

Article

Passive in Basketo*

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Abstract

This paper deals with the passive construction in Basketo, a North Omotic language predominantly spoken in Basketo Special Woreda in Ethiopia. Besides passive, the passive suffix *-int-* is also morphologically involved in the reciprocal, reflexive, and spontaneous constructions, so it can be regarded as a valency-reducing suffix, having a detransitivizing effect on the transitive.

From the viewpoint of information structure, the passive construction is a strategy foregrounding the patient, while backgrounding the agent. For this usually OSV word order (semantically PAV) is used because the initial noun phrase of a sentence becomes topic. On the other hand, in the interpretation of sentences with trivalent verbs, the noun phrase immediately preceding the verb is taken as focus. If this noun phrase is marked by instrumental (comitative) case *-bara*, the morpheme *-int-* of derived verb stems must be interpreted as reciprocal, if accusative case (object), then passive.

The passive form is also used in resultative constructions of telic verbs, i.e. those referring to a state that has come about as the result of a previous event. The object of the previous event is promoted to nominative, and the verbal noun of the derived verb stem with *-int-* is followed by the present auxiliary verb *wode* ‘exist’. Finally, the impersonal passive expresses a state of habitual or generic activity.

* A version of this paper was presented at the Second International Omotic Conference, Arba Minch University, Ethiopia, October 10-11, 2021. Data for this paper have been collected during my fieldwork in Arba Minch and Basketo, with a native speaker of Basketo. My special thanks go to Mr. Fiqre Dejene, my foremost informant, whose efforts to help my studies were far beyond the ordinary. My research is supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (no. 18KK0009) from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Japan. The Abbreviation in this article: 1 = First person, 2 = Second person, 3 = Third person, ABL = Ablative, ACC = Accusative, DAT = Dative, DEF = Definite, F = Feminine, FOC = Focus, IMPF = Imperfective, INSTR = Instrumental, LOC = Locative, M = Masculine, NOM = Nominative, PASS = Passive, PF = Perfective, PL = Plural, POSS = Possessive, REC = Reciprocal, REF = Reflexive, SG = Singular, SPON = Spontaneous, TOP = Topic, VN = Verbal noun.

1 Introduction

This paper deals with the passive construction in Basketo¹, a North Omotic language predominantly spoken in Basketo Special Woreda in Ethiopia. Basketo is one of the least studied languages in Ethiopia. There are some recent studies of the language by fieldwork, dealing mostly with morphology. Azeb (1993, 1995) deals with noun morphology and Treis (2014) with interrogativity, but neither with the passive discussed here. Sottile (2002) is a descriptive grammar of Basketo, a PhD dissertation, but discusses passive only briefly (Sottile 2002: 145-6). Azeb (1994) deals with Omoto verb derivation and introduced the passive and reciprocal forms of Basketo briefly with other three Omoto languages.

2 Middle semantics

Many Omotic languages use the same morpheme to derive passive, reciprocal and reflexive verb stems (cf. Azeb (2012: 458), Azeb (2020: 834)). The Omotic languages of neighbouring Basketo have similar passive morphemes, different in detail; *-ínt-* for passive and reciprocal in Maale (Azeb 2001: 100-107), *-int-* for passive in Dime (Mulugeta 2008: 143-146), *-utt-* for passive and reciprocal and *-unt-* for passive reflexive (i.e. middle) in Haro (Hirut 2015: 101-104), *-utt-* for passive and *-uttutt-* for reciprocal in Koorete (Binyam 2008: 78-82), as in Table 1.

Table 1: Passive, Reciprocal and Reflexive morpheme of some Omotic Languages

| Language | Passive | Reciprocal | Reflexive |
|----------|--------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Maale | <i>-ínt-</i> | <i>-ínt-</i> (<i>wóla</i> ‘each other’) | <i>-t-</i> (<*- <i>ínt-</i>) |
| Dime | <i>-int-</i> | <i>-sim-</i> | non-existent |
| Haro | <i>-utt-</i> | <i>-utt-</i> (<i>wóla</i> ‘each other’) | <i>-unt-</i> |
| Koorete | <i>-utt-</i> | <i>-uttutt-</i> (<i>wóla</i> ‘each other’) | non-existent |

According to Kemmer (1993, 1994), a semantic domain of both reflexive and reciprocal situation types is highly relevant to middle semantics. A prototypical two-participant event referred to by an *active transitive* verb is defined as an event in which

¹ ISO 639-3 code: bst. Basketo has 29 consonants and 10 vowels as follows: p, t, ts, tʃ, k, ʔ, b, d, dz, g, pʰ, tsʰ, tʃʰ, kʰ, ʙ, d̪, f, s, j, h, z, ʒ, fi, m, n, l, r, w, j, i, e, a, o, u, ii, ee, aa, oo, uu. Acute accent represents high tone.

a human entity (Agent) acts volitionally on an inanimate definite entity (Patient) which is directly and completely affected by that event. On the other hand, the *middle* indicates that agent and patient are both affected. The middle includes reflexive, reciprocal and spontaneous. In *reflexive* verbs, the two participant roles are filled by a single entity, the same referent, while in *reciprocal* verbs, two participants reciprocally perform the action in a single event. The semantic relation between the participants is the prototypical of affectedness.

The *spontaneous* construction² indicates change of state of an entity (a patient). No agent entity receives coding. The event is presented as one without volitional initiation unlike the above middle situation types.

Finally, the *facilitative middle*, as in French *Le livre se vend bien* ‘The book sells well’, indicates that the event is conceived of as proceeding from the patient by virtue of an inherent characteristic of that entity which enables the event to take place. On the other hand, the *impersonal passive* does not make reference to an inherent characteristic of the patient, but only an unknown or generic agent, as illustrated in German *Hier tanzt sich gut = Man tanzt hier gut* ‘One can dance well here (This is a good place for dancing)’. Both the facilitative middle and the impersonal passive express a state of habitual or generic activity.

3 Passive Construction of Basketo

In Basketo, the passive is not morphologically distinguished from the middle voices. The passive morpheme -int- is also involved in the reciprocal, reflexive, and spontaneous constructions. Example (1) shows the passive, (2) the reciprocal, (3) the reflexive, and (4) the spontaneous meaning, respectively. Because both the passive and the reciprocal take instrumental case on the agent, though the agentive noun of the passive can be often dropped and the reciprocal often occurs with woli ‘each other’, the interpretation of sentence can be sometimes ambiguous between passive and reciprocal like example (1) and (2). We will discuss this point in the section below.

² The middle morphemes for spontaneous events intrinsically are found in Old Norse; *anda-sk* ‘die, perish’, *birta-sk* ‘become light, clear’, in French; *s’évanouir* ‘vanish’, *se changer* ‘change’, in Sanskrit; *vardhat-e* ‘grow’, *nabhat-e* ‘burst’, etc. (Kemmer 1993: 143)

- (1) tá (í-bara) bukk-**int**-íne.
 1SG.NOM 3MS-INSTR hit-PASS-PF
 “I was hit by him.”
- (2) tá í-bara (woli) bukk-**int**-íne.
 1SG.NOM 3MS-INSTR each other hit-REC-PF
 “We (I and he) hit each other.”
- (3) tá meetʃ-**int**-íne.
 1SG.NOM wash-REF-PF
 “I washed myself.”
- (4) táá-bo ír k’el sís-**int**-íne.
 1SG-DAT rainy season feel-SPON-PF
 “I felt the rainy season (had come).
 (lit. The rainy season was manifested to me.)”

Moreover, passive and causative verb stems may be formed from transitive or intransitive verbs productively. In the passive of transitive verb roots, the passive suffix **-int-** is valency-reducing, having a detransitivizing effect on the transitive, while the causative suffix **-is-** is valency-increasing, making intransitive verbs transitive, shown by Table 2 and Table 3. It seems that the detransitivizing by passive **-int-** is similar to spontaneous function.

Table 2. Intransitive verbs made with passive suffix **-int-**

| <i>Transitive</i> | | <i>Intransitive</i> | |
|-------------------|----------|------------------------|-------------|
| ááʃ-íre | ‘hide’ | ááʃ- int -íre | ‘be hidden’ |
| bekk’-íre | ‘see’ | bekk’- int -íre | ‘be seen’ |
| búʃ-íre | ‘mix’ | búʃ- int -íre | ‘be mixed’ |
| er-íre | ‘know’ | er- int -íre | ‘be known’ |
| fag-íre | ‘divide’ | fag- int -íre | ‘divide’ |

Table 3. Transitive verbs made with causative suffix **-is-**

| <i>Intransitive</i> | | <i>Transitive</i> | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------------------|----------|
| dalg-íre | ‘loosen’ | dalg- is -íre | ‘loosen’ |
| darʔ-íre | ‘break’ | dar- s -íre | ‘break’ |
| írts’-íre | ‘freeze’ | írts’- is -íre | ‘freeze’ |
| soob-íre | ‘descend’ | soob- is -íre | ‘lower’ |
| wobb-íre | ‘bend’ | wobb- is -íre | ‘bend’ |

4 Information Structure -Topic and Focus

Basketo has a basic SOV word order. From the viewpoint of pragmatics, the passive construction is a strategy foregrounding the patient while backgrounding the agent. In general, the patient is promoted from accusative to nominative while the agent is demoted from nominative to oblique case or often deleted in nominative-accusative languages (cf. Givón 1994). In Basketo the initial noun phrase of a sentence is topic³, and so active OSV word order⁴ is preferred for this purpose. Especially, first- and second-person pronouns (i.e. participants in the conversation) tend to come to initial position of a sentence, and the simpler active forms can be selected rather than the passive which involves complicative morphology. Examples (5b) and (6b) are preferred to examples (5a) and (6a). Moreover, a subject with low animacy (such as ‘bedbugs’) tends to be avoided shown by example (7a) and OSV order is selected like example (7c).

- | | | | |
|------|-----------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| (5a) | néení | í-bara | bukk- int -íne. |
| | 2SG.NOM.TOP | 3MS-INSTR | hit-PASS-PF |
| | “You are hit by him.” | | |
| (5b) | néénána | íjí | bukk-íne. |
| | 2SG.ACC.TOP | 3MS.NOM | hit-PF |
| | “You, he hit.” | | |
| (6a) | táání | Bálaji-bara | bukk- int -íne. |
| | 1SG.NOM.TOP | Balay-INSTR | hit-PASS-PF |
| | “I was hit by Balay.” | | |
| (6b) | táánána | Bálaj-i | bukk-íne. |
| | 1SG.ACC.TOP | Balay-NOM | hit-PF |
| | “Me, Balay hit.” | | |

³ Pronouns are special in that they have short and long forms. Long pronouns, with the morpheme **-n-**, are morphologically and pragmatically marked, and make a foregrounded discourse topic in contrast with zero anaphora. (cf. Inui 2020)

⁴ The same is found in Russian. Russian does have a passive construction but its use is less frequent. Russian uses the active with the word order direct object-verb-subject, rather than the passive construction (Comrie 1989: 81).

(7a) *is-í táánání dāk'-íne.
 bedbug-NOM 1SG.ACC.TOP bite-PF

“A bedbug has bitten me.”

(7b) ?táání isí-bara dāk'-**int**-íne.
 1SG.NOM.TOP bedbug-INSTR bite-PASS-PF

“I have been bitten by a bedbug.”

(7c) táánáná is-í dāk'-íne.
 1SG.ACC.TOP bedbug-NOM bite-PF

“Me, a bedbug has bitten.”

Moreover, inanimate nouns (8a) and (9a) are dis-preferred as a subject. However, the inanimate nouns with first- and second-person possessors can be subjects with the passive construction, shown by examples (8b) and (9b).

(8a) *keetsá-d-i íntí-bara ments-**int**-íne.
 house-DEF-NOM 3PL-INSTR smash-PASS-PF

“The house was wrecked by them.”

(8b) tá keetsá-d-i (íntí-bara) ments-**int**-íne.
 1SG.POSS house-DEF-NOM 3PL-INSTR smash-PASS-PF

“My house was wrecked by them.”

(9a) *ájfa-d-i íntí-bara múj-**int**-íne.
 meat-DEF-NOM 3PL-INSTR eat-PASS-PF

“The meat was eaten by them.”

(9b) tá ájfa-d-i (íntí-bara) múj-**int**-íne.
 1SG.POSS meat-DEF-NOM 3PL-INSTR eat-PASS-PF

“My meat was eaten by them.”

On the other hand, in the case of trivalent verbs (*wongíre* ‘buy or sell’, *wúúk’íre* ‘steal’, *immíre* ‘give’, etc.), the interpretation of sentences with animate subjects seems ambiguous at first glance. However, information structure may serve as a guide. In Basketo, the sentence-initial noun phrase is the topic while the noun phrase immediately preceding the verb is the focus in the SOV word order⁵. If this focused noun phrase is marked by instrumental (comitative) case *-bara*, the suffix **-int-** of derived verb stems

⁵ Sentences with trivalent verbs take two oblique noun phrases besides subject. The focus noun phrase is the second one, immediately preceding the verb, in this case.

must be interpreted as reciprocal, while with accusative case (Object), it must be interpreted as passive.

The verb *wongíre* ‘buy or sell’ has senses ‘sell’ and ‘buy’. Its interpretation in an active clause is determined by the case of the noun phrase immediately preceding it. Dative case (Goal) implies ‘sell’ shown by (10a) while ablative case (Source) implies ‘buy’ shown by (10b). This means that the position immediately before the verb plays an important role, i.e. focus, in Basketo.

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| (10a) | íjí | aϕil-í | ízá-bo | wong-íne. |
| | 3MS.NOM | clothes-ACC | 3FS-DAT.FOC | buy/sell-PF |
| | “He sold her clothes.” | | | |
| (10b) | íjí | aϕil-í | ízá-ppo | wong-íne. |
| | 3MS.NOM | clothes-ACC | 3FS-ABL.FOC | buy/sell-PF |
| | “He bought clothes from her.” | | | |

Likewise, (10c) is interpreted as reciprocal because of having instrumental (comitative) case immediately before the verb, while (10d) is interpreted as passive for having accusative case (Object), too.

- | | | | | |
|-------|--|-------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| (10c) | ízá | aϕil-í | í-bara | wong- int -íne. |
| | 3FS.NOM | clothes-ACC | 3MS-INSTR.FOC | buy/sell-REC-PF |
| | “They bought/sold each other clothes.” | | | |
| (10d) | ízá | í-bara | aϕil-í | wong- int -íne. |
| | 3FS.NOM | 3MS-INSTR | clothes-ACC.FOC | buy/sell-PASS-PF |
| | “She was sold clothes by him.” and “Her clothes were bought by him.” | | | |

In other examples (11) of *wúúk’ire* ‘steal’ and (12) of *immíre* ‘give’, the agent of passive can be deleted but not the instrumental (comitative) of reciprocal. Therefore, if the noun immediately before the verb is patient (or object) in accusative case, it must be interpreted as passive shown by (11b) and (12b) while if this noun is in instrumental case, it must be interpreted as reciprocal shown by (11c) and (12c).

- (11a) sol-í táá-ppo míiza-d-ani wúúk'-íne.
 thief-NOM 1SG-ABL cow-DEF-ACC steal-PF
 “A thief stole the cow from me.”
- (11b) táání (solí-bara) míiza-d-ani wúúk'-**int**-íne.
 1SG.NOM thief-INSTR cow-DEF-ACC.FOC steal-PASS-PF
 “I was robbed of the cow by a thief.”
- (11c) táání míiza-d-ani solí-bara wúúk'-**int**-íne.
 1SG.NOM cow-DEF-ACC thief-INSTR.FOC steal-REC-PF
 “We (I and thief) stole each other’s cows.”
- (12a) ijí táá-bo bún-i ímm-íne.
 3MS.NOM 1SG-DAT flower-ACC give-PF
 “He gave me flowers.”
- (12b) táání (í-bara) bún-i ímm-**int**-íne.
 1SG.NOM.TOP 3MS-INSTR flower-ACC.FOC give-PASS-PF
 “I was given flowers by him.”
- (12c) táání bún-i í-bara ímm-**int**-íne.
 1SG.NOM.TOP flower-ACC 3MS-INSTR.FOC give-REC-PF
 “We gave each other flowers.”

5 Resultative Constructions

Nedjalkov and Jaxontov (1988) apply the term resultative to those verb forms that express a state implying a causing action. The resultative expresses both a state and the preceding action it has resulted from. The logical subject of the state in a resultative construction may be co-referential with either the logical subject or the object of the previous action. The former is the subjective resultative, the latter the objective one.

Subjective resultative

John has sat down. → John is sitting.

John has grasped a stick. → John is holding a stick.

Objective resultative

John has opened a door. → The door is opened.

John has broken a stick. → The stick is broken.

In Basketo, both the subjective and objective resultative are observed. The subjective resultative comprises verbal noun followed by the present auxiliary verb *wóde* ‘exist’. Examples (13a-17a) show the previous action and examples (13b-17b) subjective resultative.

- (13a) íjí ojdá gallá doʔ-íde⁶.
 3MS.NOM stool on sit-PF
 “He has just sat down on the stool.”
- (13b) íjí ojdá gallá doʔ-í wóde.
 3MS.NOM stool on sit-VN exist.IMPF
 “He is sat on the stool.”
- (14a) íjí másít-áde.
 3MS.NOM get drunk-PF
 “He got drunk.”
- (14b) íjí másít-í . wóde.
 3MS.NOM get drunk-VN exist.IMPF
 “He is drunk.”
- (15a) táání íjá-bo ɸa ájɸa-d-ani ééɸɸ-áde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP 3MS-DAT this meat-DEF-ACC get-PF
 “I have just gotten this meat for him.”
- (15b) táání íjá-bo ɸa ájɸa-d-ani ééɸɸ-í wóde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP 3MS-DAT this meat-DEF-ACC get-VN exist.IMPF
 “I have this meat for him.”
- (16a) táání dabdabbá-d-ani ts’aaɸ-áde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP letter-DEF-ACC write-PF
 “I have just written the letter.”
- (16b) táání dabdabbá-d-ani ts’aaɸ-í wóde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP letter-DEF-ACC write-VN exist.IMPF
 “I have the letter written.”

⁶ Basketo has two perfective forms; *-ine* and *-ide/-ade*. The former indicates the past perfective with the temporal adverbials like as *zináabo* ‘yesterday’ or *tabbi lájtsappo tíini* ‘ten years ago’ and the latter the recent past perfective, referring to a time immediately before utterance time with the aspectual adverbial *ɸatár* ‘just now’ optionally (Inui 2017: 21f.).

- (17a) táání kíφíl-ítti mats'ááφa-d-ani gadd-áde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP room-LOC book-DEF-ACC put-PF
 “I have just put the book in the room.”
- (17b) táání kíφíl-ítti mats'ááφa-d-ani gadd-í wóde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP room-LOC book-DEF-ACC put-VN exist.IMPF
 “I have the book in the room.”

The resultative is essentially voice-neutral. However, the objective resultative typically expresses a state of the patient which usually surfaces as subject in a resultative construction, and therefore the agent has to be deleted. This results in an intersection of the properties of resultative and passive. The object of previous event is promoted to nominative, and the verbal noun of the derived verb stem with *-int-* is followed by the present auxiliary verb *wóde* ‘exist’. Examples (18-20) show resultative constructions with passive forms.

- (18) fía ájfa-d-i íjá-bo éédǫ-ínt-í wóde.
 this meat-DEF-NOM 3MS-DAT take-PASS-VN exist.IMPF
 “This meat has been kept for him.”
- (19) dabdabbá-d-i ts'aaφ-ínt-í wóde.
 letter-DEF-NOM write-PASS-VN exist.IMPF
 “The letter has been written.”
- (20) mats'ááφa-d-i kíφíl-ítti gadd-ínt-í wóde.
 book-DEF-NOM room-LOC put-PASS-VN exist.IMPF
 “The book has been put in the room.”

However, durative verbs not expressing a result state with a previous action implied (non-terminative verbs⁷) cannot make resultative constructions irrespective of whether they are transitive or intransitive, shown by examples (21b-24b).

⁷ Terminative verbs are those that denote a transition from one state into another or an acquisition of a quality, cf. to sit down, (e.g. to sit down means ‘to change from the standing position into the sitting position). (cf. Nedjalkov and Jaxontov 1988: 5)

- (21a) ír-í kédd-íne.
rain-NOM fall-PF
“It rained.”
- (21b) *ír-í kédd-í wóde.
rain-NOM fall-VN exist.IMPF
- (22a) íjí dong-íne.
3MS.NOM dance-PF
“He danced.”
- (22b) *íjí dong-í wóde.
3MS.NOM dance-VN exist.IMPF
- (23a) táání ájfa-d-ani múj-íne.
1SG.NOM.TOP meat-DEF-ACC eat-PF
“I ate the meat.”
- (23b) *ájfa-d-i múj-ínt-í wóde.
meat-DEF-NOM eat-PASS-CONV exist.IMPF
- (24a) táání kaná-d-ani bekk’-íne.
1SG.NOM.TOP dog-DEF-ACC see-PF
“I saw the dog.”
- (24b) *kaná-d-i bekk’-ínt-í wóde.
dog-DEF-NOM see-PASS-VN exist.IMPF

In sum, the passive form is used in objective resultative constructions of verbs having the aspectual meaning of telicity, i.e. a construction referring to a state that has come about as the result of a previous action in Basketo.

6 Impersonal Passive

Both passive and active verb forms are used in subjectless sentences⁸. The verb often takes a cognate object and the meaning of the sentence is habitual or stative. Both stems express much the same meaning, but the passive has a more specific and stative meaning as in (25b) while the active is more generic as in (25a).

⁸ Koreete has similar constructions marked by personal ending for 3PL (cf. Binyam 2008: 78-82).

This construction is used productively for expressing stative situations, shown by (26) and (27). The impersonal passive of Basketo expresses a state of affairs, functioning as a marker of habitual or generic activity with the addition of a habitual temporal modifier such as *wójlínts* ‘much’.

(25a) *wójlínts* *doʔ-í* *doʔ-íre*.
 much sit-VN sit-IMPF
 “We/They/People sit a lot.”

(25b) *fiattábo* *wójlínts* *doʔ-í* *doʔ-int-íre*.
 today much sit-VN sit-PASS-PF
 “Today we/they/people are sitting a lot (without working).”

(26) *wójlínts* *úʃk-int-íre*.
 much drink-PASS-IMPF
 “We/They/People drink (alcohol) a lot.”

(27) *wójlínts* *ʃemp-int-íre*.
 much rest-PASS-IMPF
 “We/They/People rest a lot.”

7 Conclusion

This paper has discussed the passive construction in Basketo, a North Omotic language predominantly spoken in Basketo Special Woreda in Ethiopia. We described and exemplified four different aspects of passive.

First, the grammar. The passive suffix *-int-* is also morphologically involved in the reciprocal, reflexive, and spontaneous constructions. It is therefore basically a valency-reducing suffix, having a detransitivizing effect on the transitive.

Second, we looked at some interactions between passive and information structure. From the viewpoint of information structure, the passive construction is a strategy foregrounding the patient, while backgrounding the agent. In general, the patient is promoted from accusative to nominative while the agent is demoted from nominative to oblique case (Instrumental case *-bara* in the case of Basketo) or often deleted in nominative-accusative languages. However, Basketo prefers OSV word order to the passive construction because sentence-initial noun phrases are topics. Furthermore, a subject with low animacy tends to be avoided. On the other hand, in the interpretation

of sentences with trivalent verbs, the noun phrase immediately preceding the verb is taken as focus. If this noun phrase is marked by instrumental (comitative) case *-bara*, the suffix *-int-* of derived verb stems must be interpreted as reciprocal, if by accusative case (object), it must be interpreted as passive.

Third, the passive form is used in the resultative construction with verbs having the aspectual meaning of telicity, i.e. a construction referring to a state that has come about as the result of a previous action. The object of the previous action is promoted to nominative, and the verbal noun of the derived verb stem with *-int-* is used with the present auxiliary verb *wode* ‘exist’.

Finally, the impersonal passive expresses a state of affairs, functioning as a marker of habitual or generic activity.

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