Passive strategies and argument structure in Luganda: a dynamic syntax account

Abstract

The passive construction has been the focus of major syntactic studies for the past decades and it has been examined from various perspectives. The passive marker has been divided into two types: periphrastic passives (which use auxiliaries) and strict morphological passives. The latter is the most prominent strategy attested in Bantu languages (Keenan & Dryer 2007). A large and growing body of literature on Bantu languages has highlighted a number of passive strategies, the most common of which is the typical -w- passive. The other passive strategies are Class 2 / ba- passives and neutro-passives based on the stative suffix -ik-/ek-. These strategies received a considerable attention in the literature on Bantu. Agent phrases have been examined from different angles, i.e. marking agents as oblique arguments (Fleisch 2006), occurrence / non occurrence in passive double object constructions (Pak 2008; Ssekiryango 2006) and information structure (Foley 2007). Early analyses of a number of Bantu languages highlight the intricate relationship between passive constructions and object marking (Bresnan & Moshi 1990; Woolford 1995) which chart these languages into symmetrical and asymmetrical languages. A number of comparative studies investigate precedence relations to account for the argument structure of passive constructions (Alsina 1996; Bresnan & Mchombo 1995; Bresnan & Moshi 1990). However, the scope of research has been limited to a relatively small, unbalanced sample of Bantu languages, and as a result not much has been said about Bantu languages with symmetric passive and object marking patterns.

The current paper develops an analysis of passive strategies and argument structure in Luganda (Bantu E15, Uganda). I show that the agent is demoted to a slot after the VP without a morphological marker in–w- passives, and to an oblique in neutro-passives. I also show that it is completely unexpressed in ba- passives, an indication that, unlike a number of Bantu languages, the Class 2 subject prefix still retains its participant status. I also show, against the assumption in (Ssekiryango 2006), that the agent can occur in passive double object constructions only when the beneficiary is passivized. The paper also shows that object marking is licensed in passive constructions in Luganda. The analysis is formulated in the Dynamic Syntax framework (Cann et. al. 2005; Kempson et. al.2001), a formal model which reflects the hearer's ability to build left-to-right semantic representations from an utterance. In the passive analysis in DS, object marking is not possible as only one unfixed node can be introduced at a time and the subject market is projected onto an unfixed node. For the case in Luganda, I assume that verbs with an inherent 'prepositional concept' (Ashton 1954) such as applicatives and verbs ending in locative suffixes such as –ko form a barrier between the $Ty(t)$ and $Ty(e > t)$ nodes. Thus, both unfixed nodes decorated by the subject marker and the object marker are apart.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of passive strategies and argument structure in Bantu and summarises the relevant previous work. Section 3 lays out the tools of Dynamic Syntax employed for the analysis of data. Sections 4, 5 and 6 provide a detailed analysis of passive strategies in Luganda, and Section 7 provides the summary and conclusion.