Berit Gehrke & Nino Grillo, How to Become Passive

In this talk, we will reject the common approach to passivisation in terms of an operation on the argument structure of a given predicate in favour of one based on its event structure. In particular, we will propose that movement of a stative subevent of a structurally complex event to a discourse-related position at the edge of the verb phrase is the fundamental characteristics of passive constructions. We will argue that this shift provides a natural account of many of their semantic and syntactic properties some of which are left unaccounted for in previous approaches. Psycholinguistic data provide further arguments to support our hypothesis.