

# Argument structure and agency in Bemba passives\*

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## *Abstract*

Bemba employs two passive constructions: an older one with verbal extension *-w-* and a more recent construction involving the class 2 subject marker *ba-*. We argue that *ba-* is ambiguous between an ordinary, referential class 2 marker, and an underspecified passive marker, and is disambiguated by the overt encoding of a class 2 subject, or an oblique semantic agent phrase. Under the passive interpretation, the semantic patient displays both subject-like and object-like properties, posing a problem for the analysis of argument structure in these constructions, and of subjects and objects in Bantu. In contrast, the *-w-* passive extension is increasingly used in contexts where the agent cannot be expressed, but also in combination with the neutro-passive extension *-ik-*, that is, with predicates with reduced valency, where it licenses the expression of an agent oblique phrase. We argue that the *ba-* passive is used in more typical passive contexts, while the *-w-* passive becomes increasingly restricted to more marginal grammatical contexts. The paper shows that both passive constructions are taking part in a wider grammaticalization process, in which two main functions of the passive, change of argument structure and encoding of agency, are becoming dissociated.

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary Bemba is undergoing a grammaticalization process of the passive construction and as a result employs two passive constructions. On the one hand, the common verbal extension *-w-* derived from Proto Bantu *\*-u-* is used, while on the other, a more recent construction involving the class 2 subject marker *ba-* is used. This paper discusses both passive constructions in some detail, and investigates how the two are related to each other. We will argue that in the *ba-* passive construction, the subject marker *ba-* is underspecified, allowing for an interpretation as ‘unspecified agent’,

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which may be identified with any overtly expressed agent if present. This means that the status of the subject marker is ambiguous between an ordinary, referential class 2 marker, and an underspecified passive marker. The construction can be disambiguated by the overt encoding of a class 2 subject, or an oblique phrase expressing the semantic agent. We will further show that under the passive interpretation, the semantic patient argument displays both subject-like and object-like properties, thus posing a problem for the analysis of argument structure in these constructions, and for the definition of subjects and objects in Bantu.

The historically older *-w-* passive extension is increasingly used in contexts where the agent argument cannot be expressed, but also, on the other hand, in contexts where it can be combined with the neutro-passive extension *-ik-*, that is, with predicates with reduced valency, where it functions to license the expression of a specific agent in an oblique phrase. We argue that the *ba-* passive is used in more typical passive contexts, while the use of the *-w-* passive becomes increasingly restricted to more marginal grammatical contexts. The paper thus shows that both passive constructions are taking part in a wider grammaticalization process, in which two main functions of the passive, the change of argument structure and the encoding of agency, are becoming dissociated. The paper proceeds as follows; §2 gives a short overview of the use of passives and neutro-passives in Bantu; §3 presents an introductory discussion of the *ba-* passive; §4 looks in more detail at the argument structure of *ba-* passives, §5 presents further evidence from double object constructions and locative complements; §6 compares the *ba-* passive with the *-w-* passive and discusses the interaction of the *-w-* passive with the neutro-passive in Bemba and §7 offers some concluding remarks.

## 2. Passive coding in Bantu

The passive is typically understood as a construction by which the subject of an active clause is demoted to an oblique or remains unexpressed, while the object is promoted to subject status (see Shibatani 1985, Keenan 1985, Siewierska 1984, 2005 for detailed studies also covering less typical passives). This can be illustrated by the Swahili data in (1) where addition of the passive suffix to the verb changes the argument structure of the verb.

- (1) a. Juma a-li-andik-a barua hii  
 1.Juma SC1-PAST-write-FV 9.letter DEM.9  
 ‘Juma wrote this letter.’
- b. barua hii i-li-andik-w-a na Juma  
 9.letter 9.DEM SC9-PAST-write-PASS-FV by 1.Juma  
 ‘This letter was written by Juma.’

As seen in (1) the object *barua* in (1a) is promoted to subject status where it now controls agreement on the verb in (1b). The agent can remain unexpressed in the passive, or as in the case in (1b) be expressed by the oblique phrase *na Juma*. In terms of its pragmatic function, the passive is prototypically used for agent suppression or demotopicalization.

The neutro-passive can be contrasted with the passive with regard to the demoted subject. In this case the subject must remain unexpressed as the example in (2) shows.

- (2) a. Juma a-li-siki-a ngoma  
 1.Juma SC1-PAST-hear-FV 9.drum  
 ‘Juma heard the drum.’
- b. ngoma i-li-sik-ik-a kwa mbali  
 9.drum SC9-PAST-hear-NEUT-FV from far  
 ‘The drum was audible from afar.’
- c. \*ngoma i-li-sik-ik-a kwa mbali na Juma  
 9.drum SC9-PAST-hear- NEUT-FV from far by 1.Juma  
 Intd.: ‘The drum was audible from afar by Juma.’

As shown in (2c) the presence of the agent in an oblique in a neutro-passive is normally ungrammatical.

The passive suffix *-w-* seen in the Swahili examples in (1) and its various other forms across Bantu (for example, *-iw-*, *-ibw-*) have been argued to be reflexes of a reconstructed Proto-Bantu passive extension *\*-u-*. (Meeussen 1967), or of two reconstructed allomorphs *\*-u-* and *\*-i-u-* (Stappers 1967). The absence of a *-w-* passive morpheme in a number of Bantu languages has been noted by several scholars (see e.g. Stappers 1967, 140, Schadeberg 2003, 79), and has been interpreted as a historical loss (sometimes based on lexical traces of *-w-*), which often co-occurs with the development of a new passive-like construction based on the class 2 subject marker (often expressed by *ba-*). This construction, which typically involves fronting of the object and demotion of the subject to an oblique while using the class 2 subject marker on the verb, has been subject to several analyses. Givón (1979) suggests for Kimbundu that the fronted constituent is the subject of the clause and the class 2 subject prefix is frozen. Similarly, Haspelmath (1990) argues that the class 2 subject prefix loses its participant status and consequently the fronted noun phrase becomes the subject of the clause. In contrast, Kawasha (2007) proposes that the class 2 subject prefix in Lunda is neither frozen nor does it lose its participant status, rather it retains a close relation with the agent argument of the sentence, as both belong to the human classes.<sup>1</sup>

Against these previous analyses, the situation in Bemba provides further relevant evidence. In the Bantu languages previously analysed, the passive based on the class 2 subject prefix provides the only option for passivization. In contrast, in Bemba both a *-w-* passive and a *ba-* passive are found. In terms of analysis, we will show that the theme argument in Bemba *ba-* passives behaves like a syntactic object in some contexts, but as a syntactic subject in others. The status of the construction as syntactically active or passive, and of the *ba-* prefix as a subject marker or passive marker, can thus be seen as indeterminate, providing a snapshot of an intermediate stage in the grammaticalization process. We discuss the *ba-* construction, and its relation to the *-w-* construction in more detail in the following sections.

### 3. Passivization with *ba-*

Passive constructions with the class 2 subject marker are found in a number of Bantu languages, many of which are found in Guthrie’s zones L, M and N, including Kimbundu, Kwangali, Pogoro (Stappers 1967), Kimbundu (Givón 1979), and Lunda

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<sup>1</sup> As we will see in following examples, this does not hold for Bemba where there is no restriction on the class of the agent.

(Kawasha 1990). In Bemba, the construction, which exists alongside passive constructions with *-w-*, is formed with the class 2 subject marker *ba-*. In the *ba-* passive construction in Bemba, the active clause subject, as in typical passives, is demoted to an oblique position introduced by a preposition or remains unexpressed. The preferred preposition to introduce agents is *ku-/kuli-* ‘by’, while *na* ‘by/with’ is more frequent with instruments. The prepositions *ku-/kuli* are probably grammaticalized forms of the class 17 locative concord *ku-* and the copula *li* (cf. Schadeberg 2003, 79).<sup>2</sup> While their exact use needs to be further investigated, they tend to differ in that *kuli* is used with proper names and pronouns, while *ku-* is used elsewhere. The peculiarity of the *ba-* construction is that neither the non-agent argument nor the agent agrees with the subject maker: *ba-* passives appear on the surface like active transitive clauses, where the non-agent argument is not promoted to grammatical subject but retains its grammatical function, and without any overt passive morphology.<sup>3</sup> Let us now consider the main characteristics of the *ba-* passive in the following sets of data. (3a) is the active sentence contrasting with the corresponding passive.

- (3) a. abá-àna bá-alí-poos-a ífy-ákulya  
 2-children SC2-PAST-throw-FV 7-food  
 ‘The children threw the food away.’
- b. bá-alí-poos-a ífy-ákulya (ku bá-ána)  
 SC2-PAST-throw-FV 7-food by 2-children  
 ‘The food was thrown away by the children.’
- c. ify-ákulya bá-alí-poos-a ku bá-ána  
 7-food SC2-PAST-throw-FV by 2-children  
 ‘The food was thrown away by the children.’
- d. \*ify-ákulya fí-alí-poos-a ku bá-ána  
 7-food SC7-PAST-throw-FV by 2-children  
 ‘The food it was thrown away by the children.’
- e. (ifyákulya) bá-alí-fí-poos-a ku bá-ána  
 7-food SC2-PAST-OC7-throw-FV by 2-children  
 ‘The food it was thrown away by the children.’
- f. bá-alí-poos-a ífy-ákulya  
 SC2-PAST-throw-FV 7-food  
 ‘They threw the food away.’ or ‘The food was thrown away.’

As shown in the *ba-* construction expressing the passive in (3b), the theme argument is not clearly promoted to subject position: It remains in situ in post-verbal position and fails to trigger agreement with the verb, even when it is fronted (3c). As can be seen in (3b) there is no overt passive morphology on the verb despite the passive interpretation. The agent argument on the other hand can remain unexpressed or be expressed in an oblique indicating that it has been demoted. The theme argument in the passive *ba-* construction exhibits object properties and can be topicalized as in (3c) or be expressed

<sup>2</sup> The distribution of *ku-* and *kuli-*, and their historical sources in Bemba merit further investigation, but we will assume in this paper that the forms serve like *na* to introduce an agent argument. Note that the augment or pre-prefix of the noun following *ku-* is dropped.

<sup>3</sup> The *ba-* could of course be interpreted as a passive marker but as the unfolding data reveal this may not be such a straightforward option. We will take up this question below.

by an object marker in which case the object is dislocated or can remain unexpressed as (3e) shows. Finally note that, as (3f) shows, in the absence of an overt agent, either coded as subject as in (3a) or as oblique as in (3b, c and e), two interpretations are possible: one where the subject marker is taken as referential, referring to a specific agent inferable from the context, and another one where no specific agent is implied or inferable, corresponding to a passive-like translation.

From the examples in (3), it is clear that the agent argument is not the grammatical subject of the *ba-* passive clause, as it is encoded as an oblique phrase. Furthermore, as the examples in (4) show, the agent NP does not agree with the subject marker.

- (4) a. bá-alí-ly-a                      ífy-ákulya (ku mu-mbúlu)  
 SC2-PAST-eat-FV    7-food            by 3-wild.dog  
 ‘The food was eaten by the wild dog.’
- b. bá-alí-tób-a                      ibééndé      ku cii-mu-ti  
 SC2-PAST-break-FV      9.bowl            by 7-3-tree  
 ‘The pounding mortar was broken by the tree.’

In (4a) the class 3 noun *umumbulu* is the agent but does not agree with the subject marker used. (4b) illustrates that animacy is also not an essential factor as an inanimate agent, under an appropriate scenario, can also be used.

In terms of word-order, there seems to be no preference for fronted versus non-fronted objects in the construction, and the specific position of the object appears to be subject to the same (contextual-pragmatic) constraints as objects in ordinary transitive clauses. However, there is a difference between ordinary objects and objects in *ba-* passives. For ordinary objects in Bemba, the use of a co-referential object marker is in most contexts syntactically optional, and often not possible (Marten et al. 2007). While this is true for non-animate objects of *ba-* passives as well, animate objects require an object marker when not in post-verbal position.

- (5) a. umw-ààna bá-alí-mu-ít-a                      ku    mu-mbúlu  
 1-child      SC2-PAST-OC1-call-FV    by    3-wild.dog  
 ‘The child was called by the wild dog.’
- b. \*umw-ààna    bá-alí-ít-a                      ku    mu-mbúlu  
 1-child            SC2-PAST-call-FV    by    3-wild.dog
- c. bá-alí-it-a                      umw-ààna    ku    mu-mbúlu  
 SC2-PAST-call-FV    1-child            by    3-wild.dog  
 ‘The child was called by the wild dog.’
- (6) a. Ify-ákulya bá-alí-shitish-a                      (ku    mu-mbúlu)  
 8-food      SC2-PAST-sell-FV    by    3-wild.dog  
 ‘The food was sold by the wild dog.’
- b. In-sápátó    bá-alí-shitish-a                      (ku    mu-mbúlu)  
 10-shoes    SC2-PAST-sell-FV    by    3-wild.dog  
 ‘The shoes were sold by the wild dog.’

The example in (5a) contrasts with (6) in that while the animate object must co-occur with the object marker *mu-*, the inanimates in (6a-b) have no such requirement and are

in fact less preferable with the object marker. (5c) shows that the requirement for the object marker only holds when the object is fronted.

In summary then the *ba-* construction can be characterised as expressing the passive by the demotion of the subject to an oblique and use of the class 2 subject marker regardless of the class or animacy of the object. The object does not appear to be promoted to subject status, and does not show agreement with the subject marker. However, when further syntactic contexts are taken into consideration, the status of the theme argument, and of the subject marker, are seen to be more complicated than it would appear, as we will show in the following section.

#### 4. Argument structure in *ba-* passives

In this section we will show that despite surface appearances, the status of the non-agent argument in *ba-* passive constructions is grammatically intermediate, behaving as a grammatical object in some ways, but as a grammatical subject in others. We will start by looking at contexts which show object-like behaviour, and then look at those which show subject-like behaviour.

As already seen above, the theme argument in *ba-* passives does not agree with the subject marker, but shows agreement with the object marker, which in some cases – left-dislocated animate NPs – is obligatory. In terms of agreement, then, the theme argument in *ba-* passives behaves as a grammatical object. Further evidence for the object status of the theme argument comes from question formation. In Bemba, like in many Bantu languages, generally NPs can be questioned in-situ or through clefting. However, subjects can only be questioned by clefting, and cannot be questioned in-situ, irrespective whether they are pre-verbal or post-verbal.

- (7) a. ni-ínshi y-a-pon-ene?  
COP-what SC9-PAST-fall-PERF  
'It is what that fell down?'
- b. \*ínshi y-a-pon-ene?  
what SC9-PAST-fall-PERF  
Intd.: 'What fell down?'
- c. \*y-a-pon-ene ínshi?  
SC9-PAST-fall-PERF what  
Intd.: 'What fell down?'

In contrast, theme arguments in *ba-* passives can be questioned both in-situ (8a) or by clefting (8b), thus confirming their status as grammatical objects:

- (8) a. bá-pépeék-é ínshi ku mu-mbúulu  
SC2-chase-PERF what by 3-wild.dog  
'What was chased by the wild dog?'
- b. ni-ínshi bá-pépeék-é ku mu-mbúulu?  
COP-what SC2-chase-PERF by 3-wild.dog  
'It is what that was chased by the wild dog?'

Thus, so far, the theme argument in *ba-* passives behaves as a grammatical object, consistent with the assumption that *ba-* passives are syntactically active transitive clauses. However, there are two contexts in which this is not quite so clear. The first of these is the unavailability of impersonal passives with *ba-* passives (except for locative impersonal passives, see Section 5, below). Under the assumption that the *ba-* passive is non-promotional, and does not entail a change in the argument structure of the verb, we may expect that *ba-* passives can be formed from intransitive verbs. Given that, as far as we have shown, the theme argument in *ba-* passives remains a grammatical object; its absence should not block a passive reading of *ba-*. Such constructions are however not possible:

- (9) a. umw-ààna á-alí-lila  
 1-child SC1-PAST-cry  
 ‘The baby cried.’
- b. ?? bá-alí-lila ku mw-ààna  
 SC2-PAST-cry by 1-child  
 ?? ‘It was cried by the baby /the baby cried.’
- c. ici-mu-ti ci-alí-pona  
 7-3-tree SC7-PAST-fall.down  
 ‘The tree fell.’
- d. \*bá-alí-pona ku ci-mu-ti  
 SC2-PAST-fall.down by 7-3-tree  
 Intd.: ‘There was falling of the tree.’

Although (9b) is slightly more acceptable than (9d), which is judged ungrammatical, overall it appears that the *ba-* passive does not derive non-locative impersonal passives easily. Like typical promotional passives, the *ba-* passive appears to be restricted to transitive predicates, thus requiring an object, even if this is not (fully) promoted to subject.

Even stronger evidence for the intermediate status of the theme object in *ba-* passives comes from relative clauses. Bemba has two different relative strategies, one involving a relative pronoun, and the other involving tonal marking of the subject marker of the relative predicate. Of these two, only the former is available for object relatives, while the latter is restricted to subject relatives (Kula 2007).

- (10) a. in-kókó ya-pépéek-é umu-mbúulu na-í-fíka  
 9-chicken SC9REL-chase-PERF 3-wild.dog PRES-SC9-arrive  
 ‘The chicken which chased the dog has arrived.’
- b. \*in-kókó u-pépéek-é umu-mbúulu na-í-fíka  
 9-chicken SC3REL-chase-PERF 3-wild.dog PRES-SC9-arrive  
 Intd.: ‘The chicken which the dog chased has arrived.’
- c. in-kókó íyó ú-pépéek-é umu-mbúulu na-í-fíka  
 9-chicken 9.REL SC3-chase 3-wild.dog PRES-SC9-arrive  
 Intd.: ‘The chicken which the dog chased has arrived.’

In (10a), the relative verb *yapépéeké* agrees with the head of the relative clause, which is also the subject of the relative clause. The subject marker *ya-* is low toned, marking

the clause as a relative clause, as in a non-relative clause, the subject marker would be high toned. Other than the tonal marking of the subject prefix, there is no further morphological marking of the relative. (10b) shows that the tonal relative strategy is not available for object relatives, while (10c) shows the pronominal relative strategy with an object relative. Given the restriction of the tonal relative strategy to subject relatives, we would expect the strategy not to be available for theme arguments in *ba-* passives, if these are really grammatical objects. However, this turns out to be not the case:

- (11) a. in-kókó ba-pépéek-é ku mu-mbúulu na-í-fíka  
 9-chicken SC2.REL-chase-PERF by 3-wild.dog PRES-SC9-arrive  
 ‘The chicken which was chased by the dog has arrived.’
- b. in-kókó íyó bá-pépéek-é ku mu-mbúulu na-í-fíka  
 9-chicken 9.REL SC2-chase-PERF by 3-wild.dog PRES-SC9-arrive  
 ‘The chicken which was chased by the dog has arrived.’
- c. \*in-kókó ba-pépéek-é bá-námayo na-í-fíka  
 9-chicken SC2.REL-chase-PERF 2-woman PRES-SC9-arrive  
 Intd.: ‘The chicken which the women chased has arrived.’
- d. in-kókó íyó bá-pépéek-é bá-námayo na-í-fíka  
 9-chicken 9.REL SC2-chase-PERF 2-woman PRES-SC9-arrive  
 ‘The chicken which the women chased has arrived.’

The data in (11) show that the theme object in *ba-* passives can be relativised by employing the tonal strategy, which is only available for grammatical subjects. The relevant example is (11a), where *inkoko* is the head of the relative clause and the theme argument of the *ba-* passive. Note that the agreement mismatch between the class 9 noun *inkoko* and the class 2 subject marker is not a problem here. Thus in (11a) *inkoko* behaves like a grammatical subject, rather than a grammatical object. Example (11b) shows that the relativisation strategy employing a relative pronoun is also available for relativising the theme argument of *ba-* passives, which is not surprising since this strategy is available for both subjects and objects. The subject status of the theme argument in *ba-* passives crucially depends on the interpretation of the construction as passive. If the subject marker is interpreted as referential, and co-refers to a post-verbal subject, the tonal relative strategy is no longer available (11c), and only the pronominal strategy can be used (11d).

In view of the ambiguous status of the theme argument in *ba-* passives as subject and object, it would be interesting to see whether the theme argument can behave as both subject and object in the same construction. One way of testing this would be to co-index the extracted subject of a tonal relative with an object marker in the relative verb, as is attempted in (12):

- (12) \*in-kókó ba-i-pépéek-é ku mu-mbúulu na-í-fíka  
 9-chicken SC2.REL-OC9-chase-PERF by 3-wild.dog PRES-SC9-arrive  
 Intd.: ‘The chicken which (it) was chased by the dog has arrived.’

The ungrammaticality of (12), however, is likely to result from the general unavailability of object markers in relative clauses in Bemba (cf. Marten et al. 2007), and thus is unrelated to the question at hand.

Another possible test for subjecthood is the use of the theme argument in raising constructions. However, although it is possible to raise the theme argument in the

closest Bemba construction, with the predicate *-moneka*, ‘seem’ (from *-mona*, ‘see’ plus neutro-passive extension), it appears that also typical objects can be raised:

- (13) a. in-kókó í/cí-lée-mónéka kwati bá-alí-í-pépéek-a ku  
 9-chicken SC9/SC7-PRES-seem like SC2-PAST-OC9-chase by  
 mu-mbúulu  
 3-wild.dog  
 ‘The chicken seems as if it has been chased by the dog.’
- b. bá-námayo bá/cí-lée-mónéka kwati na-u-bá-témwa  
 2-woman SC2/SC7-PRES-seem like PRES-SC2sg-OC2-like  
 ‘The women it seems you like them.’

(13a) shows that the theme argument can become the subject of *-moneka*, both with full (class 9 *í-*) agreement and with default class 7 agreement *cí-*, but as (13b) shows, this is also the case with a transitive object. It is unclear to what extent the construction is a raising construction, and in any case, it does not distinguish subjects and objects, so the evidence from this is inconclusive.

The discussion so far has shown that the *ba-* passive can be used in a variety of constructions and functions. Like typical passives, the construction can be used to suppress or de-emphasize the agent argument, which can optionally be expressed through an oblique phrase. However, unlike typical passive constructions there is no overt morphological passive marking. Syntactically, the *ba-* passive behaves like an active transitive clause with respect to subject and object agreement, and with respect to question formation: In both environments, the syntactic subject appears to be encoded by the subject marker, and the theme argument is expressed as the syntactic object. On the other hand, we have argued that the absence of impersonal *ba-* passives casts doubt on this characterization, as impersonal passives are expected to be available if the *ba-* passive was syntactically an active clause. Furthermore, in terms of relativisation, the *ba-* passive construction is not like an active construction, as the theme argument of the *ba-* passive can be relativized by employing the tonal relative strategy which is restricted to syntactic subjects. The result of these observations is that the *ba-* passive construction appears to be syntactically intermediate between an active and a typical passive construction, reflecting transparently the intermediate stage in its grammaticalization process. A key element in this grammaticalization process is the role of the class 2 subject marker *ba-*: the observed intermediate grammatical status refers only to those constructions in which *ba-* is interpreted as non-referential, not when it functions as referential class 2 subject marker whose interpretation can be recovered from the overt subject or from the context. In contrast, in the passive construction, *ba-* encodes much weaker semantic information, and is interpreted as referring to a generic, unspecified agent (‘someone’), which can be enriched in a relevant context, for example when a referential agent is provided by an oblique phrase. In some sense, then, *ba-* can be described as a passive marker: it lexically encodes an unspecified agent so that a real agent does not have to be syntactically encoded. On the other hand, *ba-* does not encode argument structure change. As the examples discussed in this section show, *ba-* can be interpreted as encoding the syntactic subject – in those cases where the theme argument behaves as an object – but it can also be interpreted as making no contribution to argument structure, in the cases where the theme argument behaves as subject.

There are two further points which can be derived from this. On the one hand, it is worth noting that the development of the *ba-* passive receives strong functional motivation, under the assumption that passive clauses are semantically interpreted as transitive structures, that is, that the theme argument in both active and passive remains

the logical object of the predicate. From this perspective, the coding of object in the *ba*-passive transparently expresses that the theme argument is the logical object, through object marking on the verb, even though it can be coded as syntactic subject for other purposes. Similarly, even though the class 2 subject marker does not unambiguously encode the syntactic subject, it transparently codes that the logical subject of the predicate is an unspecified agent, however weakly described this agent might be. Secondly, our analysis of the *ba*-passive questions the notions of subject and object in Bantu. The construction as described here shows that neither subject markers nor object markers can be reliably taken as referring to syntactic subjects and objects respectively (see Marten et al. 2008 for a similar argument). Rather, as the examples discussed above show, the relation between anaphoric verbal markers and grammatical relations has to be investigated in more detail in each case. From the data presented here it appears that subject and object marking in Bantu play a less simple role for clausal syntax than is often assumed.

After having established the main points of our analysis of the *ba*-passive, we will present more evidence for the particular grammatical status of the *ba*-construction in the next section, before turning to the *-w*-passive in the subsequent section.

## 5. Double object constructions and locative complements

Further evidence for the specific status of the *ba*-passive construction comes from double object constructions and constructions with locative complements. In both cases, the *ba*-passive behaves differently from the *-w*-passive, reflecting the construction's partly underdetermined grammatical status.

Passivisation of double object constructions in Bantu has often been observed to fall into two types: In some Bantu languages, either object of a double object construction can become subject of a corresponding passive clause, while in other languages only the benefactive object can be promoted to subject in a passive. The former languages are sometimes called symmetric, the latter asymmetric languages (see Bresnan and Moshi 1990, Marten et al. 2007). In Bemba double object constructions, only the benefactive may be passivized when the *-w*-passive is used:

- (14) a. Nsáma      á-alí-péél-a                      umw-áana in-dáláma  
           1.Nsama    SC1-PAST-give-FV      1-child      10-money  
           ‘Nsama gave the child money.’
- b. umw-áana á-alí-péel-w-a                      in-dáláma (kulí Nsáma)  
           1-child      SC1-PAST-give-PASS-FV    10-money    by 1.Nsama  
           ‘The child was given money (by Nsama).’
- c. \* in-dáláma    shí-alí-péel-w-a                      umw-áana (kulí Nsáma)  
           10.money    SC10-PAST-give-PASS-FV    1-child      by 1.Nsama  
           Intd.: ‘Money was given to the child (by Nsama).’

In contrast, with the *ba*-construction, both the benefactive and the theme argument may be passivized. As argued above, subject agreement in *ba*-passives is not a good indicator of subjecthood, and so the argument here is slightly more complex. First, consider word-order variation:

- (15) a. bá-alí-péél-a                      umw-áana in-dáláma (kulí Nsáma)

- SC2-PAST-give-FV 1-child 10-money by 1.Nsama  
 ‘The child was given money (by Nsama).’
- b. umw-áana bá-alí-mu-péél-a in-dáláma kulí Nsáma  
 1-child SC2-PAST-OC1-give-FV 10-money by 1.Nsama  
 ‘The child was given money by Nsama.’
- c. in-dáláma bá-alí-péél-a umw-áana kulí Nsáma  
 10-money SC2-PAST-give-FV 1-child by 1.Nsama  
 ‘Money was given to the child by Nsama.’
- d. \*bá-alí-péél-a in-dáláma umwá-ana (kulí Nsáma)  
 SC2-PAST-give-FV 10-money 1-child by 1.Nsama  
 ‘Money was given to the child (by Nsama).’

(15a) shows the *ba-* passive construction with both post-verbal NPs in the same order as in the active clause (14a, above). Both NPs can be fronted (15b, c), with obligatory object marking of the animate NP in (15b). However, the order of the two postverbal NPs is not free, as only the order benefactive-theme (15a), but not theme-benefactive (15d) is possible. Indeed, thus far, the two NPs in the *ba-* passive behave exactly as the two objects in the corresponding active double object construction. Furthermore, like in the active, both objects can be dropped in appropriate contexts:

- (16) a. bá-alí-péél-a umwáana (kulí Nsáma)  
 SC2-PAST-give-FV 1-child by 1.Nsama  
 ‘The child was given [something/it](by Nsama).’
- b. bá-alí-péél-a in-dáláma (kulí Nsáma)  
 SC2-PAST-give-FV 10-money by 1.Nsama  
 ‘Money was given [to someone/him/her](by Nsama).’

On the other hand, both NPs behave like subjects with respect to relativization, since both can be used in subject relative clauses:

- (17) a. umw-áana ba-péél-é in-dáláma kulí Nsáma  
 1-child SC2.REL-give-PERF 10-money by 1.Nsama  
 na-a-fíka  
 PRES-SC1-arrive  
 ‘The child who was given money by Nsama has arrived.’
- b. in-dáláma ba-péél-é umw-áana kulí Nsáma  
 10-money SC2.REL-give-PERF 1-child by 1.Nsama  
 na-shí-luba  
 PRES-SC10-disappear  
 ‘The money which was given to the child by Nsama has disappeared.’

As discussed above, the low toned subject marker *ba-* in the examples in (17) signals that the sentences are relative clauses. This tonal relative strategy is only available for subject relatives and so, since it can be used for relativizing both the theme and the benefactive object of the double object *ba-* passive, either argument can assume the role of the subject in this context. The Bemba *ba-* passive is thus symmetric while the *-w-* passive is asymmetric. As we have shown, the *ba-* passive shows greater flexibility than

the *-w-* passive of double object constructions, as in the *ba-* passive, structural and functional characteristics of both active and passive are present. The examples thus provide further support of our analysis of the *ba-* passive as being intermediate between active and passive syntax.

A second group of constructions relevant here are passives with locative NPs. Again, we are comparing the *ba-* passive with the *-w-* passive, and although the results of the comparison are not as clear as the preceding examples, they seem to indicate a similar conclusion. Locative complements, introduced by a locative prefix, cannot be passivized with the *-w-* passive, in contrast to the *ba-* passive.

- (18) a. umu-mbúulu wa-alí-séndam-a mu-n-gânda  
 3-wild.dog SC3-PAST-sleep-FV 18-9-house  
 ‘The dog slept in the house.’
- b. bá-alí-séndam-a mu-n-gânda (ku mu-mbúulu)  
 SC2-PAST-sleep-FV 18-9-house by 3-wild.dog  
 ‘In the house the dog slept there.’ (‘The house was slept in by the dog.’)
- c. mu-n-gânda bá-alí-séndam-a-mó (ku mu-mbúulu)  
 18-9-house SC2-PAST-sleep-FV-LOC18 by 3-wild.dog  
 ‘In the house the dog slept there.’ (‘The house was slept in by the dog.’)
- d. \*mu-n-gânda bá-alí-séndam-a ku mu-mbúulu  
 18-9-house SC2-PAST-sleep-FV by 3-wild.dog
- e. mu-n-gânda mu-alí-séndam-a umu-mbúulu  
 18-9-house SC18-PAST-sleep-FV 3-wild.dog  
 ‘In the house slept the dog.’
- f. \*mu-n-gânda mu-alí-séndam-w-a (na/ku umu-mbúulu)  
 18-9-house SC18-PAST-sleep-PASS-FV by 3-wild.dog  
 Intd.: ‘In the house was slept (by the dog).’

(18b) shows the *ba-* passive construction corresponding to the active (18a), with the locative remaining in post-verbal position. The locative complement can also be fronted (18c) in which case it must occur with a post-verbal object clitic, its absence being ungrammatical (18d). The construction in (18c) is different from a locative inversion structure as in (18e), where the locative agrees with the verbal subject marker, and where the agent argument is coded as a bare post-verbal NP which cannot be omitted, and not as an optional oblique. (18f) shows that locative inversion is not possible with a *-w-* passivized predicate here, and thus that only *ba-* passives, and not *-w-* passives, are used to form impersonal locative passives, allowing for the optional encoding of the agent. As the previous examples, this shows that the *ba-* passive is functionally and structurally more versatile than the corresponding *-w-* passive.

The examples in this section have further demonstrated the use of the *ba-* passive in modern Bemba. We have argued that *ba-* passive constructions are syntactically intermediate between active and passive syntax, and that this is related to the grammaticalization of the class 2 subject marker, which in the passive merely encodes an unspecified agent. As a consequence of this, it may but does not need to encode syntactic subject function. Due to this functional intermediacy, the *ba-* passive is functionally freer than the *-w-* passive and can be used in constructions which are not available for the *-w-* passive. In the following section, we will look at the *-w-* passive in

more detail, and show that it has become increasingly restricted to non-typical passive functions as part of the wider passive grammaticalization in Bemba.

## 6. The *-w-* passive

Passives formed with passive marker *-w-*, sometimes *-iw-* as an alternant, are, as shown above, functionally more restricted in use than *ba-* constructions in contemporary Bemba. In addition, in many contexts, agent oblique phrases are unavailable with the *-w-* passive. Although there is variation, depending on the context and the type of predicate used, in general oblique phrases are judged ungrammatical or degraded.

- (19) a. Mutalé a-alí-ípik-a úmu-náni  
 1.Mutale SC1-PAST-cook-FV 3-food  
 ‘Mutale cooked the food.’
- b. úmu-náni u-alí-ípík-w-a  
 3-food SC3-PAST-cook-PASS-FV  
 ‘The food was cooked.’
- c. ?? úmu-náni w-alí-ípík-w-a kulí Mutalé  
 3-food SC3-PAST-cook-PASS-FV by 1.Mutale  
 ‘The food was coked by Mutale.’
- d. úmu-náni w-alí-ípík-w-a na supuuni  
 3-food SC3-PAST-cook-PASS-FV with 9.spoon  
 ‘The food was cooked with a spoon.’
- e. inongo ya-alí-tób-w-a ne-eci-mu-ti  
 9.calabash SC9-PAST-break-PASS-FV by-7-3-tree  
 ‘The calabash was broken by the tree.’
- f. úmu-náni bá-alí-ípík-w-a na umw-ikó  
 3-food SC2-PAST-cook-PASS-FV with 3-spoon  
 ‘The food was cooked with a spoon.’

The passive (19b) without an oblique derived from the active sentence in (19a) is preferable to (19c) where the agent is encoded. In contrast, passives with instrumentals introduced by *na* ‘with’ are grammatical (19d), even in cases where an instrument is involved in a non-volitional act of agency (19e). Although oblique instruments are also possible with the *ba-* passive (19f), it seems that if agent obliques are present, the *ba-* passive is preferred, while the use of the *-w-* passive is only marginally possible. From a historical perspective, the data seem to indicate that the *ba-* passive began to develop in contexts where a human, animate agent was present, reflecting the original semantic restriction of class 2 to (plural) animates, and only later became extended to non-human agents and instruments. Correspondingly, the functional domain of the *-w-* passive became restricted, starting with human agents and then reflecting the progression of the extension of the domain of the *ba-* passive. However, as argued above, the main function of the *ba-* passive is related to the encoding of agency, and not to valency changing. In contrast, in view of the data above, it appears that the function of the *-w-* passive has become associated with valency changing, rather than agency. Typically, if

not categorically, *-w-* passives derive intransitives from transitives, where the expression of any agency is dispreferred. The two constructions can thus partly be distinguished as focussing on agency (*ba-* passive) on the one hand, and on argument structure (*-w-* passive) on the other. However, further data show that the picture is more complex than this.

While in the data above, the *-w-* passive did not typically encode agency, the interaction of the *-w-* passive with the neutro-passive shows exactly the opposite. Neutro-passives or statives have no implied agent and therefore cannot take an oblique phrase. In this respect, they show similarities with the *-w-* passive, as discussed above, as can be seen in (20) with the neutro-passive suffix *-ik/-ek-*.

- (20) a. Mulenga á-alí-cén-ék-a mu-lúbúlí (\*kulí Chisanga)  
 1.Mulenga SC1-PAST-hurt-NEUT-FV 18-fight by 1.Chisanga  
 ‘Mulenga was hurt in a fight (by Chisanga).’
- b. ici-íbí na-ci-isal-ik-a (\*na Mulenga)  
 7-door PRES-SC7-close-NEUT-FV by 1.Mulenga  
 ‘The door is closed.’

In the neutro-passives in (20) use of an oblique is ungrammatical, as the verb form specifically negates the existence of a specified agent. The passive in (19b, above) seems to have a similar interpretation to the neutro-passives in (20), and in both the object of the active is promoted to the subject of the passive/neutro-passive, without a corresponding expression of the agent.

Given the similarity of the argument structure of neutro-passives and passives, in that both involve the promotion of the theme argument to subject and the suppression of the agent argument, it is expected that neutro-passives and passives cannot co-occur in the same verb form. This is, as Kula and Reintges (2004) show, however, possible in Bemba:

- (21) a. Mulenga á-alí-cén-ék-a mu-lúbúlí (\*kulí Chisanga)  
 1.Mulenga SC1-PAST-hurt-NEUT-FV 18-fight by 1.Chisanga  
 ‘Mulenga was hurt in the fight (by Chisanga).’
- b. Mulenga á-alí-cén-ék-w-a mu-lúbúlí (na/?kulí  
 1.Mulenga SC1-PAST-hurt-NEUT-PASS-FV 18-fight by  
 Chisanga)  
 1.Chisanga  
 ‘Mulenga was hurt in the fight (by Chisanga).’
- c. ici-íbí na-ci-isal-ik-a (?no-omw-eela)  
 7-door PRES-SC7-close-NEUT-FV by-3-wind  
 ‘The door is closed (by the wind).’
- d. ici-íbí na-ci-isal-ik-w-a no-omw-ééla  
 7-door PRES-SC7-close-NEUT-PASS-FV by-3-wind  
 ‘The door has been closed by wind.’
- e. ici-íbí ci-aci-isal-ik-a bucébucé (\*kulí  
 7-door SC7-TODAY.PAST-close-NEUT-FV small.small by  
 1.Mulenga)  
 Mulenga

‘The door closed gently.’

- f. ici-íbí ci-aci-isal-ik-w-a                      bucébućé kulí Mulenga  
7-door SC7-PAST-close-NEUT-PASS-FV small.small by 1.Mulenga  
‘The door has been closed gently by Mulenga.’

The neutro-passive form of the verb in (21a) cannot co-occur with an oblique agent. However, in (21b) the passive suffix *-w-* is added and the expression of an agent in an oblique phrase is possible. In (21b) the preposition *na* is preferred here probably because the action involves two actors rather than a sole agent. Similarly the neutro-passive in (21c) is preferred without the agent clause, but with the addition of the passive marker in (21d) the non-volitional agent phrase is licensed. Finally, (21e) shows that a human, volitional agent is not licensed in the neutro-passive, but is licensed when the passive *-w-* has been added. Although the combination of the neutro-passive and the passive is not free and there are many instances where the derivation is simply blocked, the data presented here show the relation between the two extensions: the neutro-passive marginally accepts non-volitional agents, but does not license volitional agents, but when the *-w-* suffix is added, both non-volitional and volitional agents can be expressed by an oblique phrase.

The two instances of *-w-* passive constructions we have looked at in this section thus appear to fulfil very different, opposing functions: When combined with a transitive verb, the *-w-* passive promotes the active object to subject and suppresses the agent, which is preferably not expressed, and is thus in function similar to the neutro-passive. On the other hand, when the passive *-w-* is combined with the neutro-passive, the morpheme’s main function appears to be to introduce an agent. In the former use, the *-w-* passive’s function is argument changing, not encoding of agency, while in the latter use, it is encoding of agency, not argument changing. A possible historical explanation of this situation is to assume that argument changing and agency encoding were both typical functions of the *-w-* passive. With the grammaticalization of the *ba-* passive, the functions of the *-w-* passive became reduced, with the central functions increasingly being expressed by the use of the *ba-* passive, in particular the promotion of the theme argument (to subject or as fronted object, or even as topic) and the suppression of a typical human, volitional agent, which can optionally be expressed by an oblique phrase. The *-w-* passive has thus become restricted to more marginal functions, such as the complete suppression of the agent, and the expression of the agent in conjunction with the neutro-passive. While historically, these functions were part of a wider range of functions, and in a sense, at the two extreme ends of a functional spectrum of the *-w-* passive, they have now become the core functions of the construction, and thus appear disjointed. In fact, it appears that each of the two functions of *-w-*, argument changing and agency encoding, is becoming restricted to a specific morpho-syntactic context, the former with typical transitive verbs, where the agent in the passive is not encoded, the latter with neutro-passive verbs. The decreasing functional domain of the *-w-* passive, compared with the rise of the *ba-* passive, shows two aspects of the grammaticalization of passive constructions. While *ba-* might be said to illustrate the construction of a passive marker, *-w-* witnesses its deconstruction.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has discussed two passive constructions in Bemba, one based on the class 2 subject marker *ba-*, the other, historically older, on the verbal suffix *-w-*. We have

argued that the *ba-* passive construction is of a syntactically intermediate status, combining characteristics of both active and passive clauses, and that a central aspect of the construction is the interpretation and syntactic function of the *ba-* marker. We have also shown that *-w-* passives are typically found in two contexts, with transitive verbs on the one hand, in which case the *-w-* passive prefers that the agent is not expressed, and in combination with the neutro-passive extension on the other hand, in which case *-w-* licenses the introduction of an agent oblique phrase. We have proposed that historically, the *ba-* construction is in the process of grammaticalization, and that the indeterminate syntactic status of the construction is a reflection of this. On the other hand, at the same time that the *ba-* passive construction becomes more frequent and more functionally versatile, the *-w-* passive construction is becoming more restricted. The restricted environments in which it is typically found are an indication of the split of two central functions of typical passives, argument structure change and agency encoding, into two distinct, contextually induced functions.

In terms of theoretical claims, we have argued that passive constructions in Bemba raise theoretical issues about the syntactic status of subjects and objects in Bantu, and their relation to subject and object markers. In particular, we have proposed that subject and object marking cannot be taken as a reliable indication of syntactic subject and object status. Furthermore, the notions of syntactic subject and object, which appear intuitively essential for the discussion of passives, in fact turn out to be only part of the characterization of the construction. In addition, the encoding of agency, independent of argument structure change, plays an important role in passive constructions, as does, in the specific Bantu case, the role and interpretation of the agreement markers.

Regardless of the specific analyses we have proposed, the data presented in this paper provide a detailed picture of two intermediate stages in the grammaticalization of passive constructions:

- The development of a passive construction involving a generic 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural marker, and
- the decline of a fully grammaticalized passive construction with its attendant use in increasingly restricted domains.

Passive marking in contemporary Bemba thus provides a valuable snapshot of a well-known grammaticalization path, which helps to study this process in detail.

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