There is No Lexicon-Syntax Distinction: Adjectival Passives in English

The Lexicalist model of grammar strictly separates lexical from syntactic processes, and holds that syntax may not be the input to lexical processes (Wasow 1977, Reinhart and Siloni 2005). A primary source of motivation for this model has always been the distinction between verbal and adjectival passives in English. This paper shows with data from corpora that many accepted facts about adjectival passives are incorrect: adjectival passives can be formed from ECM/raising verbs, and they can also involve a subset of indirect objects. This means that adjectival passives must be formed from syntactic structures, and are incompatible with the Lexicalist model. The paper proposes a syntactic account of adjectival passives that explains the facts, as well as the few differences that actually do hold between verbal and adjectival passives. This syntactic analysis also permits a simple account of the alleged class of non-intersective adjectives, and the predictions it makes provides support for the theory of applied arguments advanced by Bruening (2010b).