

Passivization in Mbere

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Abstract:

This paper is about the syntactic examination of passivization in Mbere. The analysis is approached following Chomsky's Government and Binding theory (GBT). It comes out that Mbere passivization is implemented by moving the direct object argument from its logical position to the phonetic form. Yet, the change of word order does not imply the insertion of auxiliary verb and the morphological change of the verb stem, but it implies the substitution of the overt NP object by a pronominal which is co-indexed to the moved object. This causes the violation of Chomsky's impenetrability condition, the condition B of binding theory and the copy theory of movement. In this connection, Mbere passivation shows promotion and demotion as principles of world languages passivization and insertion and substitution as parametric of variations or language idiosyncratic. Therefore, except the existing insertion, promotion and demotion, Mbere provides the new property of passivization which is substitution.

Keywords: *passivization, Mbere, promotion, demotion, insertion, substitution*

Résumé:

Cet article examine le passif en Mbere selon l'approche Chomskienne du Gouvernement et du Liage. Il en ressort qu'en Mbere le passif est réalisé par le mouvement de l'objet de sa position sous-jacente à la position non canonique. Cependant, le changement de l'ordre des mots n'implique pas l'insertion d'un éventuel auxiliaire et n'entraîne pas non plus le changement du radical verbal. En revanche, il implique une substitution du syntagme nominal objet par un pronom antécédé par l'objet mû ; ce qui entraîne la violation de la condition d'Impénétrabilité, la condition B du Liage et la théorie de copie du mouvement de Chomsky. A cet effet, Mbere atteste la promotion et la relegation comme principes communs du passif dans les langues du monde et considère l'insertion et la substitution comme des variations paramétriques ou des idiosyncrasies langagières. En conséquence, en plus des mécanismes existants de promotion, relegation et insertion, le Mbere ajoute la substitution au passif.

Mots clés: *Passif, Mbere, promotion, relegation, insertion, substitution*

Introduction

This article analyses the construction of passive structures in Mbere, a Bantu language spoken in Congo Brazzaville. The literature on passivization mentions universal properties referring to promotion, agent phrase (demotion) and insertion (Tellerman; 2011; Shibatani; 1988). Also, passivation implies the movement of overt NPs (arguments) within a given structure. However, the movement of argument bares the occurrence of another syntactic component in the transferred place, if and only it is not a non-over NP (Chomsky 1995, Radford, 2009). In addition, movement entailed by passivization is usually linked to conditions namely copy theory, Binding B and the impenetrability. In this connection, this contribution seeks to showing whether all the literature on passivization issue matches Mbere passivization. In other words. As such, the paper addresses the following questions: What are the properties that characterize passivization in Mbere? How are they variant and invariant in Mbere? The first section is concerned with the overview of passivization, while the second considers passivization in Mbere.

1. Passivization: an overview

This section deals with the overview of passivization. Put otherwise, it aims at showing how the item passivization has been developed by different language scholars. Indeed, passivization has been a issue of attraction for many linguists. It is one processes which helps turn a basic structure into a surface one. According to Svartvik (1966:1), passive has become an object of interest for many scholars. In this connection he says:

The study of the grammatical category voice has enjoyed considerable popularity over the last few years. In fact, voice has probably received greater attention from linguists than ever before in the history of English scholarship.

This means that many scholars have glanced at analysis of voice specifically passive. The topic has been developed by authors like Gehrke and Grillo (2009), Huddleston, Pullum (2012), Alexander and Close (2009), Morapedi (2018), N'douli (2018), Chomsky (1981), Jaeggli (1986), Baker et al (1989) Tallerman (2011), Áfarli (1992), Thompson and Schepers (2013), Rejtharová and Skálová (1981), Ndongo-Ibara (2017) to quote but a few. The Gehrke and Grillo (2009) treat passive as the movement of a verbal projection to the specifier of VoiceP. Put otherwise, passivization is process whereby the object leaves its canonical position to the front position. Ariana (2011:154) describes the passive voice in the following way:

The passive voice is a grammatical construction in which the subject of a sentence or clause denotes the recipient of the action rather than the performer, that is, a category of verbs that is related to what thing or person is

It comes out from this assertion that the passive with passive, the overt syntactic NP subject does not perform any action. It does not initiate the action of the verb like with the active construction. Consider the following examples

- (1) a-Paul kills a dog (LF)
- b- A dog_i is killed t_i by paul (PF)
- c-Children ate the food (LF)
- d-The food_i was eaten by children (PF)

From these examples above, it appears that “*a dog*” and “*the food*” in (1a) and (1c) appear as NPs object of their respective predicates *kill* and *eat*, while in (1b) and (1d) they move to the subject position by entailing the passivization of the structure. Alexander and Close (op.cit: 241) puts out that *passive and active voice refer to the form of a verb and both of them can express the same idea or utterance*. While in the active structure, the subject is the person or the thing doing the action, in the passive, the action is performed to the subject. Huddleston, Pullum (op.cit: 240) adds that *the general term active and passive are based on the semantic role of the subject in clauses expressing*. I other words, the active voice is used in a clause where the overt NP argument expresses the agent of the main verb and the subject does, did or will do the action of the verb. In this connection, the pre verbal argument of the sentence is the performer of the action and the direct object NP is the receiver of the action. Passivization is used in a clause when the patient stands in the role of subject and the main emphasis is on the action of the verb. Accordingly, the syntactic object in passive voice functions as a dummy element or a floating element, since it can be dropped out without affecting the grammaticality of the structure. As a matter of fact, passivization refers to constructions which imply the use of passive verbs. Due to their non-performance, passive verbs are said to be inactive in their participation and utilization. Tallerman (op.cit:212) argues the following concerning passivization:

Basic passive constructions in all languages are formed from transitive verbs. There are two hallmarks of the passive. First, the core arguments of a transitive verb (subject and object) both undergo change in their grammatical relation. Specifically, the object of the active sentence is promoted to be the subject of the passive sentence, while the subject of the passive sentence is either removed altogether in the passive or simple demoted.

What emerges from this assertion is that passivization process is only possible with more than monovalent verbs. As a matter of fact, passivization occurs if a predicate c-commands at least two arguments, otherwise this process is impossible. In addition, it is noticed that when the movement of the NP object is operated, there is the occurrence of the empty category called trace which prevents other overt syntactic NPs to occur in that position. Trace then is the copy of the moved NP. Chomsky (1995) termed this movement as the copy movement and the trace position as the impenetrable one (that is a position which is not allowable to arguments).

Furthermore, when the movement of arguments is operated, there is the insertion of the auxiliary verb and that of a by-phrase. Syntactically, the passive version is clearly more complex than the active by virtue of containing extra elements: the auxiliary verb **be** and the preposition **by**. Huddleston and Pullum (op.cit: 238) consider the passive as a non-canonical construction (not the major one; not the key one) and explain that non-canonical constructions have syntactically more elementary or basic counterparts. This means that passives constructions are not logical construction, but they are phonetic ones.

In a nutshell, passivization is characterized by promotion of the post-verbal argument (object), demotion of the pre-verbal argument (subject) and insertion of the auxiliary **be** which implies the morphological change of the verb stem as in the following examples:

- (2) a- They spoke English.
b- English was spoken by them.

c- Ye abeti mwana. (Lingala)
Him he-beat child
He beat the child

d- Mwana abetamaki na ye (Lingala)
Child he-beat-pass-t by he
The child was beaten by him

From these examples it appears that English insertion process of passivization implies a lexical item (the auxiliary), this auxiliary absorbs the case assigner and makes the main verb inactive in the action. Put differently, the verb becomes c-commanded by the inflectional phrase. This kind of insertion is called syntactic insertion (since it uses a lexical item). However in Lingala when the object moves to the front position, it affects the morphology of the verb stem by the insertion of inflections. In that case, we refer to morphological insertion. Therefore, passivization can imply both syntactic and morphological insertion.

2. Passivization in Mbere

How Mbere speakers construct passive structures is the main concern of this section. Let us consider the following examples:

- (3) a. Bɔ adzé **biela** (LF)
They ate food
They ate the food
- b. **Biela**_i madzé **dzɔ**_i bɔ (PF)
Food it-ate it them
The food was eaten by them
- c. Tara atué **ndzɔ** (LF)
Father built house
The father built the house
- d. **Ndzɔ**_i atué **yɔ**_i tara (PF)
House built it father
The house was built by the father
- e. Mwana adzé **okwɔ** **kia** (LF)
Child ate cassava that
The child ate that cassava.
- f. **Okwɔ** **kiá**_i adzé **tsɔ**_i mwana (PF)
Cassava that child ate

That cassava was eaten by the child.

In the above examples, LF structures are bivalent. Indeed, based on the Verb Phrase Internal Subject Hypothesis (VPISH), their respective predicates dominate two arguments; one of which is internal, i.e., occurring in the pre-verbal and the other external i.e., appearing in the post verbal. However, it emerges that when the internal argument is promoted by means of passivization process in Mbere, the latter is substituted by a pronoun which is coindexed to the moved argument to avoid oddness of the structure.

In (3b, 3d, 3f) we observe that the position where the extracted NPs were is occupied by a pronoun referring back to the moved NPs. This indexing relation violates binding conditions governing the relation between pronominals and their antecedents. If an antecedent is not required to be in the same configuration with pronominal; It is written: Condition B: A pronominal must be three in the same governing category.

This means that pronominal cannot be co-referential with the NP that c-commands it in the same sentence.

Ndongo Ibara (2007:70) while analyzing binding condition in Embosi writes:

If I try to puzzle out this matter, it is clear that reflexives and reciprocals are not subject to the same rule of interpretation. In this perspective, I suggest to consider condition A as parametric variation issues as word orders and the like.

Similarly Mbere language shows that principle B should also fall among parameters of variation cross linguistically.

In (3b) for instance the movement of *biela* entails the appearance of *dzo* in its devoicing position. As such, we would hardly speak of trace in Mbere passivization but of the substitution of the NP object by a pronominal instead. Consequently Mbere passivization is characterized by:

- (1) Promotion of the post verbal NP
- (2) Demotion of the pre verbal NP
- (3) Substitution of the post verbal NP by a pronominal.

What is obvious is that Mbere passivization is free from auxiliary insertion. In other words, Mbere does not imply the use of auxiliary in its passive structures. In this connection let see how passivization does work in other bantu languages like the one listed in the following examples

(4) a. Mwana me bul**ama** (na mama) (Kituba)

mu-ana me bul-am- a na Ø-mama
l'enfant PRF taper-Pass-FV par la-maman
l'enfant a été tapé par la maman
N'douili (op.cit: 275)

e. Mwána wáb**ú**lu (ká máma) (Civili)

mú-ána u-á-búl-u ká Ø-máma
l'enfant PV₁. PRF-taper-PASS par la-maman
L'enfant a été tapé par la maman
N'douili (op.cit: 276)

c. Olangi o-bondz-**im**-i la koli (Embosi)

Bottle AGR-break-PASS-FV at night
A bottle was broken at night
Ndongo Ibara (op.cit: 61)

d. Bo-gobe bo-neel-**w**-a ngwa-na ke-mo-sadi (Setswana)

14- Porridge 14-give-PASS-M 1-child by-1-woman
The porridge is given to the child
Morapedi (op.cit: 55)

It comes out from these examples that the use of passivization implies the insertion of an extensional morpheme at the suffix position of the verb base in order to signal out passivization. For instance, Kituba uses (am), Civili (u), Embosi (im) and Setwana uses (w). This shows how far these Bantu languages are from Mbere regarding Passivization. While these languages attest the feature insertion, Mbere attest a new feature which is substitution. In this connection, Mbere passivization is somewhat strange as it demarcates itself from other Bantu languages. As such, Mbere attests a kind of passivization with anaphoric pronominalization unlike the above mentioned Bantu

languages. Indeed, in Mbere passivization, the place where an element is moved is filled by another which shares the same features as the moved one. According to Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC), the c-command domain of a phase head is impenetrable to an external probe (i.e. goal which c commanded by the head of phase is impenetrable to any probe c commanded the phase). Further, in Chomsky (2001: 5), Radford (op.cit:380) avers that once all the operations which apply within a given phase have been completed, the domain of the phase (i.e the complement of its head) becomes impenetrable to further syntactic operations. With reference to the Bantu languages mentioned above and based on Chomsky and Radford's ideas, we may question whether structures in (3b, 3d, 3f) are passive structures. According Chomsky and Radford, when the NP object has been transferred to the subject position in order to form the AgrP at phonetic form as in (3), the verb object position should remain empty, that is, a syntactic operation could no longer be applied at this position. In other words, if an element is moved, its underlying position cannot be filled by another grammatical category because the moved element leaves a copy at its LF. However, the contrary seems to be attested in Mbere. As a matter of fact, Mbere tends to violate the Phase Impenetrability Condition and the copy theory of movement as it allows the moved element to be substituted by another element in case of passivization process. Consequently, in addition to well-known features related to passivization namely promotion, demotion, and insertion, Mbere also includes substitution. Let us also glance at the antipassive process to see whether (3b, 3d, 3f) constructions can be accounted for under that angle. Basically, antipassive constructions are constructions found in some languages that omit or demote the object of a transitive verb. According to Dixon (1994:146),

A voice construction must meet the following four construction to be considered as an antipassive: (i). It is a detransitive construction; (ii) the subject of antipassive corresponds to the subject of the underlying active clause; (iii) the object of the base verb either goes into an oblique function being treated as non-core argument, or is omitted; (iv) there is some overt formal marking signaling an antipassive derivation.

If one considers PF examples in (3), s/he will realize that there no link with the antipassive idea presented by Dixon, since in these examples, there are promotion and demotion of the object and the subject respectively. Additionally, Bostoen, Dom and Segerer (2015:744) show the preliminary typology of antipassive in Bantu as follows:

Firstly the antipassive is always developed as a particular instantiation of a core reciprocal/associative meaning. In all cases except one it is the suffix –an-. Secondly, those languages for which an antipassive marker could be recognized clearly subdivide in two semantic types: those where the antipassive is still a particular instantiation of the polysemy of the reciprocal/associative and those in which –an- has lost its original reciprocal/associative meaning and has become a dedicated antipassive marker.

Finally, there seems to be Bantu languages where antipassive is exclusive depatientive (it only deletes the patient object if the verb base is monotransitive, but the recipient-like object if the verb base is ditransitive).

Consider:

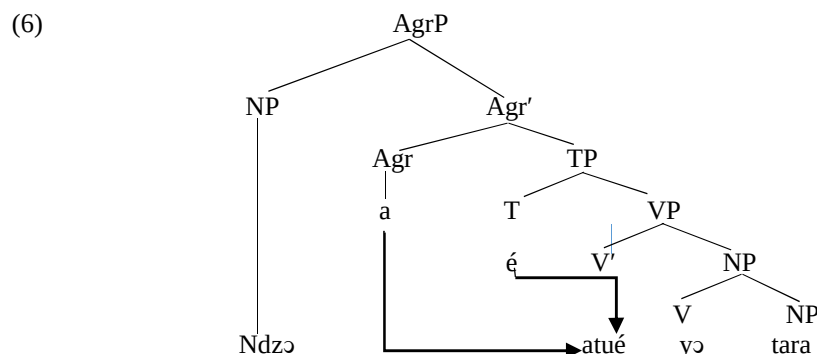
(5) Kirundi

A -ba- nyéeshuule ba -a- tuk- an- ye
AUG-NP2- Student SG2 -PST- insult- RECP/ANTIP-PRF
Student insulted each other.

(Bostoen, Dom and Segerer (op.cit: 273) based on (Ndayiragije 2006:276)

The example above shows the implication of the reciprocal “an” in order to form the antipassive in Kirundi language. However, no mention is made of a reciprocal morpheme –an- or object demotion in (3b, 3d, 3f) examples to attest antipassive process in Mbere. This means that PFs of (3) are not antipassive constructions. Therefore, the only process attested in (3) PF constructions is passivization.

Owing to how far Mbere is from other languages say European languages like English and bantu languages like Embosi, Kituba, Civili and Setswana in terms of passivization operation, one can admit that this process is rather a parameter of variation than a principle as its mechanism is language specific. The (3d) structure can be represented in the tree as follows:



Conclusion

This work has deal with the analysis of passivization in Mbere. It has been demonstrated that in Mbere, passivization is realized by the movement of overt NPs. Indeed, when the NP object is moved from its canonical position, it is substituted by a pronominal. This pronominal is anaphoric to the moved NP. As far as properties are concerned, Mbere passivization is determine by the promotion of the object, the demotion of a subject and the substitution of an object by a pronominal. Concerning variant and invariant, Mbere passivization shows that promotion and demotion are principles, while insertion and substitution are parameters of variations. Put otherwise, insertion and substitution are language idiosyncrasies. Therefore, one should not limit at promotion, insertion and demotion while approaching the passivization issue, but should also expect other mechanisms such as substitution. In addition, Mbere passivization violates the Impenetrability condition, the copy theory of movement and the condition B of Binding theory; what really enriches Chomsky's UG hypothesis.

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