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## **Das geht nicht zu ändern: the origin and structure of the German go to+V modal passive**

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We investigate a case of creative innovation straddling economy and expressivity involving a sparsely documented passive construction in colloquial German whereby *gehen* ‘to go’ combines with a *zu*-infinitive.

- (1) *Was einmal geschehen, das geht nicht zu ändern.*  
What once happened that goes not to change  
‘What happened once cannot be changed.’

(Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon. Bd. 1, 1867, S. 1585; DWDS corpus)

The construction resembles other modal passives, e.g. deontic *sein+zu* ‘be to’ (Demske-Neumann 1994, Eroms 2006, Holl 2010), since (i) it expresses modality (i.e., (im)possibility), and (ii) the infinitive’s object is promoted to subject. Yet the *go-to*-passive differs from other modal passives in its meaning and grammatical and lexical-semantic restrictions. Explicitly, the *go-to* passive expresses only (im)possibility and is facilitated by negation (or adverbials akin to middles) (2a); speaker consultation and corpus analysis also reveal a lexical restriction for transitive verbs expressing accomplishments (a result state/change of state involving a durative event, Vendler 1957) e.g. *abwischen* ‘to wipe (off)’, *(ver)ändern* ‘to change’, *öffnen* ‘to open’, *(ver)schließen* ‘to close’, while transitive change-of-state achievement verbs such as *töten* ‘to kill’ or *befördern* ‘to promote’ are incompatible but occur in other modal passives (2b).

- (2) a. *Die Tafel geht ??(nicht/einfach) abzuwischen.*  
the board goes (not/simple) off-to-wipe  
b. *Dieser Angestellter ist/\*geht nicht zu befördern.*  
This employee is/ goes not to promote

We argue that the *go-to*-passive emerged by analogy with preexisting strategies involving *gehen* expressing impossibility (*Das geht nicht* ‘That isn’t possible’), especially with resultative particles (*Das geht nicht ab* ‘It doesn’t come off). The combination with *zu*-infinitives was also likely facilitated by an older construction involving ‘go’ and a *zu*-infinitive to express future events (Demske 2020).

**References:** • Eroms, H.-W. (2006). Das modale Passiv im Deutschen. In: R. Harweg, F. Hundsnurscher & E. Iwasaki (eds.), *getriwe ân allez wenken*. Festschrift für Shoko Kishitani. Göttingen: Kümmerle, 8–25 • Demske-Neumann, U. (1994). *Modales Passiv und Tough Movement*. Tübingen: Niemeyer • Demske, U. (2020). *Zur Grammatikalisierung von 'gehen' im Deutschen*. *Forum japanisch-germanistischer Sprachforschung*, 9–42 • Holl, D. (2010). *Modale Infinitive und dispositionelle Modalität im Deutschen*. Tübingen: Narr • Vendler, Z. (1957). Verbs and Times. *Philosophical Review* 56, 143–160.