Voice is not a spell-out domain: Ask Kurdish and Baxtiari

INTRODUCTION. Non-active voice (henceforth, NAct) structures refer to a group of remarkably similar structures which prevent external arguments from surfacing syntactically, such as *anticausatives* (i.e., spontaneous events, e.g., predicates like *break*, *open*), *dispositional middles* (generic statements about the internal argument properties/abilities), and *passives*. NAct structures are classified morphologically into two types in many languages: *analytic* (or periphrastic) NAct voice is expressed through a combination of an auxiliary (AUX) and a non-finite element (participle, infinitive, or nonverbal element), as in English (1a), while *synthetic* voice is expressed by a designated NAct morpheme, as in Japanese (1b).
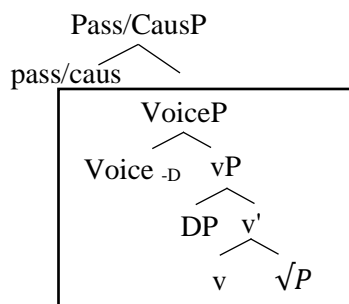
(1) a.   The door was opened.   (English)
     b.   hanako=ga   sensei=ni   sikar-**are**-ta.   (Japanese)
          hanako=nom   teacher=dat   scold-**NAct**-Pst
          'Hanako was scolded by the teacher.'

NAct voices can also surface syncretically across languages (e.g., Russian, Greek, Korean, etc.). That is, two or more underlyingly distinct NAct voices are pronounced identically. For instance, in Russian, a single NAct morpheme can be interpreted ambiguously, either as passive or anticausative.

(2)   kalitka   otkryvalas.   (Russian)
      gate   open.Impf.Pst.NAct
      Passive:'The gate was being opened (by e.g., Oleg).'
      Anticausative: 'The gate was opening.'   (Oikonomou and Alexiadou, 2022: 25)

Oikonomou and Alexiadou (2022:25), henceforward O&A, make a generalization about voice syncretism in which they state that "voice syncretism is associated with synthetic morphology". They argue that analytic NAct voice, unlike synthetic NAct voice, is associated with a single interpretation. Only synthetic morphology can be interpreted syncretically as passive, middle, or other voices. In languages with both synthetic and analytic constructions, there can be no syncretism in the interpretation of analytic constructions and these constructions must have a single designated interpretation (O&A, 2022: 2). O&A explains why analytic and synthetic forms correspond to non-syncretic and syncretic interpretations, respectively. In their analysis, they take voiceP as a spell-out domain and relate syncretism and non-syncretism to the absence and presence of a designated head above voiceP, respectively. Therefore, any head that disambiguates voice, being a causative, anticausative, passive head, etc., is phase-external (3). Thus, if a language aims to specify the NAct meaning, it requires additional heads and since these additional heads lie outside voiceP, they must be spelled out separately. Accordingly, this phase-external phrase has a designated interpretation. On the other hand, in the absence of a higher head, the vP and voiceP sequences remain in the same spell-out domain and are transferred to interfaces simultaneously, resulting in a synthetic NAct voice with a syncretic interpretation (4).

(3) Designated Pass/ Caus Cs   (4) Syncretic voice
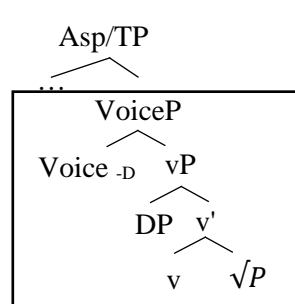
DATA. This generalization, however, is at odds with two related Iranian languages:

(5) a. ʔatena mal-aka-i xæraw kerd. (Kurdish/ active)
atena house-Def-acc destroy do.PST.3rd.SG
'Atena destroyed the house.'

b. mal-ækæ xæraw **bu.** (Kurdish, analytic: anticausative/ passive)
house-Def destroy become.Pst.3rd.sg
'The house was destroyed (by itself/ or by e.g., Atena).'

c. ʔæw rext-e **vaii.** (Baxtiari, analytic: anticausative/ passive)
water pour-Prtc become.Pst.3rd.sg
'The water was poured (by e.g, Atena). / The water poured (by itself)'

Kurdish and Baxtiari, with both analytic and synthetic[1] NAct voice systems, demonstrate the exact opposite behavior from O&A's generalization. In what follows, we will focus on Kurdish but the analysis can be extended to Baxtiari as well. In the active sentence (5a), with a complex predicate (CPr), the light verb (LV) *kerden* 'to do', combines with a predicative item, here, a noun. To form a NAct counterpart, Kurdish can, analytically, replace the active LV, *kerden* 'to do' with the NAct auxiliary, *bun* 'to become'. This structure is syncretic, lending itself to two interpretations[2]: it has either an anticausative reading, in which no external agent intentionally destroyed the house (i.e., the house destroyed by itself), or a passive reading, in which an implicit agent is present. This violates O&A's generalization as Kurdish (5b) uses syncretic analytic NAct voice.

The data thus provide evidence that there is no constraint on combinations of syncretic readings and forms (i.e., synthetic or analytic) as is shown in table 1: analytic and non-syncretic (English), analytic and syncretic (Kurdish/Baxtiari), synthetic and non-syncretic (Hebrew) and synthetic and syncretic (Russian). The shaded cells were introduced by O&A.

	analytic	Synthetic
Unambiguous	English	Hebrew
Ambiguous	Kurdish/Baxtiari	Korean

table 1

In light of these languages falsifying the generalization, we can conclude that whether a voice is unspecified or not does not reflect its analytic or synthetic nature. Therefore, both non-/syncretic synthetic and analytic NAct forms should be possible in principle, and whatever mechanism drives non-/syncretism differs from what is responsible for analytic/synthetic, and the mechanisms work independently. We adopt O&A's claim that the analytic form occurs when the derivation spells out voices separately. However, we argue against the idea that voiceP is a spell-out domain. Hence, if a particular head (be it the head of a PassP or CauseP) appears, as Kurdish, a synthetic form can still be generated. In addition, the head of VoiceP in languages can still be spelled out analytically without any specially designated interpretation. Regardless of the VoiceP's nature, there is nothing that prevents a language from expressing the Voice head as an syncretic analytical construction. Concretely, we propose that NAct voices have the same underlying structure: VoiceP> PredP> RootP. It is language-specific properties, however, that determine whether voice, Pred, and Root heads are spelled out as one unit (i.e., synthetic) or separately (i.e., analytic). This fully depends on the morphophonological way such higher heads are realized (i.e., whether they are bound or unbound morphemes). The only crucial factor for NAct structures is that the NAct head c-commands the Pred head.

CONCLUSION: An analysis without any spell-out domain achieves the right effect with the fewest assumptions. By dropping the idea that VoiceP is a spell-out domain, there is no longer a prediction that the analytic forms are non-syncretic and only synthetic forms can be syncretic. There is no connection between analytic vs. synthetic morphology and the absence or presence of a particular interpretation anymore. NAct *forms* are governed by morphosyntactic rules which are language-specific, as proven correct by the data presented in this paper.

SELECTED REFERENCE: Oikonomou, D. & Alexiadou, A. 2022. Voice Syncretism Crosslinguistically: The View from Minimalism. *Philosophies 7*, 19. https://doi.org/10.3390/

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[1] We are focusing only on analytic NAct voices here which falsifies O&A's claim.

[2] We used typical passive (e.g., using *by-phrase*, using agent-oriented adverbials, control into purpose clauses, etc.) and anticausative diagnostics (e.g., using *by-itself*, using simply/easily adverbials, etc.) to make sure that these sentences have syncretic interpretation. However, as a matter of space, we have not mentioned them in the abstract.