

# Not cut to fit – zero coded passives in African languages<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, a growing number of linguists have reported constructions that fulfil all or most criteria for being called a passive but one: morphological or periphrastic marking in the verb phrase. In the constructions in question, passive semantics is conveyed through argument remapping, sometimes without the possibility for an oblique Actor by-phrase. The intransitive use of a transitive verb triggers a reversal of voice orientation: of the two participants of the active transitive verb, the Undergoer is linked to the one and only argument position, the subject. The Actor is either demoted to an oblique participant or not encoded at all, depending on the language. An example of such a zero-coded passive from the Mande language Jalonke is given in (2), which is the passive, intransitive equivalent of the transitive active clause in (1):

- |     |                       |               |             |     |                               |             |
|-----|-----------------------|---------------|-------------|-----|-------------------------------|-------------|
| (1) | <i>Maimuna</i>        | <i>jee-na</i> | <i>baa.</i> | (2) | <i>Jee-na</i>                 | <i>baa.</i> |
|     | Maimuna               | water-DEF     | draw        |     | Water-DEF                     | draw        |
|     | 'Maimuna drew water.' |               |             |     | 'The water has been drawn.'   |             |
|     |                       |               |             |     | Jalonke (Lüpke, elicitations) |             |

Far from being marginal deviations from more prototypical passives exhibiting passive morphology in form of verbal inflection or auxiliary constructions, passives of this kind are the norm for West-African Mande languages, and apparently also occur in the neighbouring Gur languages, both of the Niger-Congo phylum. Preliminary evidence points to the existence of similar constructions in a number of African languages of the Adamawa, Chadic, Bantu, and Berber subgroupings, and in some Creoles of African substratum. Out of Africa, an analysis of Manggarai (Austronesian/Indonesia) by ARKA & KOSMAS (2005), convincingly shows that there is a construction that qualifies for a proper passive despite the absence of morphological marking.

A decision how to call transitivity alternations conveying a passive interpretation without any morphological marking in the verb phrase ultimately goes beyond the terminological level, in that it depends on generally adopted definitions of a passive. As laid out in 2, most typologically oriented definitions of passives insist, for reasons that remain implicit in most cases, on the presence of morphological/periphrastic marking on the verb phrase as a necessary criterion for passive constructions. Yet, undeterred by the clash with the mainstream definition, the descriptions for a considerable number of African languages use the label passive for constructions without verbal marking. This terminological tradition seems to have gone by largely unnoticed by typologists and syntacticians, as the discrepancy is almost never discussed. This paper is motivated by the mismatch between the descriptive accounts on the one hand and the mainstream definitions for passives on the other hand, and suggests a more inclusive definition for the construction. To this end we present a detailed analysis of the Mande-type passives, which have so far remained in some sort of twilight zone, being called passives but not being recognised as such by typologists. We argue that the passive constructions in Mande languages constitute a distinct sub-type of passives, and discuss its syntactic and semantic properties in depth. In particular, we will present detailed data from the Mande languages Bambara (COBBINAH 2008), and a summary of the properties of this construction in the related language Jalonke.<sup>2</sup> In addition, we discuss data from a number of African languages that present evidence of zero-coded passives.

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<sup>2</sup> We refer the reader to LÜPKE (2005, 2007) for more detailed analyses of this Mande language.

We take the data from these languages as compelling evidence to show that morphologically unmarked passives, though certainly underrepresented in the well-documented European languages, occur in a considerable number of African languages, and in particular in languages that are predominantly isolating or are losing morphological distinctions. In line with their general lack of verbal morphology, these languages seem to favour the encoding of passives by syntactic means. We draw attention to these languages because of the importance of a broader data base for a truly typological discussion of voice phenomena, not just for terminological reasons, and would like to call for a new canonical typology for passive constructions taking zero-marked constructions into account. An inclusion of lesser documented, non-Indo-European languages in the process of theory building is an essential step in overcoming the Eurocentric bias still dominant in many areas of linguistic theory.

## 2. Typologically oriented definitions of the passive

Two influential catalogues of criteria are taken here to exemplify properties of passives that are commonly accepted by typologists and those that aren't. SHIBATANI'S (1985:837) list of characteristics is to be understood as the requirements for a passive prototype, and he is quite generous in accepting deviations from it, for instance impersonal constructions:

- i) Primary pragmatic function: agent defocusing
- ii) Semantic properties:
  - a) Semantic valence: predicate (agent, patient)
  - b) Subject is affected
- iii) Syntactic properties:
  - c) Encoding:       Agent → ∅ (not encoded)  
                          Patient → subject
- iv) Morphological properties:
  - Active = P
  - Passive = P [+passive]

The gist of this definition is shared by KEENAN and DRYER'S (2007) treatment of passives, in which they distinguish between basic and non-basic passives and, in line with Shibatani, define basic passives as lacking an agent phrase. This view is not shared by DIXON and AIKHENVALD (2000:4), whose catalogue is similar to Shibatani's but differs from it in one crucial point, an insistence on "some explicit formal marking generally by verbal affix or periphrastic verbal construction". The divergence between the two definitions reveals an important question that needs to be addressed when assessing and comparing them: whether they intend to present generalisations over a wide range of languages or whether they aim at developing a prototype or point of reference from which languages and/or constructions can diverge to a certain extent. Some other definitions even seem to combine both aims, in that they present prototypical definitions informed by typological studies of a large number of languages.

Although it initially may seem so, this discussion does not pertain exclusively to the terminological level. We agree with HASPELMATH (2007) in his analysis that pre-established categories do not exist, that typologically oriented labels for language-individual constructions should come with the warning that they are merely mnemonic labels that hide important differences if taken too literally, and that fine-grained descriptions of individual languages from a perspective that relies as little as possible on descriptive presuppositions are to be preferred over axiomatic uses of available cross-linguistic categories. Yet we believe that in the case of zero-coded passives, the functional parallels between them and the mainstream morphologically marked ones are too important and systematic to be swept aside as being exclusively of terminological relevance or as presenting a limited number of exotic cases. In addition, we believe that these constructions systematically occur in languages that have little verbal morphology, so that the absence of morphological marking for the passive is in line with the general paucity of morphological categories. Apart from the analysis of HASPELMATH (1990), who excludes the zero-coded passives on systematic grounds because for him "the basic function of the passive is to modify the situation expressed by the verb rather than to alter the prominence relations among a verb's participants" (HASPELMATH 1990:60), no other typologically-oriented framework explicitly motivates the insistence on morphological marking on the verb phrase. Since descriptive linguists turn to the typological literature in order to compare the language-individual constructions they encounter with categories attested in other languages, it is likely that they either use a convenient label despite crucial

differences in properties or that they avoid the available label because of discrepancies like the one that interests us, the presence of morphological marking. As a consequence, the diverging characteristics do not inform typologically-informed definitions because the deviating cases seem too marginal, and a perfect vicious circle is created. It seems to us that this is exactly the case criticised by HASPELMATH (2007) – an apparent typologically-oriented definition becomes in fact normative and hinders the development of a canon for the linguistic domain in question. After an inspection of candidates for zero-coded passives in African languages and beyond, we therefore join SIEWIERSKA and BAKKER (2009) in calling for the development of an exploratory canonical typology of the passive (cf. BOND 2009, CORBETT 2007, 2009) and make some preliminary suggestions to this end regarding the inclusion of passives without morphological marking. CORBETT (2007:8f.) describes the canonical approach to typology developed by him as one that “take[s] definitions to their logical end point and build[s] a theoretical space of possibilities”. When then studying how this space is populated, “[I]t follows that canonical instances, which are the best and clearest examples, those most closely matching the ‘canon’, may well not be the most frequent. They may indeed be extremely rare. However, they fix a point from which occurring phenomena can be calibrated.” (CORBETT 2007:9) When applying this approach to passives, at one extreme of the conceptual space lie constructions fulfilling all the criteria in, e.g. SHIBATANI’S catalogue above, and the other end of the scale is occupied by constructions where there is no morphological marking on the verb, no oblique Actor-phrase present, and only very few, if any morphosyntactic criteria allow determining that the Undergoer appears as the subject of the clause. As we will aim to demonstrate, such an approach offers the advantage of including constructions that are semantically and functionally very similar to passives into the conceptual space for this construction, and to account for divergences from the logical ‘canon’ for this domain in terms of distance from it – a framework very reminiscent to prototype theory, albeit stemming from generalisations of a very different nature.

### 3. The Bambara (Manding) passive

Bambara (or Bamanan, as it is called by the speakers), the lingua franca of Mali, belongs to a dialect continuum within Central Mande extending from the Atlantic coast in the west to the Côte d’Ivoire in the South and Burkina Faso in the East. Following KASTENHOLZ (1996) these languages will here be referred to as Manding languages and include among others the major languages Mandinka (Senegal, Gambia), Malinké (Guinea), Dioula (Côte d’Ivoire). Due to the structural similarities shared by these languages, including the patterns of passivisation through intransitive usage of transitive verbs, claims made for Bambara are also valid for other members of the Manding cluster.

Previous accounts of languages of the Manding cluster presented by linguists are overwhelmingly in favour of considering the construction in question a passive. VYDRINE (1994), CREISSELS (2007) and KONÉ (1984) use the term passive for describing the Bambara construction, as do FRIEDLÄNDER (1992) and GRÉGOIRE (1985) for Malinké and BRACONNIER (1993) for Dioula. DUMESTRE (2003) for Bambara and CREISSELS (2009) for Mandinka avoid the term passive, although they describe a construction with passive-like features (“Alternance de transitivité sans marque morphologique avec changement dans le rôle sémantique du sujet” (CREISSELS 2009:152))<sup>3</sup>. A rare case of explicit exclusion of a passive analysis is present in some older descriptive accounts by CREISSELS (CREISSELS 1991 concerning Bambara, and CREISSELS 1983 concerning Mandinka), but the already mentioned uses of the label passive in CREISSELS (2007) makes it apparent that Creissels changed his mind in favour of a passive analysis.<sup>4</sup> These statements are, however, in most cases not explicitly supported by detailed data, analyses and discussion of typological definitions. Therefore, neither the violation of the criterion of morphological marking nor the intriguing absence of Mande-type passives in the discussion of passive constructions in the typological literature (cf. DIXON & AIKHENVALD 2000, KEENAN & DRYER 2007, SIEWIERSKA 2005, SIEWIERSKA & BAKKER 2009) is explicitly addressed. The following section seeks to overcome this missing link between descriptive practices on the one hand and typological characterisations on the other hand by presenting a detailed account of the Bambara passive against a typological backdrop.

<sup>3</sup> “Transitivity alternation without morphological marking with change in thematic role of subject”

<sup>4</sup> The apparent repeated change of position in Creissels’ publication seems to reflect publication dates rather than an actual move away from his later analyses in favour of the passive.

### 3.1. The Bambara passive

An analysis of the Bambara passive hinges crucially on word order and the notion of transitivity in this Mande language. The word order of Bambara is extremely rigid, not allowing any deviations from the basic word order subject-auxiliary-(object)-verb-(oblique) typical for the entire Mande group. This word order is maintained even in case of relativisation and focusing. Relative pronouns are placed in-situ and focus constructions involve the use of a focus particle placed directly after the concerned element. Left- or right dislocation apart from topicalisation, where an anaphoric pronoun co-referential to the fronted constituent remains in situ, is not permitted. Since passivisation relies mainly on the validity of the categories transitive/intransitive and on the validity of grammatical relations, an introduction to these topics is necessary at this point. Bambara allows a fair amount of conversion - i.e. unmarked category change – between nouns and verbs and also between transitive and intransitive uses of verbs. These conversions can be analysed either as alternations or as valence lability. We follow the analysis that Bambara verbs belong to four main transitivity categories (based on VYDRINE 1994, 1995 and CREISSELS 2007), and that valence changes are best framed in terms of alternations between polysemous verbs of different argument structures. Such an approach reveals the following four large classes, of which we focus on the class of transitive verbs in the remainder of this section:

1. Purely intransitive: a small class of verbs, exclusively used in intransitive clauses, which includes some verbs of movement and communication (e.g. *kooro* ‘shout’) and which have to be morphologically derived in with the causative prefix *la-* in order to appear in transitive clauses.
2. Primarily intransitive: a large class of verbs which usually occur in intransitive clauses but undergo the “limitative alternation” (*boli* itr. ‘run’/tr. ‘run (a distance)’). This alternation is quite restricted in productivity and only occurs with verbs of directed motion or temporal duration.
3. Versatile: a small group of verbs, equally used in transitive and intransitive constructions. These are mainly causative/inchoative verbs (e.g. *fa* itr. ‘fill up’/tr. ‘fill’) and a series of minor non-productive alternations.
4. Reflexive verbs: the object slot is occupied by a reflexive pronoun, which makes the construction syntactically transitive, although only one participant is involved (e.g. *i sigi* ‘sit down’).
5. Purely transitive: a large class of verbs, which appear in transitive clauses with an active reading, and in intransitive clauses with a passive reading. These verbs are analyzed as participating in the passive alternation.

When a transitive verb appears in an intransitive clause, this clause invariably has a passive reading. The single argument occupying the subject slot is the Undergoer; the Actor remains either unexpressed or appears in an oblique postpositional phrase after the verb. In the following example, we see that the object of the transitive clause (3) *ɲɔ* ‘millet’) is promoted to subject position in the corresponding passive clause (4), while the former subject, the Actor, here the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronoun *ù*, is either deleted or optionally expressed in the postpositional phrase *ù fɛ* ‘by them’. Apart from the empty object slot and argument remapping, no other overt indication of a passivisation is apparent in the present tense. An intransitive use of a transitive verb is only possible in constructions involving nominalisations, as in (5) and (6).

- (3) *Ù bɛ ɲɔ dan.*  
 3PL PRES millet sow  
 ‘They sow millet.’  
 Bambara (Cobbinah, elicitations)
- (4) *ɲɔ bɛ dan (u fɛ).*  
 millett PRES sow (3PL PP)  
 ‘Millet is sown (by them).’ but: \* ‘Millet sows.’  
 Bambara (Cobbinah, elicitations)
- (5) *N bɛ dɔ̀n-ni kɛ.*  
 1SGSG PRES sow-NOM do  
 ‘I am sowing.’ (lit. “I do the sowing”)

- (6) *N bε dān-ni na/kān*  
 1SG PRES sow-NOM on/at  
 'I am sowing.' (lit. 'I am at the sowing')  
 Bambara (Cobbinah, elicitations)

A major requirement for a passive analysis is the syntactic intransitivity of the passive clause. Fortunately, Bambara provides us with two simple tools to check for formal intransitivity: the perfect markers are sensitive to transitivity. The auxiliaries or predicate markers *ye* (affirmative) and *ma* (negative) are exclusively used in transitive clauses (see (8)) and the suffix *-ra~la~na* is exclusively used in intransitive clauses (see 7). We would expect the passive to be compatible only with the intransitive allomorph, which is confirmed in (9). A combination with the transitive allomorph of the perfect marker is ungrammatical (10). In accordance with the passive criteria established previously, a passive in Bambara is syntactically intransitive, although semantically transitive, as evidenced through the possibility of an Actor by-phrase (cf. (4) above) for all passive clauses.

- (7) *N taga-ra.*  
 1SGSG go-PERF:ITR  
 'I went.'
- (8) *À ye n fô.*  
 3SG PERF:TR 1SG greet  
 'He greeted me.'
- (9) *N fô-ra.*  
 1SGSG greet-PERF:ITR  
 'I was greeted.'
- (10) *\*N ye fô.*  
 1SG PERF:TR greet  
 '\*I was greeted.'  
 Bambara (Cobbinah, elicitations)

The Bambara passive is highly productive (see CREISSELS 2007:15): every transitive verb can appear in an intransitive passive clause. This also holds for causativised verbs as well as for the transitive counterparts of any of the available transitivity alternations. Ambiguities can be resolved by adding a postpositional Actor phrase. We still need to prove that the participants of a passive clause are remapped to grammatical relations in relation to the active clause, instead of just being omitted. In this respect, the order of auxiliaries offers the necessary evidence to analyse a clause as in (4), where no perfect marker signals intransitivity, as a passive clause with an Undergoer subject rather than a clause with an ellipsed subject. Here, the position of the predicate marker or auxiliary provides the necessary diagnostic: if we were dealing with a clause with an omitted subject, the auxiliary should precede the object. Hence, we can safely conclude that the single participant of a clause like (4), even in the absence of an Actor by-phrase, is a subject.

### 3.2. Conclusion on the Manding passive

The passive alternations observed in the Manding languages and here presented on the example of Bambara do fulfil all commonly used passive criteria, except for the presence of morphological marking. They are examples of highly grammaticalised passive constructions that are well integrated into the syntax. By this we mean that the interpretation of a clause as passive is

- I. unambiguous with regard to an active reading;
- II. independent of semantic features of the participants, such as animacy;
- III. independent of pragmatic parameters such as context;
- IV. highly productive;
- V. formally intransitive.

Furthermore, the majority of grammatical accounts of Manding languages seem to agree in that the constructions under discussion are best described as passives, while no other satisfying analysis has been presented so far (see COBBINAH 2008).

### 3.3 A brief excursion on the Jalonke passive

The Jalonke passive has been discussed in great depth in LÜPKE (2005, 2007). Therefore, only a brief recapitulation of the major properties of the Jalonke construction will be offered here. Some of the diagnostics used for Bambara are not applicable to Jalonke, since there is no formal morphological difference distinguishing between transitive and intransitive uses of lexically transitive verbs, analogous to the different perfect markers in Bambara. There is also no possibility for the Actor to be overtly encoded in a postpositional phrase, leaving semantic tests as the only diagnostic to reveal the semantic valence of passive clauses as including an Actor and an Undergoer, as exemplified in (11). The possibility of the clause ‘Somebody Xed it’ and the ungrammaticality of the clause ‘It Xed by itself’ reveal the semantic transitivity of intransitive clauses featuring transitive verbs in Jalonke and distinguish them from the inchoative uses of the small class of verbs participating in the causative/inchoative alternation exemplified in (12). The intransitive use of these verbs is ambiguous with an inchoative AND a passive interpretation, as evidenced through the acceptability of both ‘Somebody Xed it’ and ‘It Xed by itself’ in the absence of a clarifying real-world context. However, this alternation is only recorded for 12 Jalonke verbs, and the only other attested transitivity alternation (the unexpressed object alternation) only for 5 verbs. This makes the Jalonke passive even more productive than the Bambara construction: potential ambiguities between an active and a passive reading are virtually non-existent.

- (11) *Jee-na*            *baa*    (!*Muxi nda*    *a*        *baa. / \*A*        *ba*        *a*        *kantigi.*)  
 Water-DEF        draw    (person some 3SG    draw/ 3SG    draw    3SG    owner)  
 ‘The water has been drawn.’ (!Somebody drew it./ \*It drew by itself.)

- (12) *Tas-εε*            *birā.*    (!*Muxi nda*    *a*        *birā. / !A*        *birā*        *a*        *kantigi.*)  
 cup-DEF            fall    (person some 3SG    fall/ 3SG    fall        3SG    owner)  
 ‘The cup fell/was dropped.’ (!Somebody dropped it./ !It fell by itself.)  
 Jalonke (Lüpke, elicitations)

Furthermore, in Jalonke all available syntactic criteria – difference to topicalisation, difference to mere argument ellipsis – point to parallels to passives. The overall evidence leads us to analyse the transitivity alternations observable in Jalonke as passives. Due to structural differences between Jalonke and Bambara, the unmarked passives in these languages do not have exactly the same properties, making the Jalonke construction appear less grammaticalised than the Manding passive. What they do have in common is the obligatory passive interpretation of an intransitive clause featuring a transitive verb, which always holds independently of semantic characteristics of the participants and the pragmatic context (except for the five verbs participating in the unexpressed object alternation) as well as its high productivity. For Jalonke, frequency data that demonstrate that the active is the unmarked, the passive the marked diathesis, as expected, are also available – only 11% of transitive verb tokens in a quantitative sample occur in the passive, it is only attested for 54% of the transitive verb types in the same sample, and 90% of the instances of transitive verb types are in the active voice. At the same time, the passive is unevenly distributed over discourse genres, with planned genres having more passives than unplanned ones (for details, see LÜPKE 2005:349-407).

## 4. Passives without passive morphology in other languages

Zero-coded passives are certainly best documented for Mande languages, but are by no means restricted to this branch of Niger-Congo. We will provide examples with similar properties from several Gur languages, where they are almost as frequently found as in Mande; the most detailed analysis is provided for Supyire (CARLSON 1997, 2000) and the related languages Ditammari, Kaansa, and Byali (REINEKE & MIEHE 2005). A closer look will probably reveal similar findings for Kabiye (LÉBIKAZA 1998) and Nawdm (NICOLE 2000). In addition, there are several candidates for zero-coded passives from Chadic (KERA, EBERT 1979), Adamawa (MUNDANG, ELDERS 2000), Coptic (PLISCH 1999), Bantu (MBUUN, BOSTOEN & MUNDEKE 2011) and possibly Berber languages (AXEL FLEISCH, p.c.), although again more data on these languages and specifically on passives will certainly be conducive to a better categorisation of these cases. At a universal level, constructions of this kind have been shown to occur in the Austronesian language Manggarai (ARKA & KOSMAS 2002) as well as in Caribbean Creoles (WINFORD 1993, ALLSOPP 1983) and Brazilian Portuguese (NEGRÃO & VIOTTI 2006, 2008). In the case of

the latter two languages, an influence from an African substratum is claimed, in particular by Winford for the Caribbean Creoles, for which he looks at Mande languages as a possible substrate influence. In the following sections, we present data from these languages in order to corroborate our claim that zero-coded passives are not as rare and marginal as they may seem.

#### 4.1. Gur

The Gur languages are spoken throughout the central and eastern part of the Sahel region, covering parts of Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo, Ghana and Benin. The area is directly adjacent to the Mande speaking areas with partly overlap in southern Mali and Burkina Faso, where both Mande and Gur languages are spoken side by side. This is the case for Supyire, a Senoufo language found in the Sikasso area of Mali, where Bambara is used as a lingua franca. The argument structure patterns in Supyire involving passivisation through deletion of the Actor-subject and promotion of the Undergoer-object, seem to be very similar to those found in Central Mande languages. It must remain open at this point whether or not the zero-coded passive is an areal feature which entered Gur through contact with Mande languages, via lexical borrowing of verbs together with their argument structure properties or through more abstract pattern borrowing. This would definitely constitute an interesting line of enquiry.

Structurally, Supyire shares the peculiar and very rigid word order “subject – auxiliary – object – verb – oblique” with Bambara and other Mande languages. Here again, the vacation of the Object slot triggers the passivisation of the clause through remapping of the transitive object to Undergoer-subject (see (13) and (14)). This operation is highly productive: “[V]irtually any verb which can be put into a transitive clause, can be put into an intransitive passive” (CARLSON 2000:54).

(13) *ŋùùr' à v à à ñ ŋ k e k w ò ñ .*  
 Nguuro PERF cloth:DEF cut  
 ‘Nguuro cut the cloth’

(14) *V à à ñ ŋ k' à k w ò ñ .*  
 cloth:DEF PERF cut  
 ‘The cloth was cut.’  
 Supyire (CARLSON 1997:27)

Interestingly, pre-publication drafts of KEENAN and DRYER (2007), but not the published version of their article on passives discuss the Supyire construction, which Carlson does not hesitate to call a passive, as a functional equivalent to basic passives and leave open whether such a construction should be analysed as “some kind of morphologically degenerate passive in which the verb is not distinctively marked” (KEENAN & DRYER 2006:330). A very thorough analysis of zero-coded-passives found in the three related languages Ditammari, Kaansa and Byali is available in REINEKE and MIEHE (2005). Again, the authors stress the parallelism to the passives in Mande languages: “In contrast to other Niger-Congo languages (...), Gur and Mande developed a different formative principle which does not necessitate morphological changes to the verbal form in question, but is based on the presence or the suppression of the second argument of a ‘transitive’ verb. It is this type of valency change which enables the languages to express change of voice” (REINEKE & MIEHE 2005:337). Compare the transitive active phrase of the verb ‘sweep’ in (15) to its intransitive passive equivalent in (16):

(15) *ō k ò ò t ā k ū t ō ō k ū*  
 CLS sweep CL room-CL  
 ‘He/she sweeps the room.’

(16) *k ū t ō ō - k u k ò ò t a*  
 CL room-CL sweep  
 ‘The room is/has been swept.’  
 Ditammari (REINEKE & MIEHE 2005:341)

The basic pattern in these three languages is similar to what we have seen in Supyire and Mande generally. Nonetheless, the conditions and restrictions for a possibility of a passive interpretation are

more complex in most Gur languages than in the aforementioned languages. At the semantic level, animacy plays an important role in that the presence of animate subjects in an intransitive clause is not compatible with a passive interpretation. At the syntactic level, all three languages analysed by Reineke and Mieke are shown to have two large verb classes, where verbs in one class undergo the unexpressed object alternation, i.e. do not passivise, whereas verbs of the other class undergo the passive alternation. The distribution of verbs in the classes is language-specific. The variations found between Ditammari, Byali and Kansa and the differences to Supyire are suggestive of different degrees of grammaticalisation and might give valuable clues as to how these structures have developed. We will elaborate this notion more profoundly in section 5 of this paper.

#### 4.2. Carribbean English Creole

Mention of passives without morphological marking in Caribbean Creoles is made in passing in BORETZKY (1983) and VOORHOEVE (1957). More detailed examples and some analysis are provided in ALLSOPP (1983) and especially WINFORD (1993). The latter also clearly mentions their similarity to prototypical passives (WINFORD 1993:152) and differentiates them from inchoative and anticausative constructions. Winford also notes the similarity with passives in Mande languages, next to Benue-Kwa languages the most important substrate for Carribbean English Creole. The following two examples show active and passive uses of the verb ‘mash’.

(17) *Jan mash di eg-dem.*  
‘John mashed the eggs.’

(18) *Di eg-dem mash.*  
‘The eggs have been mashed.’  
CEC (WINFORD 1993:119)

ALLSOPP (1983) quotes further examples of passive alternations from Jamaican Creole and Sranan, where these patterns seem to be productive. As in some of the Gur languages, animacy is apparently relevant in the passive interpretation for Sranan. Animate subjects are more likely to be interpreted as the Actor of a verb appearing in the unexpressed object alternation as in (19), whereas inanimate subjects are more likely to be interpreted as Undergoer subjects of a passive clause (see 20).

(19) *yu no kan bow dape*  
2SG NEG can build there  
‘You cannot build there.’

(20) *a oso no kan bow dape*  
ART house NEG can build there  
‘The house cannot be built there.’  
Sranan (ALLSOPP 1983:144)

#### 4.3. Other examples

The Adamawa languages Mundang (ELDERS 2000:314) and Ngbaka (HENRIX ET AL. 2007:79), as well as the Chadic language Kera (EBERT 1979:211) are reported to make use of valence-changing transitivity alternations, which might in some cases qualify for zero-coded as passives (see (21) and (22)).

(21) *hwál zà-nì*  
millet:gruel cook-NV  
‘The millet gruel cooks.’

(22) *mí zà hwáli.*  
woman cook millet:gruel  
‘The woman cooks the millet gruel.’  
Mundang (ELDERS 2000:315)

Elders proposes a new thematic role, that of Patientive, for the subject of a clause like (21). In light of the limited amount of data and the semantic and syntactic properties of the verbs appearing in his examples, it is impossible to judge whether a passive analysis is likely or whether we are dealing with alternations of a different type – the causative/inchoative alternation or a middle construction seems equally plausible for (21).

Passive alternations are documented for the extinct Coptic language, generally referred to as “ingressive” in most publications. Dynamic transitive verbs are ambiguous between a passive and an unexpressed object alternation when the object is left unmentioned. The data on this topic are not too abundant but it should be noted that the reference grammars of both LAYTON (2004) and PLISCH (1999) refer to the ingressive as passive (see (23) and its ingressive/passive counterpart in (24)).

(23) *tše a -p -noute tšok -f ebol n -neu -šêre.*  
 thus PERF-ART-god fulfil:STPR-3SGO PART DAT-3PLPOSS-child  
 ‘Thus god fulfilled it for their children.’

(24) *alla ntetn -tšôk ebol hm pe -pneuma.*  
 but CONJ:2PL-fulfil:STABS PART by ART-spirit  
 ‘(...) but be filled by the spirit.’  
 Coptic (PLISCH 1999:36)

BOSTOEN and MUNDEKE (2011) describe a number of morphologically zero-coded constructions that are functionally and semantically equivalent to passives for the Bantu language Mbuun (B87) spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These constructions exist alongside several morphologically marked passive constructions and can be situated on a cline regarding the grammatical relation of the Undergoer. In some constructions, it is clearly a pre-posed object, as evidenced through object agreement on the verb. However, they also find that “there are contexts indeed in which the pre-posed object in Mbuun does not behave as a prototypical topic, but seems to have properties which are rather reminiscent of a subject” (see BOSTOEN & MUNDEKE 2011 for a detailed discussion involving a battery of diagnostics). For our purposes, one example shall suffice, with an active clause and its counterpart given in (25) and (26). For the indefinite and unspecific NP in preverbal position in (26) they argue that at least regarding some properties, it may be analysed as a passive subject rather than as a topicalised object.

(25) *ntáám ká-dzu-i ndaam á-nsa*  
 lion SM<sub>1</sub>-kill-PRF some NP<sub>2</sub>-antelope  
 ‘The lion has killed some antelopes.’  
 Mbuun (BOSTOEN & MUNDEKE 2011:89)

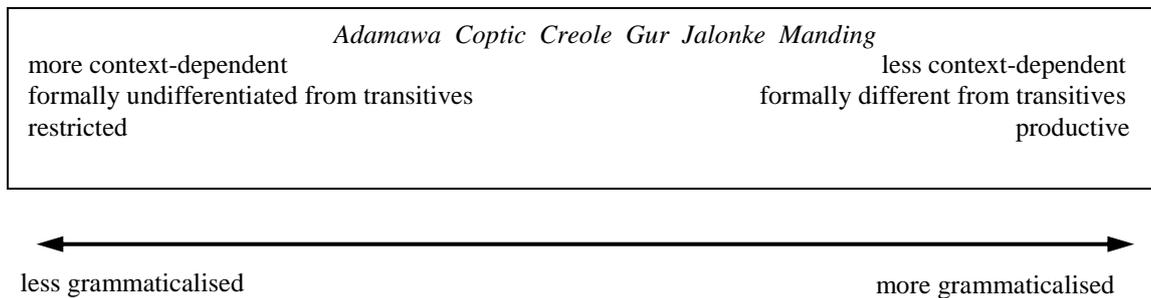
(26) *ndaam á-nsa ntáám ká-(ba-)dzu-i*  
 some NP<sub>2</sub>-antelope lion SM<sub>1</sub>-(OM<sub>2</sub>-) kill-PRF  
 ‘Some antelopes have been killed by the lion.’  
 Mbuun (BOSTOEN & MUNDEKE 2011:89)

Finally, in recent analyses of the passive alternations in Brazilian Portuguese, NEGRÃO and VIOTTI (2006, 2008) claim these constructions to be the indirect result of language contact with African Bantu languages during the slave trade showing similar features. Zero-coded passives appear to be quite widely used in Brazilian Portuguese, though interestingly absent in European Portuguese.

## 5. Conclusion

The zero-coded passives presented in this paper have in common that transitivity alternations are employed for a reversal of voice-orientation equivalent to morphologically marked passives in other languages. The languages differ greatly however, in the degree of integration into the syntax, thus occupying different points in relation to canonical passives. We suggest to analyse these differences in terms of degree of grammaticalisation. Our analysis regarding these highly productive, well-integrated alternations in Bambara and Manding languages confirm their status as proper passives. The passive of the related language Jalonke appears already less integrated into the syntax, hence slightly less

grammaticalised. In the case of the other languages, we are not able to offer any final statements in light of the paucity of data, though it seems that some of them are considerably less grammaticalised and therefore much more depending on non-syntactic parameters, being also less productive and more ambiguous than their Mande counterparts:



When we started our investigation of the passive constructions of two Mande languages, Bambara and Jalonke, we thought that we were dealing with a phenomenon that was rare at a global level and for this reason largely invisible to typologists. Since then, without conducting a ‘proper’ typological study of zero-coded passives, we have found examples from numerous related and unrelated languages, and more are added at every occasion we present this topic to other linguists. This finding motivates us to draw the phenomenon of passive constructions that do not operate through morphological marking in the verb phrase to the attention of other descriptive linguists and typologists. This paper does not aim to achieve a new typologically-informed definition of the passive. Rather, its goal is to present preliminary data that point out the insufficiency of the available cross-linguistic definitions and to call for more empirical data that part from a functional domain (the conceptual space for passives, in line with a canonical approach) and investigate the formal ways and variations of expressing it. In light of the variation attested, we consider the passive domain as an excellent case for the development of a canonical approach (cf. BOND 2009, CORBETT 2007, 2009, SIEWIERSKA & BAKKER 2009). We tentatively propose to include the presence of morphological marking in the canon or foundational base for the category passive, as an abstract and ideal base not drawn from an inspection of linguistic properties of a construction (and in fact rarely, if ever, instantiated in a real language) but as a logical abstraction that serves as a reference point to calibrate deviations from it. Thus, the presence of verbal morphology in a passive should be included in the canon, as it creates maximal distinctiveness to the active. The absence of morphological marking, rather than ruling out the membership of the construction in question, then would merely be noted as one difference with respect to a logical reference point. Consequently, zero-coded passives should be recognised as non-canonical passives.

### Abbreviations used in the text

Abbreviations were taken from the sources and translated into English where necessary.

1,2,3	1st, 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> person	PART	particle
ART	Article	PERF	perfect
CL	noun class	PL	plural
CLS	class marker subject	POSS	Possessive marker
CONJ	Conjunctive	PP	postposition
DEF	definite marker	PRF	perfect
ITR	intransitive	PRES	present tense
NEG	negation marker	S	subject
NOM	nominaliser	SGSG	singular
NP <sub>2</sub>	nominal prefix class 2	SM <sub>1</sub>	subject marker class 1
NV	nounverb	STABS	status absolutus
O	object	STPR	status pronominalis
OM <sub>2</sub>	object marker class 2	Tr	transitive

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