), is said to disallow an eventive reading (Butler and Tsoulas 2006:5), and was therefore excluded from the variable context.

(26) [...] production doesn't really allow for that these days cos they'**re made** differently (SG31m/SCVE)

Further, certain lexical verbs were excluded *a priori* due to their stative properties, such as *known*, *called* (as in *She was called Mary*), *allowed*, and *kept.*

Despite this careful circumscription of the variable context, a great many tokens still proved ambiguous. To disambiguate between stative or resultative and eventive passives, a series of tests were used. Toyota (2008) provides several tests for determining stativity in an auxiliary + past participle construction, of which the following were adopted for this study:

(i) non-occurrence in the progressive

(ii) compatibility with durative adverbial phrases

(iii) incompatibility with egressive aspect

(v) incompatibility with agentivity

(Toyota, 2008:256)

While *get* + past participle constructions typically appear as unambiguous eventive passives, some ambiguity obtains in the case of inchoative *get*, which is not always easily disambiguated from passive *get*. This is exemplified in (27). These constructions are structurally similar, if not identical, to *get*-passives; however, the past participles in these examples are stative/resultative, with *get* representing not a passive auxiliary but a resulting copula, and were thus excluded from this study. Here, *get* can be replaced with the verb *become* and retain the same meaning.

(27) I remember her, um, spanking a boy who was a slow reader because she **got frustrated** with him (LL46w/SCVE)

Finally, passives with purpose clauses (as in (21)) were excluded from the variable context, based on Labov's (1975) claim that *get*- and *be*-passives with purpose clauses are not semantically equivalent.

In summary, a *be*- or a *get*-passive was considered a part of the variable context where it (i) met Quirk et al.'s criteria for a central passive construction (e.g., a passive with a corresponding active counterpart and the potential to be joined with an agent or actor by-phrase); (ii) was unambiguously eventive; and (iii) occurred with no purpose clause. Illustrative examples from the corpora are given in (28).

(28) a. every name would **be called** and you'd slowly have to run home (BB39w/SCVE)

b. when he went to school he **was taken** by the family nurse (Cecilia Bullen/DCVE)

c. I **got hired** by the Ministry of Education in their regulation department (LD60m/SCVE)

With this definition of the variable context in mind, *be*- and *get*-passives were extracted by searching the corpora for all instances of BE and GET, including any instance of their conjugated forms: *was, were, being, got, get, gets, gotten,* and *getting*, as well as negated forms, such as *wasn't,* and *weren't*.[8] AntConc (Anthony, 2014) was used for this procedure.

[8] Instances of *am, are,* and *is* were excluded, as per section 3.3.

A sub-set of tokens was ultimately not retained for analysis. There were three reasons for this. First, tokens were excluded if they were "primed," that is, the speaker's response was a direct or near-direct echo of a question asked by an interviewer, as in (29).

(29) Interviewer: do you know where she **got trained** for that?

SR67m/SCVE: where she **got trained**?

Second, there were several examples in which two or more past participles followed a *get-* or *be-* passive auxiliary, as in (30). These cases were counted as a single token, due to the presence of a single auxiliary.

(30) I didn't like **being licked** or **jumped on** (SH38w/SCVE)

And third, a number of contexts were found to not exhibit variation (that is, little to none was attested in this data set). The perfect passive construction admitted variation only exceptionally: While there were 346 tokens of perfect *be*-passives in the data set (31a), only 1 perfect *get*-passive occurred, shown in (32b) (99.7% *be*; N = 347).[9] This singular token was produced by one of the younger speakers in the sample, suggesting that the *get*-passive may only just be expanding to this context. As such, all perfect passive tokens were excluded from the analysis.

(31) a. I'**d been struck** by the mate (Francis E. Fredette/DCVE)

b. I'**ve** never **gotten caught** (DA16w/SCVE)

[9] Perhaps the oft-cited relationship between the perfect and the resultative (Nedjalkov and Jaxontov, 1988) renders the perfect incompatible with the eventive *get*-passive. This is an issue for further research to address.

(Near) categoricity was also attested by individual lexical verbs. In this case, verbs that occurred ten times or more and that appeared categorically with the *be*-passive were excluded. These included *appointed* (N=29), *brought* (N=22), *brought in* (N=26), *brought up* (N=21), *educated* (N=15), *forced* (N=13), *given* (N=85), *held* (N=21), *made* (N=44), *opened* (N=18), *started* (N=13), *taught* (N=15), and *told* (N=36). No verbs occurred categorially with the *get*-passive. Other verbs occurred near categorically with *be*; that is, variation with *get* accounted for less than 5% of instances. These verbs included *asked* (N=26, 96.2% *be*), *born* (N = 405, 99.8% *be*), done (N=81, 97.5% *be*), and *used* (N=26, 96.2% *be*). On the other hand, *married*—a verb that occurs consistently and regularly across the entirety of the VEA—is a high frequency context for *get*. Although rates never approached categoricity, the frequency of *get* is markedly higher with this verb than with any other verb captured here (64.2% *get*, N = 229). Because this suggests a powerful lexical effect (see Appendix A), all tokens of *married* were also excluded.[10]

The result of this set of procedures was a total analysis set of 1716 passive tokens (1420 *be*, 296 *get*), all of which were then coded for the predictors outlined in the following section.

3.4 Predictors

This study investigates the (potential) effects of several linguistic and social predictors on variation between *get*- and *be*-passives. Language-internal factors considered here are drawn from the corpus linguistic and descriptive literature on *get*-passives. Social factors reflect macro-level categories that are well established in the sociolinguistic literature.

The majority of semantic properties of the *get*-passive cited throughout the literature are related to an element of subject responsibility, an observation Toyota (2008) attributes to the

[10] This high distribution suggests that *marry* may have been an early entry point for the *get*-passive—an interesting direction for future research.

historical development of the *get*-passive out of a reflexive-causative construction (see section 2.1). It is not possible to objectively determine whether a speaker felt that the subject of a given passive clause unambiguously possesses responsibility, or indeed, to reliably determine based on interview transcripts alone. However, examining related predictors can offer insight into the extent an element of subject responsibility is present in the *get*-passive.

One such related predictor concerns **subject animacy**. Specifically, the animacy of the subject may condition passive variability, since only animate subjects can be said to possess responsibility. Toyota (2008) draws a three-way distinction amongst subjects in his data, distinguishing between animate human subjects, animate nonhuman subjects, and inanimate subjects. This study follows that model, differentiating between a subject that is inanimate (32a), animate and human (32b), or animate and nonhuman (32c). While the *get*-passive has been associated predominantly with human subjects, Toyota finds a slight diachronic shift toward higher frequencies of inanimate subjects in his data, indicative of grammaticalization as the *get*-passive behaves increasingly like a prototypical *be*-passive. A ternary distinction of subject animacy allows us to view the *get*-passive's potential spread to broader contexts in terms of subject animacy, observing a potential intermediate stage of nonhuman, animate subjects.

(32) a. all that stuff **was piped** across or underneath the bridge (Joseph Douglas Hunter/DCVE)

b. don't want him to **get pinched** (Walter Engelhardt/DCVE)

c. I remember we used to lean out the window watching the Windsor Greys **being exercised** (BJ83w/DCVE)

As it happens, however, there are few non-human animate subjects in the data set, just 21 in all. As such, the two subsets of animate tokens were collapsed as a single category for analysis, leaving a binary distinction in the data between inanimate subjects (32a) and animate subjects (32b,c), regardless of their status as human or not (cf. Schwarz 2019:211).

As simple as the distinction between animate and inanimate may seem, there is much ambiguity involved in this categorization. Yamamoto (1999:14-17) points out that rather than consisting of neat categories (i.e., animate or inanimate), animacy is best conceived of as gradient, with humans, the 'prototypical' animate being, at one end—with some animate beings (e.g., other mammals) falling closer to humans and others practically considered inanimate in the human imagination (e.g., amoebae and water fleas). Furthermore, concepts of animacy are highly variable within and across cultural contexts.[11] For the purposes of the present study, all living non-human animals were classified as animate; dead animals (such as the corpses of fish and

[11] It is necessary to point out the highly problematic nature of animacy scales and hierarchies as constructed in the field of linguistics. Chen (2012) considers the animacy hierarchy to be "affected and shaped by the spread of Christian cosmologies, capitalism, and the colonial orders of things"; in other words, these orderings are not intrinsic, but subject to the "racism, stereotyping and lack of empathy" held by the scholars (and societies) who conceive them. Chen further claims that "animacy is political, shaped by what or who counts as human, and what or who does not." A variationist framework allow us to observe linguistic patterns across multiple categorization schemas, but it is a limited approach in that generally requires categorical distinctions to be made, which are informed and shaped by dominant socio-political ideologies. While I choose to employ variationist methodologies in my investigation of the *get*-passive, I recognize their limitations and adherence to colonial paradigms within linguistic inquiry.

other hunted animals) were classified as inanimate, as were stuffed animal toys and other non-living objects with anthropomorphic qualities. Organizations and geographical entities, composed of living, breathing, thinking human beings, posed an interesting challenge, especially considering that speakers often encode a degree of animacy in the way these bodies are referenced in human language, such as through the use of animate pronouns, as in (33) (animate pronoun *who* italicized). As such, organizations were coded separately, in order to determine whether they pattern like animate or inanimate subjects in our data set. However, only 8 such tokens were found, which were recoded as inanimate.

(33) The, um, architectural firm *who* are still our consultants, uh, **were brought** in, uh, to advise on this issue (Peter L. Smith/DCVE)

Another predictor concerns the presence or absence of an **expressed actor phrase.**[12] While English passive constructions generally do not occur with expressed agent phrase (e.g., Svartvik, 1966), this is said to be especially true of the *get*-passive (Quirk et al., 1985:161). This observation has been supported by empirical evidence (e.g., Downing, 1996; Carter and McCarthy, 1999; Toyota 2008), and can also be linked to the notion of subject responsibility in the *get*-passive. According to Hatcher (1949), for example, the absence of an agent phrase de-emphasizes the role of the implied actor, in turn emphasizing the role of the subject. I therefore

[12] Majority of literature regarding the *get*-passive, and indeed the English passive in general, refers not to an actor phrase, but to an agent phrase. This study follows Toyota (2008) in adopting an actor-undergoer distinction, rather than the common agent-patient distinction, to describe the roles in English passive constructions (Toyota 2008:9-10). This allows for a broader inclusion of tokens intuitively understood to be passives, but in which arguments may not fulfill prototypical "agent" and "patient" roles, such as *students aren't allowed to go down there because they'll* ***get swept away*** *by the waves* (CL41m/SCVE). In this example, the outer cause, *the waves,* would not qualify as an agent by most standard criteria, as waves are generally understood to lack the property of volition (Quirk et. al 1985:701).

differentiate between passives with a *by*-phrase expressing an actor (34a) and those without one (34b). Examples like (34c) were not considered to possess an expressed actor phrase, as the preposition *with*, as opposed to *by*, indicates an instrument rather than an actor (Quirk et al., 1985:700), and were coded like (34b).

(34) a. My father went into this field and **was charged** by a bull (Philippa Holmes/DCVE)

b. He **got brought** along to the girly shows (TC32w/SCVE)

c. He **was replaced** with, um, his assistant (Wilfred Johns/DCVE)

In addition to testing for an effect of putative "subject responsibility," examining the presence or absence of an expressed actor phrase will contribute to a fuller picture of the grammaticalization of the *get*-passive. As the *get*-passive continues down the pathway of grammaticalization from its original lexical source, we can expect it to occur more frequently with typical hallmarks of passive constructions such as the *by*-phrase.

Finally, this study considers a predictor not directly related to subject responsibility: effect of adversative, beneficial, or neutral **consequence for the subject**. The *get*-passive is said to carry connotations of adversity (Quirk et al., 1985:161; Downing, 1996; Collins, 1996; Carter and McCarthy, 1998; Gronemeyer, 1999:6-7); other scholars claim it expresses adversative or beneficial connotations (Hatcher, 1949; Chappell, 1980; Fleisher, 2006). Commonly, adversative consequences are attributed to the subject-referent (e.g., Quirk et al., 1985; Downing, 1996; Gronemeyer, 1999:6-7;), but they can transfer to a proximal entity with some relationship to the event (Chappell, 1980: 440), or can reflect the consequences on either the speaker themself or their attitude toward the event in question (Lakoff, 1971:154).

To explore the relationship between the *get*-passive and adversative or beneficial meaning, tokens were coded for adversative (35a), beneficial (35b), or neutral (35c) consequence for the subject-referent, when determinable from context. Unclear instances were coded as indeterminate (35d).

(35) a. I **got beaten up** a lot (MM37m/SCVE)

b. […] so was fortunate enough to **be accepted** as a grad student there (BM77m/SCVE)

c. Everything **was loaded** at the bow (Francis F. Fredette/DCVE)

d. Things **were changed** but they weren't all the sudden (GC47m/SVCE)

Determination of the type of consequence was based on the presence of one or more of several elements. The first entailed the lexical properties of the verb itself. "Unequivocally unfavourable" verbs, such as *abused, chased, injured, murdered,* or *robbed* were coded as adversative, whereas verbs like *invited, offered, elected,* and *promoted* were generally coded as beneficial (Downing 1996:195-196). More often than not, however, the verbs did not carry an intrinsic adversative or beneficial meaning. In these instances, adversative/beneficial meaning was determined from the context. Adversative outcomes for the subject-referent included being caused emotional distress, pain, or death; having violence enacted upon them; being caused loss of something valued, both abstract or literal; being caused to do something against one's will or wishes; being damaged; and generally being caused any outcome against one's own wishes or desires. Beneficial outcomes included receiving something one had desired or hoped for; receiving something considered 'good', be it literal like food or money, or abstract like acceptance or inclusion; being caused pleasure or healing; or the end of pain or a dangerous or

threatening circumstance. Where the subject of a clause was inanimate, these criteria still applied; where relevant, the consequences were transferred onto a proximal and clearly associated animate entity. Adversative and beneficial meaning was often retrieved where such meaning was otherwise undetectable by the presence of contextual markers, such as an event being referred to with positive or negative terms like “wonderful” or “awful”.

Verbs with clearly adversative properties carry beneficial results when they occur in a context with negation, as in (36a), or vice-versa, as in (36b), and were coded accordingly. Similarly, verbs with generally adversative or beneficial properties may carry the opposite consequence for the subject, such as getting invited to a party one does not wish to attend.

(36) a. So, um, fortunately for her she **wasn’t expelled** (SB46w/SCVE)

b. I first learned that Tarlton was not going to **be renewed** (Peter L. Smith/DCVE)

Tokens in which the consequence was clearly neither adversative nor beneficial were coded as neutral. Where none of the contextual factors described above clarified the nature of the consequences, but adversative or beneficial meaning was plausible, tokens were coded as indeterminate.

In addition to these three linguistic predictors, four social factors are considered: gender, year of birth, socioeconomic status, and education (cf. Feagin, 1979; Weiner and Labov, 1983; Herold, 1986; and Sneller and Fisher, 2013; 2015). Gender was coded based on a binary distinction of woman or man, based on the pre-existing metadata provided for the VEA.

Year of birth represents a particularly important social factor, as it serves as a proxy for time, allowing us to view the diachronic trajectory of the feature and track changes in passive

variation over the course of 130 years. This conceptualization of time, known as apparent time, relies on synchronic observations of speakers across a range of ages to construct a longitudinal view of language use across time—reliant on the assumption that, after adolescence, speakers' grammar remains relatively stable, and therefore that speech observed at a given point in a speaker's life reflects the state of their speech community at the point in time they acquired language.

Being a multistage corpus—that is, a corpus which contains data collected at multiple points in time—the Victoria English Archive contains temporal dimensions beyond speaker year of birth that can all be operationalized to expose different facets of a linguistic feature— namely, speaker age and date of interview (cf. Fruehwald, 2017). While these dimensions can be useful, they can also be quite complex. Taking speaker age and date of interview as factors can elucidate aspects of language use such as age grading; however, in the VEA, which blends historical and synchronic data, this approach would group together speakers of similar ages but vastly different dates of birth, obfuscating critical temporal analogues of language change. As the *get*-passive is well-documented as a change in progress, both by historical literature tracking its grammaticalization over the past several centuries and variationist literature capturing its distribution in the contemporary grammar, this thesis follows previous variationist work (e.g., Feagin, 1979; Weiner and Labov, 1983; and Sneller and Fisher, 2015) in operationalizing only year of birth as a temporal factor, privileging a continuous analysis of the effect of time over one with the ability to detect lifespan effects. With that said, coding for the distinction of corpus allows us to glimpse the possibility of communal change by comparing speakers with similar birth years interviewed several decades apart without introducing the complicating factors of speaker age and date of interview. This brings a real time dimension to this study.

While no information regarding education or occupation is available for DCVE speakers, SCVE speakers were assigned 3 scores within the full corpus: an occupation score (1-6), an education score (1-6), and an overall socioeconomic score (1-12). Occupation scores were assigned based on skill level, according to the National Occupational Classification Matrix 2011, with higher skilled labour receiving more points (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2011); education scores were based on level of schooling, ranging from no high school certificate to graduate degree or professional school. These scores were combined to get an overall socioeconomic status score of 1-12. To simplify the data and allow more coherent patterns to emerge, however, these scores were re-stratified thus: Education score was stratified based on a binary distinction of +/- higher education; speakers with education above a compulsory level (i.e., beyond a high school diploma) were coded as having received higher education. Over-all socioeconomic status was grouped into two levels, reflecting broad categories that roughly span manual workers to managers, termed 'non-professional' (3-6) and 'professional' (7-12)[13].

Once all 1716 tokens were coded according to the above factors, distributional and inferential analyses were carried out using Rbrul, a variable rule program (Johnson, 2008). The results yielding from these analyses are presented in the following chapter.

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[13]While overall socioeconomic status was scored on a scale of 1-12, 3 was the lowest score found in the corpora.

Chapter 4. Results

4.1 Overall Distribution and Longitudinal View

When taking all instances of *get*- and *be*-passives in the DCVE and SCVE together, the overall frequency of *get*-passives is 17.2% (N=1716). Though *get*-passives represent a minority of overall passive tokens in these materials, a longitudinal view gives a clearer picture of the role of the *get*-form within the passive. As noted in section 3, the DCVE and SCVE taken together represent a relatively large chronological span, one that enables a longitudinal view more comprehensive than that used in previous variationist studies of the *get*-passive. The oldest speaker in this study was born in 1865, and the youngest in 1996, giving us a view of just over 130 years of spoken English in Victoria.

The diachronic trajectory presented in Figure 4.1 demonstrates an incredible rise in the frequency of the *get*-passive over time[14]. For speakers born between 1865 and 1919, the *get*-passive hovers under 10%. It then begins a climb, reaching a frequency of 64.5% among speakers born in the 1990s. Among the youngest speakers in the sample, who were 15-31 years of age at the time of recording, the *get*-passive is in fact the majority form within this sector. These results are consistent with Sneller and Fisher's (2015) findings, which showed a preference for the *get*-passive among speakers born after 1950. Indeed, Weiner and Labov (1983:43) state that "[a] shift to the *get* passive appears to be one of the most active grammatical changes taking place in English." Our data confirm that this change is still very much active, at least in Victoria.

[14] The results presented here are given in terms of percentage of *get*-passive only. As the *get*- and *be*-passives constitute a binary variable, the remaining percentage is necessarily comprised of *be*-passive.

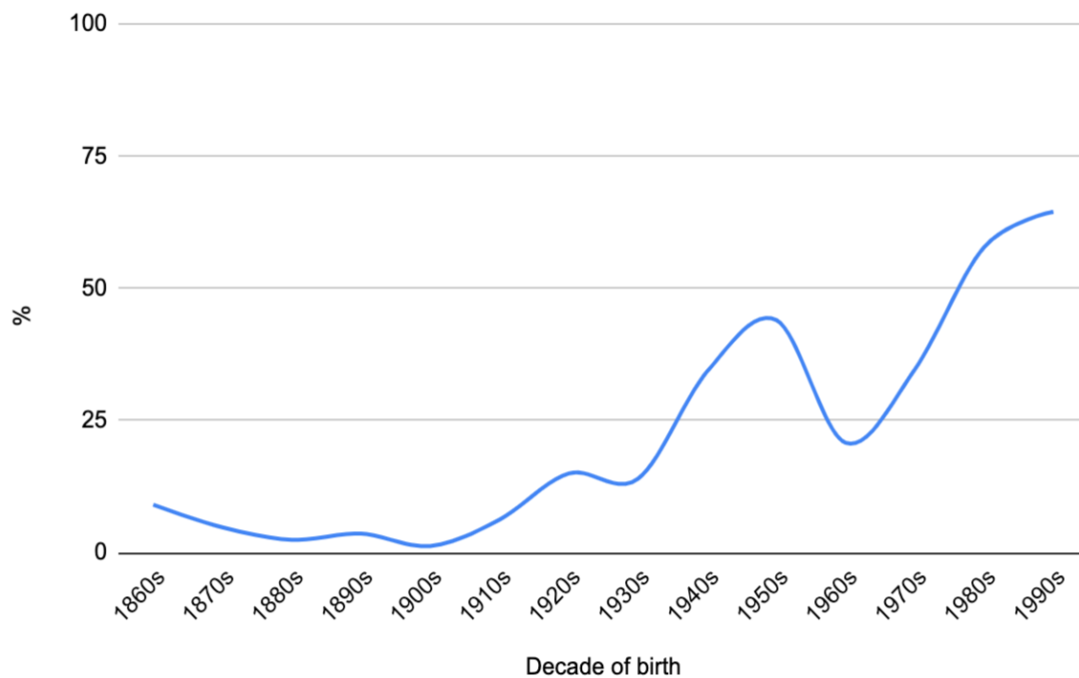

Figure 4.1. Distribution of *get*-passives by speaker decade of birth.

Despite this overall increase, the upward trajectory of the *get*-passive is not straightforwardly linear. Rates of *get*-passive usage surge dramatically among speakers born in the 1940s and 1950s, increasing from a rate of 14% among speakers born in the 1930s to a rate of 44% in the 1950s. This peak is followed immediately by a dramatic drop in the 1960s, plummeting to a rate of 20.8%, before rising over the next three decades to reach nearly 65% in the 1990s. The reasons for this sharp peak and rapid plummet are not clear. However, a sudden acceleration in the 1940s and 1950s is attested for other changing features in English, and indeed, for other features examined in the VEA. Roeder et al. (2018) and Buaillon et al. (2020) both find increased rates of change among Victoria speakers born in 1940 or later, a pattern which parallels other changes in English that have accelerated in the second half of the 20th century (Tagliamonte et al., 2016:838). Tagliamonte et al. (2016) describes the increased rates of change

across features observed in speakers born after 1940 as part of a "concomitant linguistic renaissance" resulting from the social, cultural, and political impacts of World War II.

What, then, could explain the immediate plunge in *get*-passive usage we see in speakers born in the 1960s? Sneller and Fisher (2015) found that the *get*-passive stopped increasing in their data among speakers born in 1950 or later. To explain this, they propose that the *get*-variant became socially salient around that point—that is, that the *get*-variant entered the general consciousness, speakers becoming aware of its use. This social salience, they conclude, resulted in the stigmatization of the variant, causing speakers to reduce their use of the *get*-passive. This argument is supported in their data by patterns of social stratification by both gender and income, which emerge around 1950: Women and upper-income speakers born around the 1950s retreat from the change toward the *get*-passive.

To give context to their study, and to eliminate age grading as a possible explanation for the reversal, they present evidence from Google Ngrams illustrating a hiccup in the rising trajectory of the *get*-passive in written texts around 1960, reproduced in Figure 4.2. Sneller and Fisher's results, reproduced in Figure 4.3, do not replicate this pattern exactly, showing instead a slight decline in *get*-passive usage in speakers born in the latter half of the 20th century, rather than a sudden drop followed by an immediate rise. However, they attribute this to the "shallow time depth" of their corpus, claiming that their results are consistent with the Ngrams data. Sneller and Fisher speculate that in time, the *get*-passive will resume its incline, and the decrease observed in their data will manifest as a slight hiccup on its S-curve trajectory toward completion (Sneller and Fisher, 2015:8-9).

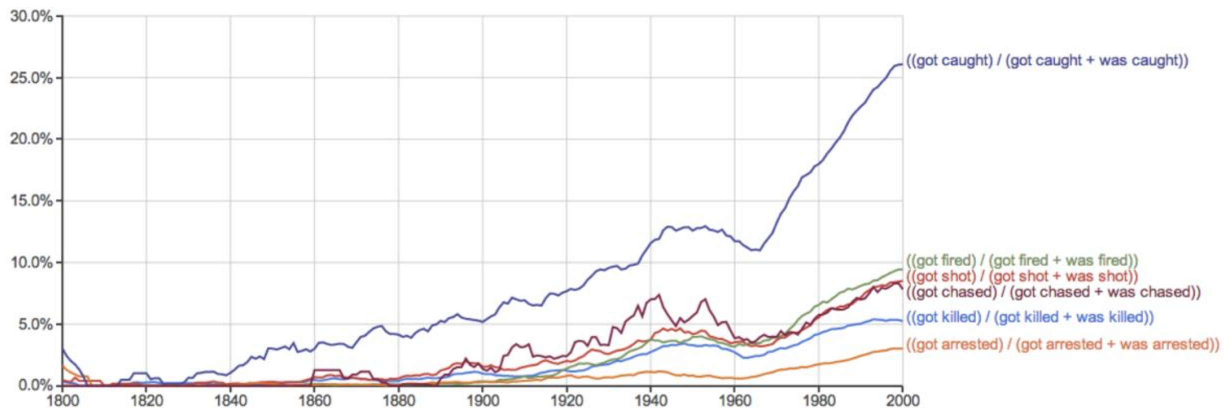

Figure 4.2. Rates of *get*-passives in written texts of American English, from Sneller and Fisher (2015).

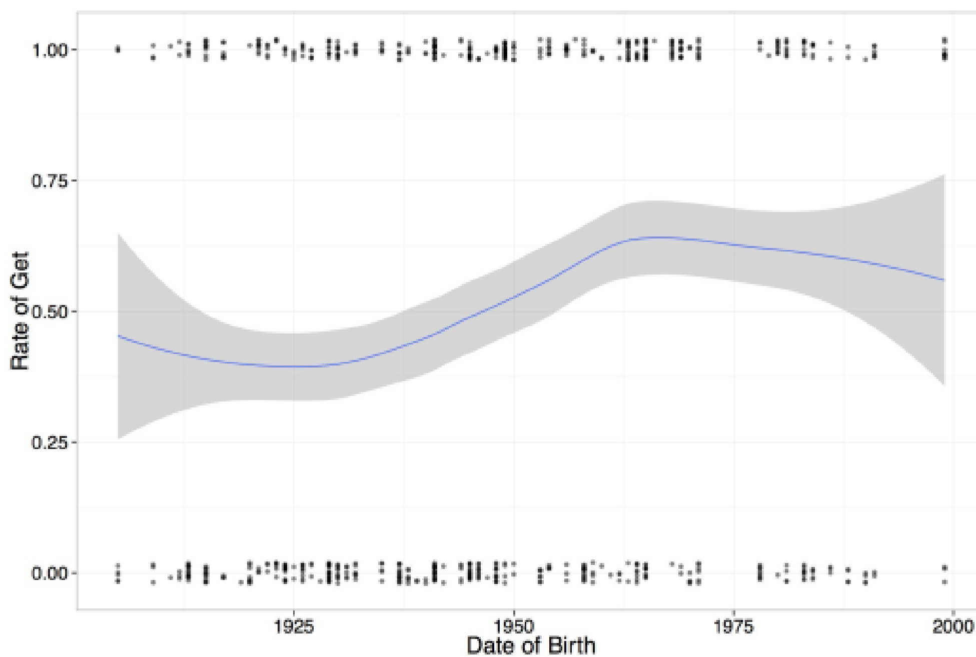

Figure 4.3. Rates of *get*-passives by date of birth in the Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus, from Sneller and Fisher (2015:4).

Notably, the dip seen in Figure 4.2 appears near-identical to the dip seen in the Victoria materials among speakers born in the 1960s, though at lower frequencies (unsurprising, given that nonstandard variants generally appear at lower frequencies in written texts than in spoken language). In fact, the Victoria data seem to illustrate Sneller and Fisher's predictions for their own corpus: Following the sudden decline in speakers born in the 1960s, the change toward the *get*-variant immediately resumes. This brief but substantial interruption in the advancement of the incoming form results in a hiccup in the S-curve trajectory of the change, seen in Figures 4.1 and 4.2.

Figure 4.4 highlights the differences in *get*-passive usage over the three decades during which speaker year of birth overlaps between the DCVE and the SCVE, 1910-1939. DCVE speakers born between 1910 and 1939, mostly interviewed in 1978 and 1980 (with a few speakers interviewed in the early 1990s), use lower rates of *get*-passives than SCVE speakers born in this period of overlap, interviewed in 2011-2012.

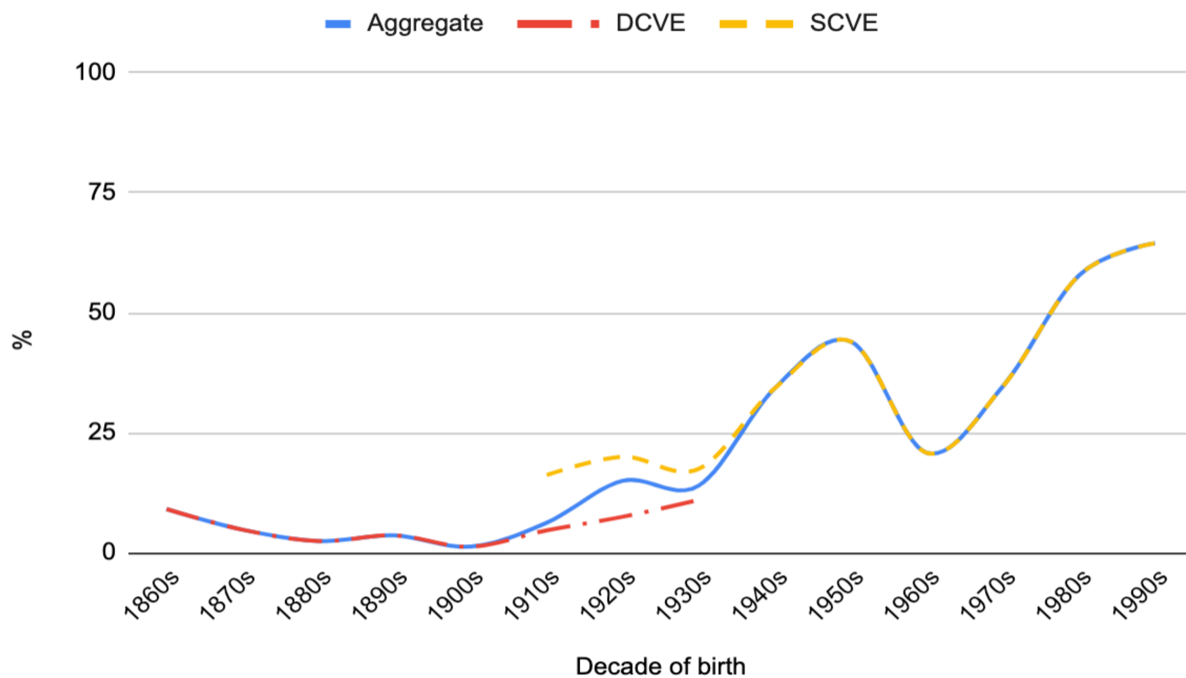

Figure 4.4. Distribution of *get*-passives by year of birth and corpus.

There are a few possible explanations for this real-time differential. One possibility is communal change: Perhaps SCVE speakers born at the same time as DCVE speakers but interviewed decades later have continued to shift toward higher frequencies of *get*-passives as younger generations with higher rates of *get*-passives make up more of the speech community (cf. Sankoff and Blondeau, 2007; Sankoff, 2019). Alternatively, a difference in social status between the two corpora might be at play. While metadata concerning detailed socioeconomic information about DCVE speakers is not available, DCVE speakers on the whole represent a more 'elite' social class. Interview subjects consist largely of those early Victorians with prominent social, political, and community roles, as well as former University of Victoria professors. This social prestige may contribute to a higher frequency of 'standardness' among the DCVE speakers.

These results demonstrate a striking increase in *get*-passive usage overall over a period of 130 years. Let us now turn to examine the effects of both social and linguistic predictors on the use of the *get*-passive, which will allow us a more nuanced view into the operation of the feature.

4.2 Factor by Factor Distributional Analyses

4.2.1. Social Factors

Table 4.1 shows the rates of *get*-passive according to gender. In these materials, men exhibit a modestly higher frequency of *get* than women do overall. When we cross-tabulate gender with speaker year of birth, as shown in Figure 4.5, we see that this gender effect is by-and-large consistent over time. If the *get*-passive is a stigmatized variant as suggested by Weiner and Labov (1983) and Sneller and Fisher (2015), or, minimally, if it is the non-prestige variant, this consistent gender effect is unsurprising. Women on the whole are known to avoid stigmatized forms and prefer standard or prestige forms (see, e.g., Wolfram, 1969; Labov, 1972; Trudgill, 1972; Wolfram and Fasold, 1974; Romaine, 1978; Trudgill, 1983).

Table 4.1. Distribution of *get*-passives by gender.

Gender	**%**	**N**
Men	19.4	905
Women	14.8	811
Total		1716

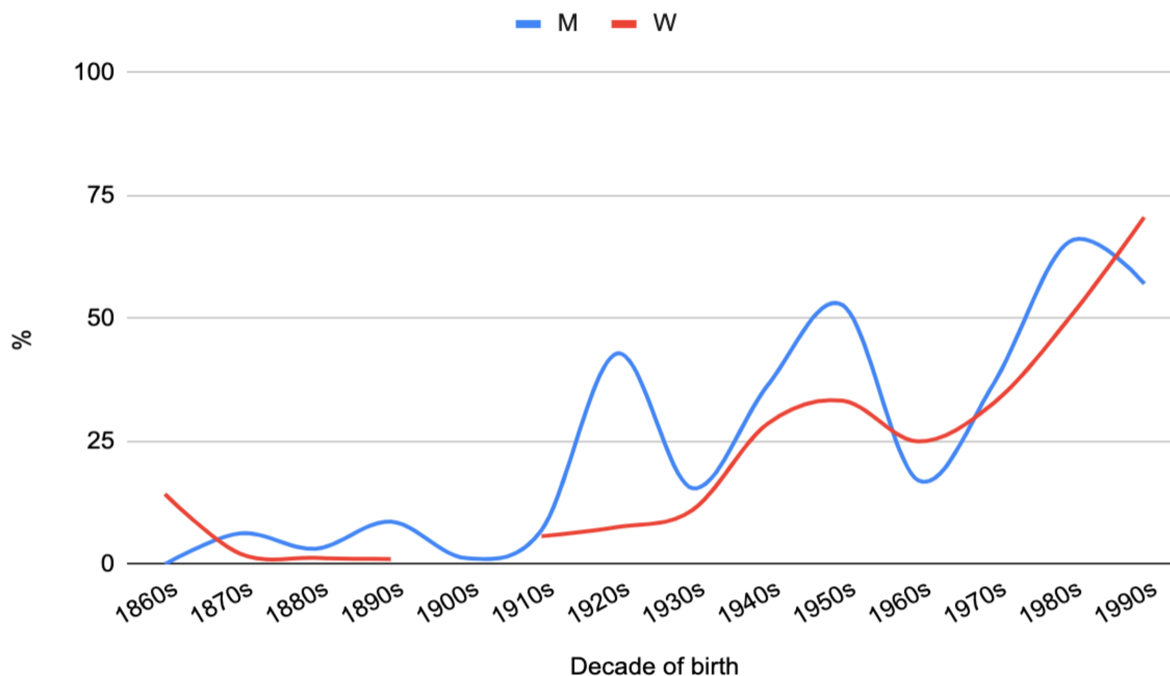

Figure 4.5. Distribution of *get*-passives by year of birth and gender.

The trajectory for men displayed in Figure 4.5. is quite turbulent, with prominent peaks among those born in the 1920s and the 1950s. The reasons for this first peak are not entirely clear, though it may be due in part to the distribution of the data. Recall that, in terms of birth year, DCVE and SCVE speakers overlap in the 1910s-1930s, and that SCVE speakers use higher frequencies of *get*-passives than their DCVE counterparts, possibly indicating communal change (cf. Figure 4.3). While the data includes men from both corpora born in the 1910s and the 1930s, there are no men in the DCVE born in the 1920s. The majority of tokens from men born in the 1910s and 1930s are from single DCVE men, driving down the overall *get* frequencies of their cohorts on either side of the 1920s. Still, this does not explain a frequency as high as 42.9%, a rate not reached again until speakers born in the 1950s. Only four men born in the 1920s are

represented in the data (cf. Table 3.1); of these speakers, three used higher rates of *get* than expected. More data is needed to draw further conclusions about the reason for this peak.

Figure 4.4 also demonstrates that the sharp increase in *get* frequencies through the 1940s and 1950s and sudden decline in the 1960s, noted in section 4.1, is evident among both men and women—though the trend appears much more pronounced in men, to the extent that *get* frequencies among men momentarily drop below those of women born in the same decade. This apparent reversal of gender effect is likely due to distributional imbalances—a point which will be clarified shortly.

The remaining social predictors, education level (Table 4.2) and socioeconomic status (Table 4.3), yield somewhat puzzling results. Speakers with education beyond high school have a higher rate of the *get*-passive, which is not consistent with the hypothesis that the variant is stigmatized (cf. Weiner and Labov, 1983; Sneller and Fisher, 2013; 2015). At the same time, there is no apparent effect of socioeconomic status overall. Recall that results for these two predictors are reported for the SCVE only, as data regarding education and socioeconomic status was not available (or inferable) for most speakers of the DCVE. Further, speakers who were 18 and younger at the time they were interviewed presented a confound within a scoring system based on age-contingent categories such as occupation and education. To preserve the integrity of these predictor groups, tokens produced by these speakers were excluded from these results as well.

Table 4.2. Distribution of *get*-passives by education level.

Education	**%**	**N**
Up to compulsory	26.6	173
Beyond compulsory	34.7	501
Total		674

Table 4.3. Distribution of *get*-passives by socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic status	**%**	**N**
Non-professional	32.6	264
Professional	32.7	410
Total		674

Consideration of the interaction of socioeconomic status and speaker year of birth provides us a further glimpse into the social status of the *get*-passive; the results are displayed in Figure 4.6. This figure reveals that professional speakers lead the change toward the *get*-passive through to the middle of the 20th century, peaking at a rate of 49.3% among speakers born in the 1950s. We also see that professional speakers lead the rapid decline of *get* that consistently appears among those born in the 1960s, falling to a frequency 14.6% before resuming an upward trajectory among those born in the ensuing decades. Note that speakers categorized as "professional" here are effectively middle class speakers, as there is no substantive upper class represented in the SCVE. That these speakers would both lead the change toward the *get*-passive through the 1950s and drive its momentary reversal in the 1960s is consistent with two Labovian observations: one, that linguistic change from below is led by centrally-located socioeconomic groups (Labov, 1966), and two, that the "second highest status group" shows the highest degree of linguistic

insecurity and hypercorrection (Labov, 1972). This finding thus lends some tentative support to Sneller and Fisher's (2015) claim that the *get*-passive became salient and stigmatized among speakers born in the 1950s, resulting in a dip in the trajectory of its rise, led by the more sensitive middle class. I return to this point in Chapter 5.

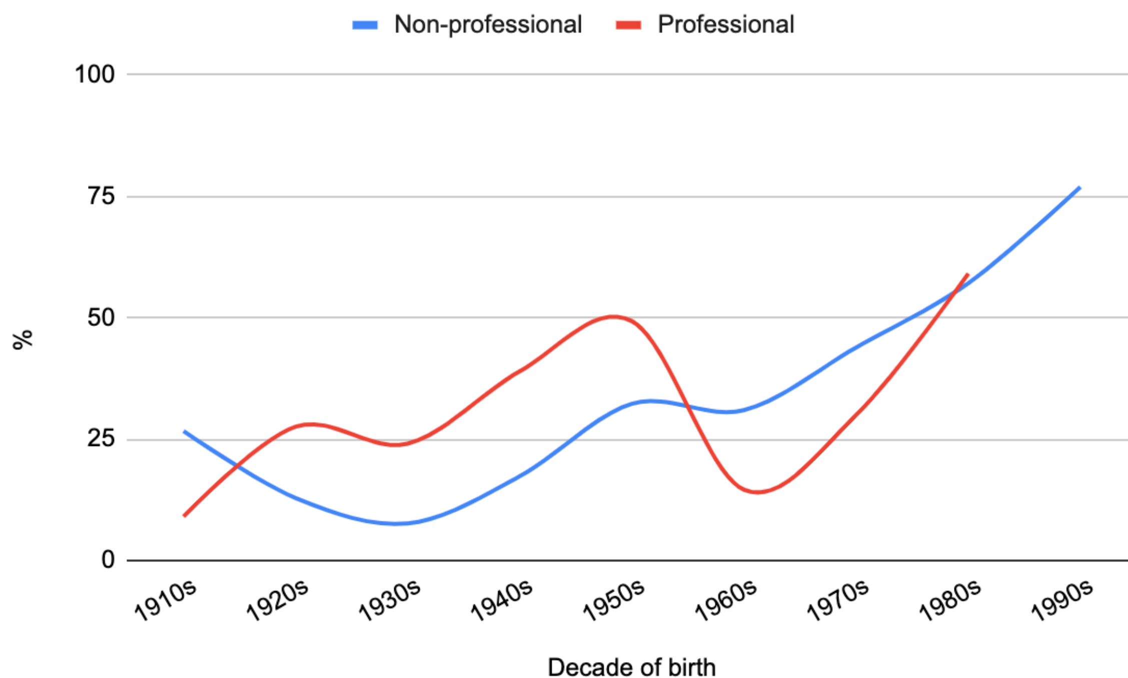

Figure 4.6. Distribution of *get*-passives by year of birth and socioeconomic status.

Figure 4.6 also helps to explain the reversal of the effect of gender that is evident in Figure 4.5, wherein men born in the 1960s briefly drop below woman born in the same decade. In our sample, the majority of tokens produced by men born in the 1960s come from professional speakers, and the majority of tokens produced by women born in the 1960s come from non-professional speakers. As professional speakers are largely responsible for the drop we see in the 1960s, we can conclude that the concentration of data in professional men is dragging down the

overall *get*-passive frequencies of men born in this decade, while the higher frequencies of non-professional women born in that decade keep their frequencies more stable.

All this being said, any interpretation regarding social evaluation must necessarily remain tentative, given the challenges inherent in relying on oral history and sociolinguistic interview data alone. This type of data, while ideal for tapping the vernacular, leads to inevitable inconsistencies in terms of participant demographics and token counts. For example, the sample selected for this study lacks non-professional men and professional women born in the 1910s. Speakers also varied widely in the number of passive tokens produced, leading to imbalanced cells, some with 54 tokens, others with as few as four. Furthermore, as noted, speakers under the age of 18 were excluded from the analysis of this socioeconomic status and education, obscuring any potential trends among the youngest speakers in the VEA.

A further distributional issue arises when considering total Ns across decades of birth. When interview lengths are normalized to 1,000 words, it becomes clear that speakers born in later decades produced fewer passive tokens on the whole (see Figure 4.7), even as rates of *get*-passive increase. That is, *get* increases at the same time that use of the passive overall drops. Whether this demonstrates an age-grading effect on passive usage or is evidence of a change in progress away from passive voice is beyond the scope of this thesis, and points toward an important topic of future research, with potential to elucidate critical details of the trajectory of change.[15] For the purposes of the present study, however, this decline in passive use among speakers born in later decades—whatever the reason—results in an imbalance of data across apparent time.

[15] In their study on the agentless passive, Weiner and Labov (1983:42) do find that the adults used the passive voice more frequently than the adolescents. They note, however, that this effect was not statistically significant, and that they have "no reason to suspect change in progress."

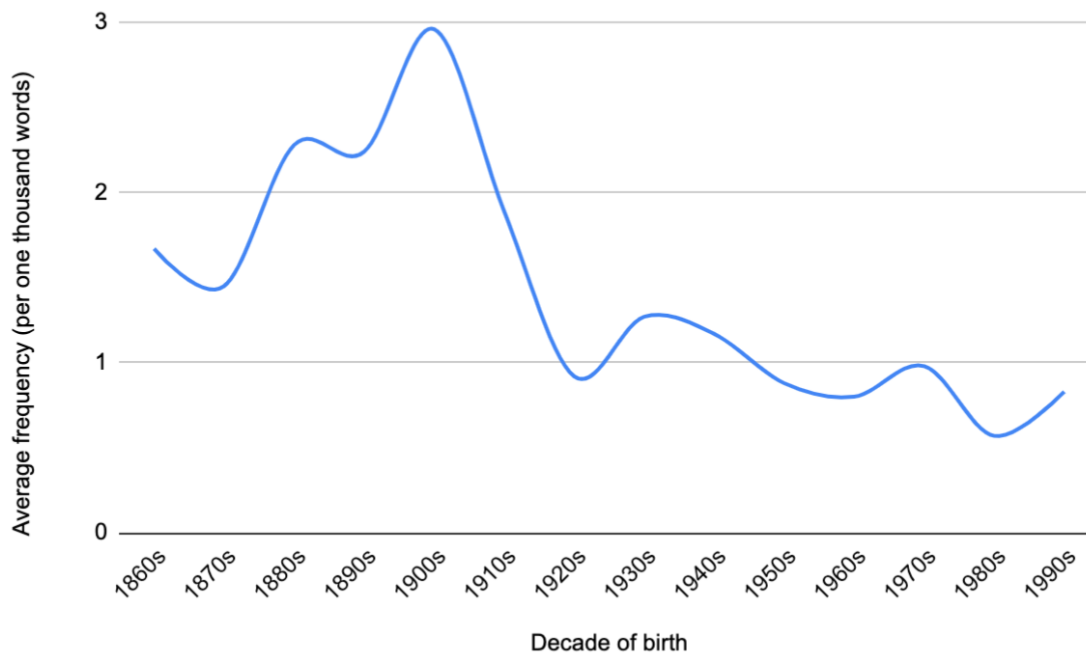

Figure 4.7. Average rate of passive use per one thousand words by speaker decade of birth.

4.2.2. Linguistic Factors

In addition to social predictors, this study also considers several linguistic predictors, guided largely by previous claims in the literature regarding semantic tendencies of the *get*-passive. As discussed in section 2.2, among the most common claims about the *get*-passive is that it possesses a strong adversative sense for the subject-referent; others, however, claim it can serve to express both adversative or beneficial meaning. As demonstrated in Table 4.4, both of these claims are corroborated in this data set: Adversative contexts appear to have the strongest favouring effect, followed by beneficial contexts.

Table 4.4. Distribution of *get*-passives by consequence for subject

Consequence for subject	**%**	**N**
Adversative	29.1	611
Beneficial	18.7	396
Neutral	5.94	589
Indeterminate	7.5	120
Total		1716

If the rise of the *get*-passive reflects a change in progress, as reported in the literature and supported by the diachronic view in Figures 4.1, then we may wonder whether the effects observable in the aggregate in Table 4.4 hold over time, or whether expansion within or across contexts is evident. Figure 4.8 shows the effect of consequence for subject over time.

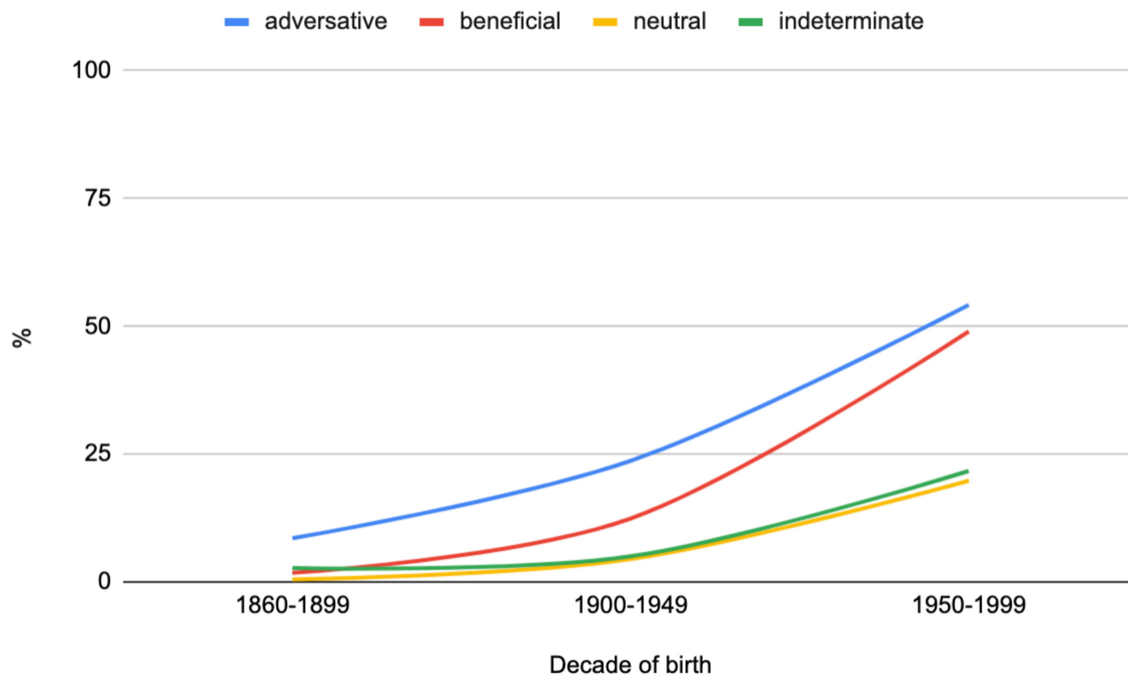

Figure 4.8. Cross-tabulation of *get*-passives by consequence for subject and year of birth.

As Figure 4.8 demonstrates, adversative consequence for the subject consistently favours *get*-passive usage, even among speakers born in the earliest period, and this effect has grown stronger over the course of the last century. Consider, on the other hand, the effect of beneficial consequence for the subject. Among speakers both in the 19th century, this context appears to pattern with neutral and indeterminate consequences: With the exception of adversative contexts, all other contexts are bundled together and appear to disfavour the *get*-passive. By speakers born in the first half of the 20th century, however, the beneficial consequence to subject context has emerged as a more favourable context for *get*-passives. Finally, within the youngest cohort, born in the second half of the 20th century, beneficial contexts appear to be converging toward adversative ones. In other words, this predictor group appears to re-organize over time. Rates of *get*-passive usage in these two contexts, adversative and beneficial consequence for subject, appear to be accelerating more quickly than the neutral and indeterminate contexts, ultimately pulling away from them and moving the contrast from ternary and n-ary to binary. Retention of semantic nuance from the source construction(s) such that *get* is favoured in adversative contexts, is evident across the entire trajectory of this feature in the VEA. At the same time, we also see ongoing restructuring of the variable grammar such that this effect patterns in parallel with beneficial contexts, which join with adversatives in favouring the get passive. I will return to this point in Chapter 5. Notably, the indeterminate consequence, despite being made up of ambiguous, unclassifiable tokens (according to how this predictor was coded), patterns virtually identically to the neutral context, suggesting that their lack of clearly adversative or beneficial consequence, while not synonymous with neutrality, plays a meaningful role in *get*-passive selection.

In other words, based on these observations, we might expect rates of *get*-passive usage with adversative and beneficial contexts to continue on a path of convergence, further differentiating from the already-identically-patterning neutral and indeterminate contexts. Perhaps future studies of *get*-passive usage will operationalize not the quaternion predictor examined here, but a binary predictor that codes for presence of a clear, non-neutral consequence for subject (cf. Schwarz, 2019:201).

Examining now other effects on the passive system of English, another common claim in the literature about the *get*-passive, as discussed in Chapter 2, is its capacity to evoke responsibility on the part of the subject for the event(s) described. While it was not possible to test this effect directly within a variationist framework (see section 3.4 for discussion), I consider instead two related predictors: subject animacy and presence of an expressed actor phrase. Table 4.5 demonstrates substantially higher rates of *get*-passive occurring with animate subjects than with inanimate subjects. This result is consistent with Vanrespaille (1991) and Toyota (2008), who find a majority of human subjects with the *get*-passive. This finding thus supports the well-established association of subject responsibility with the *get*-passive, as only animate subjects can be said to be causally responsible for an event.

Table 4.5. Distribution of *get*-passives by subject animacy.[16]

Subject animacy	**%**	**N**
Animate	26.1	938
Inanimate	6.56	778
Total		1716

[16] Note that while our study originally coded for a ternary distinction of human, non-human animate, and inanimate subject, due to low token count of non-human animate subjects (N=21), both human and non-human animate subjects were combined into a single "animate" category.

Despite consistently higher rates of *get*-passive with animate subjects, the data also shows an increase in *get*-passive usage with inanimate subjects over time, shown in Figure 4.9. Through to the 1920s, *get*-passives occurred with inanimate subjects at a rate of less than 4%, representing a nearly categorical context. This frequency begins to rise amongst speakers born in the 1930s, however, reaching 43.8% (N=16) among speakers born in the 1990s. From the 1930s onward, though the effect of animacy remains stable, *get*-passives with inanimate subjects follow a near-identical trajectory to *get*-passives with animate subjects. Here again the drop of the 1960s is evident (cf. Figures 4.1, 4.5, and 4.6), but notably, while use with inanimate subjects continues to increase through speakers born in the 1990s, use with animate subjects shows a slight decrease from 74.4% (N = 43) in the 1980s to 71.7% (N=46) in the 1990s. This difference is not significant (X^2 (1, N = 89) = 8.1, p = .78), but it is worth noting for future studies. Is it indicative of the inception of levelling of this predictor on variant choice, or is it simply a blip in the data?

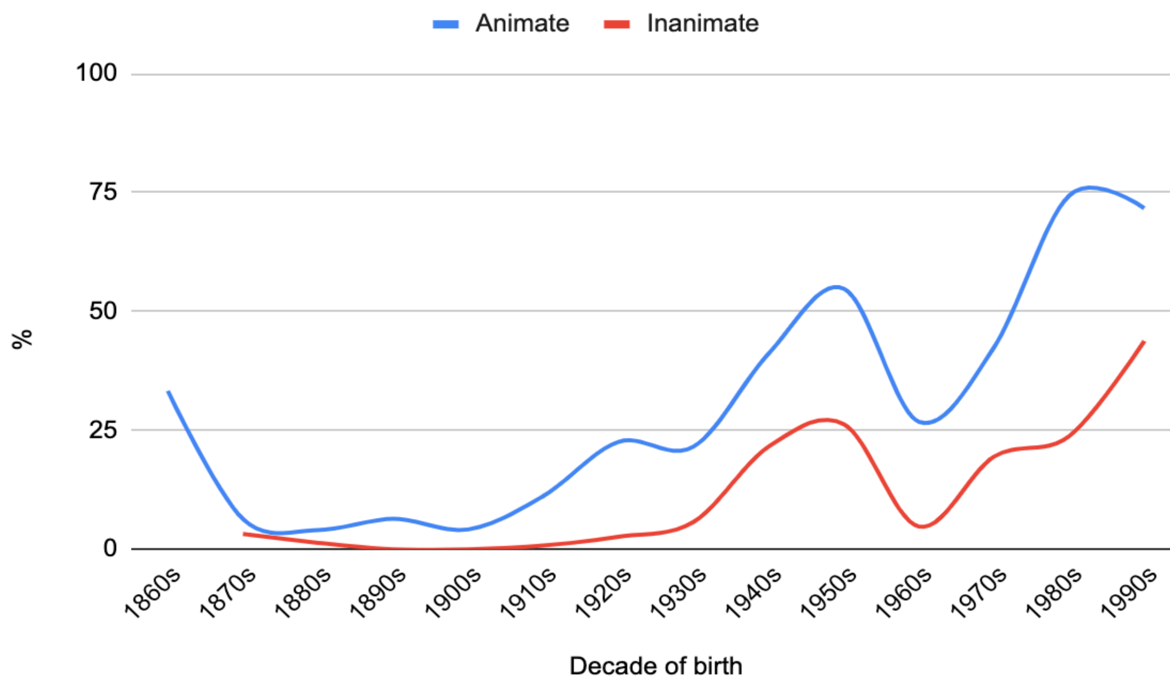

Figure 4.9. Cross-tabulation of *get*-passives by subject animacy and year of birth.

While only future research will be able to demonstrate whether this reversal continues with speakers born in later decades, *get*-passive use in this context is already offering a compelling view to the grammaticalization of the *get*-passive as a passive auxiliary. Toyota (2008:161-162) found a slight increase in the *get*-passive with inanimate subjects from LModE to PDE in both written and spoken data—though he notes that the change in his data is so small, that to characterise it as a shift toward inanimate subjects in *get*-passives is "mere speculation". Schwarz (2019), too, finds evidence of increased use of the *get*-passive with inanimate subjects from the 1870s to the 1990s in magazines and non-fiction books. She presents this widening sphere of use as evidence for the continued grammaticalization of the *get*-passive. The increase found in this study corroborates the corpus findings of both Toyota (2008) and Schwarz (2019),

and provides evidence of the continued grammaticalization of the *get*-passive, demonstrating its ongoing generalization into contexts typically dominated by the *be*-passive.

The second factor examined in this study that relates specifically to subject responsibility is presence or absence of expressed agent phrase. The *get*-passive has been observed to occur with expressed agent phrases extremely infrequently, which some scholars claim has the effect of de-emphasizing the agent and, in turn, emphasizing the role of the subject in the events described (e.g., Hatcher, 1949). Table 4.6 shows rates of *get*-passive according to presence or absence of expressed actor phrase. Consistent with the literature, overt actor phrases were uncommon throughout the data overall (N=162). However, contrary to claims that the *get*-passive occurs with an expressed actor phrase infrequently, the data displays virtually no difference in rates of *get*-passive with and without expressed actor phrase. Figure 4.10 shows the parallel rise of the two contexts over time, demonstrating that their effect remains consistently marginal; this lack of significance was confirmed by a chi-square test (not shown here).

Table 4.6. Distribution of *get*-passives by presence or absence of expressed actor phrase.

Expressed actor phrase	**%**	**n**
Present	18.8	162
Absent	17.1	1554
Total		1716

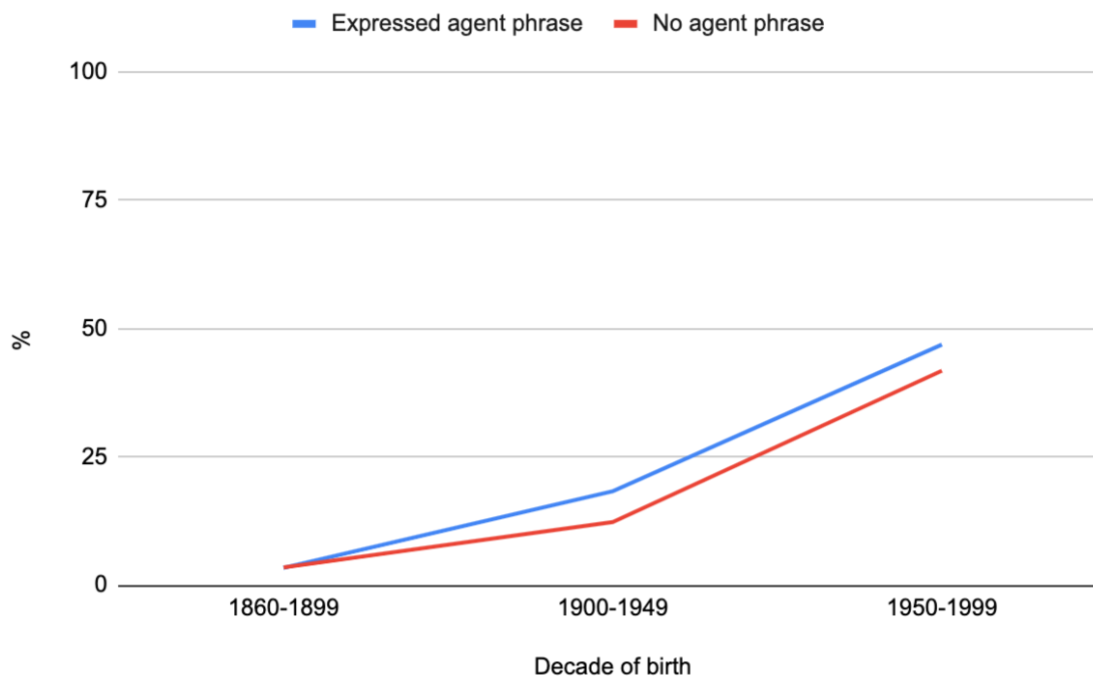

Figure 4.10. Distribution of *get*-passives by presence of expressed agent phrase over time.

4.3. Inferential Statistical Analysis

Table 4.7 shows the results of a multivariate regression analysis as performed in Rbrul (Johnson, 2008).[17] A multivariate analysis elucidates which factors, both language-internal and language-external, have a statistically significant impact on the selection of the *get*-passive, thereby enabling us to draw conclusions about which conditions are most likely to result in *get*-passive use.

Note that, due to distributional issues described in section 4.2.1, socioeconomic status was excluded from all models. With the exclusion of this social factor, the following social and linguistic predictors were selected as significant: year of birth, which was run as a continuous

[17] The model reported here is a fixed effects model, meaning no random effects were included. While a mixed effects model could account for variation at the level of individual speaker or lexical verb, the model failed to converge as a mixed effects model.

factor, and speaker gender, consequence for subject, and subject animacy, which were all run as categorical factors. Presence or absence of expressed agent phrase were not selected as significant factors; nor was education, confirming that the unexpected result given in Table 4.2 does not reflect a meaningful effect.

Table 4.7. Fixed effects multivariate analysis of predictors constraining the selection of the *get*-passive.

Predictor value [get]	Levels	Log odds	Token Ns	Response proportion (%)	Factor weight
Consequence for subject *p* = 1.91e-13	Adversative Beneficial Other[18]	0.652 0.142 -0.794	611 396 709	29.1 18.7 6.21	0.657 0.535 0.311
Subject animacy *p* = 1.35e-11	Animate Inanimate	0.589 -0.589	938 778	26.1 6.56	0.643 0.357
Speaker gender *p* = 6.00e-04	Man Woman	0.263 -0.263	905 811	19.4 14.8	0.643 0.357
*Year of birth p = 7.50e-57					
Deviance: 1116.003	AIC: 1128.003	Df: 6	Intercept: -69.317		

Year of birth was revealed to have the strongest effect on variant choice (p = 7.50e-57), which is supportive of an interpretation of vigorous rise in frequency over the period examined here. Consequence for subject also demonstrates a robust effect on get-passive selection. Unsurprisingly, given the distributional results for this factor, adversative consequence for

[18] Neutral + indeterminate

subject strongly favours the get-passive. Beneficial consequence also favours get, while the ‘other’ context, made up of both neutral and indeterminate contexts, disfavours get. Recoding the subfactors to represent a ternary distinction between adversative, beneficial, and ‘other’, rather than maintaining neutral and indeterminate contexts as separate categories, yielded a better fitting model. This further suggests that it is the presence or lack of a clear adversative or beneficial consequence that is meaningful in get-passive selection, rather than a mere neutral/non-neutral distinction. The next strongest effect on get-passive selection is subject animacy. Animate subjects favour the get-passive, while inanimate ones disfavour them. Finally, speaker gender was selected as significant, such that men favour the get-passive over women. The results of the multivariate analysis show statistical support for the observations made in section 4.1 and 4.2. Predictors such as year of birth, gender, consequence for subject and subject animacy operate simultaneously on variant choice, demonstrating the import of both social and linguistic factors in the use of the get-passive.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

At the heart of this thesis is the question of variation between two forms, *get* and *be*, that are assumed to share functional equivalence as passive auxiliaries. To carry out a traditional variationist study on these forms is to suppose, as did Feagin (1979), Weiner and Labov (1983), and Sneller and Fisher (2015), that *get* in a passive context is interchangeable with *be*, and therefore a typical sociolinguistic variable. This is not an unproblematic assumption, given the abundance of literature from across the discipline of linguistics that note substantial semantic differences between the two forms—differences that have gone unaddressed in previous variationist work. In fact, scholars like Toyota (2008:184) do not consider the *get*-passive a true passive at all, citing "semantic and functional differences," and instead characterize it as a middle voice construction. Nonetheless, this thesis follows the aforementioned variationist works in treating the *get*- and *be*-passives as two variants of a single variable, adopting Sankoff's (1988:153) view that, though syntactic variants may possess connotations distinct from each other (as is the case with the *get*- and *be*-passives), "distinctions in referential value or grammatical function among different surface forms can be neutralized in discourse." Indeed, beyond the stative-eventive distinction referred to in Chapters 2 and 3 and from which our variable context was circumscribed, this study found that the semantic contrasts purported for the *get*- and the *be*-passive are not categorically distinctive.

It is equally important to note, contra Labov (1975), that these purported semantic contrasts are not irrelevant to variant selection. The putative distinguishing characteristics of the *get*-passive do indeed play a significant role in the variable grammar (see Table 4.7). Even so, none of these contexts categorically select or bar *get*-passive usage, affirming their status as

variants of a single variable—though longitudinal evidence suggests that, at one point, they may have (see Figures 4.7 and 4.8).

What this thesis details is a still-grammaticalizing form which likely entered into the arena of variability with the *be*-passive relatively recently. Among the oldest speakers in our corpora, we see a low overall frequency of the *get*-variant, and exceptionally low frequencies in specific contexts, suggesting that the form was just beginning to vary with the *be*-passive in the canonical variationist sense. Increased frequency across all contexts in the time period represented in this study indicates continued grammaticalization; further, we see retention of semantic nuances from earlier stages along the path of its grammaticalization (cf. Bybee and Pagliuca, 1987: 112).

The longitudinal view of the 19th- and 20th-century development of the *get*-passive provided in this study can be linked to previous accounts of the feature; specifically, to historical accounts which give detailed descriptions of the grammaticalization of lexical *get* through several intermediary stages to a passive auxiliary. According to Hopper's (1991) principle of persistence, "details of [a form's] lexical history may be reflected in constraints on its grammatical distribution" (Hopper, 1991, cited in Fleisher, 2006:249-250). This thesis reveals, through distributional and inferential analyses, the substantive role of factors pertaining to the subject-referent in *get*-passive selection. While the presence or absence of an expressed agent phrase did not prove to be a significant factor in *get*-passive selection, subject animacy and consequence for subject were both revealed to have a significant impact, such that contexts with animate subjects and contexts with adversative and beneficial consequences for the subject favour *get*-passive use.

While not in agreement about the particular source construction of the *get*-passive, scholars of the historical development of the *get*-passive suggest that the semantic characteristics emphasizing the subject-referent are holdovers from its source construction(s). Fleisher (2006), who cites inchoative *get* as the direct historical source of the *get*-passive, notes that many of the key complements involved in the change from motion *get* to inchoative *get*, such as *loose*, *free*, *sick*, *clear*, and *lame*, had strong adversative or beneficial connotations. According to Fleisher, the non-neutral semantics of the present day *get*-passive, described in previous *get*-passive literature and observed in Chapter 4 of this thesis (see Table 4.4), were inherited from its inchoative source.

Toyota (2008), on the other hand, argues that the *get*-passive developed out of a reflexive-causative construction, which eventually lost its reflexive pronoun—resulting in a sense of responsibility and control on the part of the subject. This, in turn, results in higher frequencies of *get*-passives with animate subjects, as animate subjects are more likely to carry control or responsibility for the expressed action. Indeed, our study confirms that *get*-passives tend to occur with higher frequencies of animate subjects (cf. Table 4.5). Givón and Yang (1994:139), who by-and-large agree with Toyota on the *get*-passive's historical source, point out that this "human-agentive feature of the subject" is also related to the adversative (and, by our extension, the beneficial) properties associated with the *get*-passive: "Adversity or advantage are relevant only to humans/animates, their associates or possessions."

The results presented in Chapter 4 seem to indicate that semantic traces from earlier stages in the *get*-passive's grammaticalization are still very much present in its contemporary use (cf. Hopper, 1991). In the case of consequence for the subject, these semantic vestiges appear to be further entrenching (see Figure 4.8). The tendency for the *get*-passive to occur with animate

subjects, on the other hand, might be decreasing—though data from more recent time slices is needed to further investigate this possibility (cf. Figure 4.9). As to the more likely historical source of the *get*-passive, this thesis remains agnostic; both views can account for the significant role of the semantic factors examined here.

In terms of social factors, in addition to a strong effect of speaker year of birth, the results reveal a significant gender effect such that men favour the *get*-passive over women. Results regarding the effects of socioeconomic status and education level were inconclusive due to issues of data distribution (see section 4.2.1); however, a cross-tabulation of socioeconomic status with year of birth suggests the possibility of a re-organization of the social evaluation of the feature among speakers born after 1960, and thereby provides compelling considerations and directions for future research.

This possible shift in the social evaluation of the feature is supported by the momentary reversal in the *get*-passive's rising trajectory among in speakers born in the 1960s, seen recurrently throughout the data (cf. Figures 4.1, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.9). This retreat is led by what is effectively the middle class, known throughout the literature to demonstrate a high degree of linguistic insecurity and hypercorrection (Labov, 1972). This dip is virtually identical to the one found in Sneller and Fisher's (2015) Google Ngram results for the *get*-passive in American texts, reproduced in Figure 4.2. They find a similar reversal in the Philadelphia Neighborhood Corpus (PNC), though it is much less steep and lasts over several decades in those materials. Sneller and Fisher hypothesize that this reversal is indicative of an emergent salience of the *get*-passive occurring in the second half of the 20th century that resulted in the stigmatization of the variant.

If this is the case, however, why is the downward trajectory so brief—did something occur in the social atmosphere to reverse the trend once again? Is this brevity representative of a

broader sociolinguistic phenomenon, one seen in other changes? The diachronic course of the *get*-passive in Victoria, and indeed in the Ngrams results, is highly similar in shape to that of the rise of DO-support in Middle English (Warner, 2005, cited in Sneller and Fisher, 2015), which also demonstrates a brief, momentary reversal in the trajectory of the change in specific contexts, resulting from a shift in social evaluation. While Warner offers a more nuanced explanation of the dip in usage of the feature, he initially suggests that when the non-standard feature "reaches a certain level (here 38%) evaluation of the opposition between incoming and established forms becomes possible" (p. 275). Notably, the *get*-passive peaks at the similar rate of 44% before beginning its downward trajectory. The question still remains, though, as to why the dip seen in Warner's DO-support study, Sneller and Fisher's Ngram results, and the results presented in this thesis, is so short-lived.

The present thesis and Sneller and Fisher's (2015) study taken together provide excellent grounds for comparison between American and Canadian English—at least with regards to this particular feature. It should be noted that the VEA spans a time breadth exceeding that represented in Sneller and Fisher's study by 35 years, on the front end. Though there are no speakers in Sneller and Fisher's study born before 1901, and we therefore cannot compare *get*-passive usage in both locations before the turn of the century, rates at the first point of overlap between the Philadelphia and Victoria data are vastly different. As seen in section 4.1, the *get*-passive hovers at frequencies under 10% in Victoria until 1920. By contrast, the change toward the *get*-passive seems to be well underway in Philadelphia by the time the oldest speaker in Sneller and Fisher's study was born in 1901: Rates in the PNC are already approaching 50% by that point, rates that are not attested in the Victoria materials until the speakers born in the 1950s (and recorded in 2011-2012). Without a comparison point from another Canadian variety, it is

unclear if this differential in frequencies reflects a contrast between Canadian and American varieties, or if it is another instance of Victoria English lagging behind general changes in Canadian English, and perhaps in this case, North American English at large (cf. Roeder et al., 2018; Denis and D'Arcy, 2019; Buaillon et al., 2020).

Around the time of speakers born in the 1960s, rates of *get*-passive in both Victoria and Philadelphia suddenly begin to decrease. However, by the 1990s, the decade in which the youngest speakers from both studies were born, the *get*-passive is well into the resumption of its upward climb in Victoria, while it continues to slowly decline in the PNC. Though the VEA and the PNC display different patterns, the rates of *ge*t-passive in either corpus toward the end of the 20th century are actually quite similar, hovering in the range of 50-60% overall.

In summary, while the trajectory of the *get*-passive in both the VEA and the PNC share similar attributes—an incline through the first half of the 20th century followed by a shift and reversal around 1960s, ending up with at rates around 55-65% toward the end of the century—the Victoria data on the whole follows a much more extreme course. Rates of *get*-passive in Victoria at the turn of the 20th century are considerably lower than those in Philadelphia, demonstrating that the change was far less advanced in Victoria. *Get* frequencies continue to climb dramatically in Victoria, catching up to Philadelphia in the 1950s, before reversing—momentarily—in the 1960s. The reversal found in the VEA is both more extreme and more fleeting than that found in the PNC. Indeed, rates in the PNC continue to decrease through the end of the 20th century, while rates in Victoria continue upwards. Nonetheless, frequencies in both corpora settle in the same spot.

Perhaps the most notable finding of this thesis is the tremendous increase in *get* as a passive auxiliary over the last century-and-a-half. While in line with the findings of previous

studies, this finding illustrates the magnitude of this change in progress and supports its ongoing grammaticalization into the present-day.

In light of all of this, a shortcoming of this study was the inability to fully probe the role of socioeconomic status in *get*-passive selection over time. This was due to issues in the selection of SCVE speakers, discussed in section 4.2.1, and the lack of full metadata for speakers in the DCVE. A future study using the same corpora would ensure that speakers were balanced evenly across both the two genders represented in the corpus as well as the two socioeconomic categories delineated in section 3.4. A further limitation in this area was perhaps unavoidable: Assigning accurate, consistent and replicable socioeconomic scores to adolescents who have not yet worked or completed their high school education proved challenging, and as a result, the role of socioeconomic status in *get*-passive usage in Victoria was obscured.

Another distributional issue, discussed in section 4.2.1. pertains to the infrequency of passive tokens among younger speakers in the corpora. A future study would account for this imbalance by extracting data from more speakers born in later decades, ensuring the most robust and consistent token count possible across the timespan represented here.

This study considers two of the three temporal dimensions accessible within the two corpora: year of birth, and to a lesser extent, year of interview (by way of corpus distinction). This choice is motivated by the constraints of these particular corpora, as well as previous studies of the *get*-passive (see section 3.4). That said, a truly comprehensive study of this variable might make use of speaker age to test for any evidence of lifespan change (cf. Fruehwald, 2017).

This study provides an account of *get*-passive usage in Victoria, B.C., which can be compared to *get*-passive usage in other varieties of English, both synchronically and historically. By viewing the results of this study with those of Feagin (1979), Weiner and Labov (1983), and

Sneller and Fisher (2015), we can ostensibly compare Canadian English with different varieties of American English—at least, with regards to this particular feature. The picture is far from complete, especially knowing, as we do, that Victoria English does have anomalous behaviours that set it apart, however slightly, from the rest of CanE. An inquiry into *get*-passive usage in Toronto, for example, would provide needed context to more accurately compare not only CanE with American varieties, but also Victoria English with general CanE. This could potentially tease out answers to some of the questions which emerged via comparison of our study with that of Sneller and Fisher (2015).

Ultimately, this thesis has tracked the emergence of the *get*-passive in English over the last 130 years, exposing a longitudinally consistent and robust variable grammar that constrains variation between this innovative form and the canonical *be*-passive. I have illustrated how the two forms have come to share the domain of passive voice in contemporary English, and detailed the factors which constrain their variation, both historically and synchronically. This thesis shows that semantic traces from source constructions play a consistent role in *get*-passive selection throughout the last 130 years, from its early use through to the end of the 20th century, where it competes viably with *be* and, for speakers born in the 1980s and 1990s, is the favoured form for marking passives with animate subjects and passives with non-neutral consequence for the subject. At the same time, this thesis has exposed hallmarks of grammaticalization such as re-organization and re-structuring of semantic predictors and has raised perplexing questions about the role of social groups and social evaluations in advancing linguistic change.

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Appendix A

Additional tables and figures

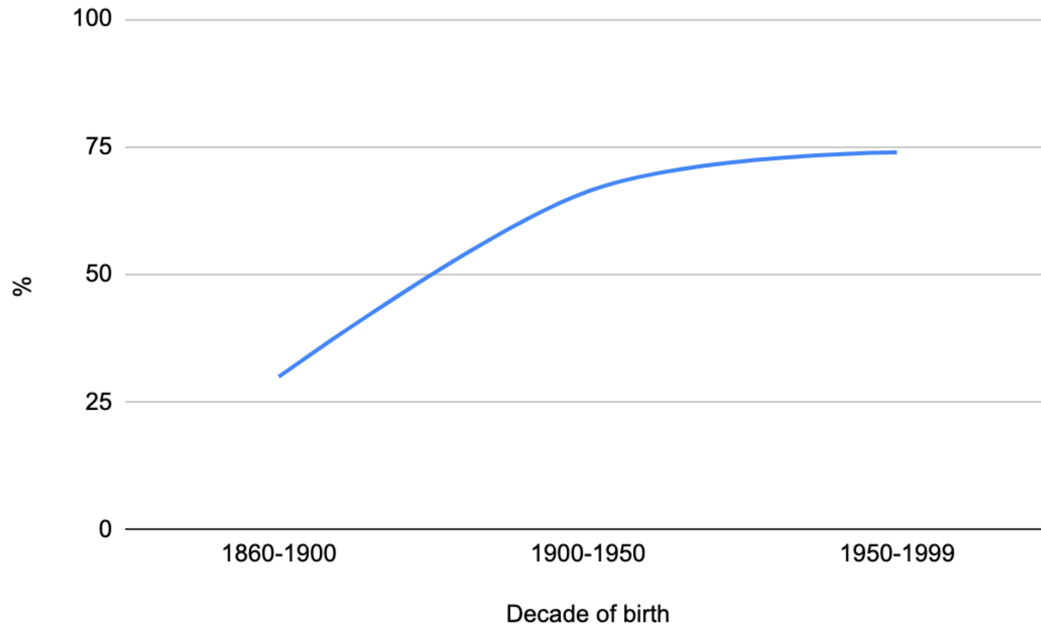

Figure A1. Distribution of *get* with lexical verb *married* over time.