

Passivization and Theta (Θ) Role in Arabic and Fulfulde

Aisha Iya Ahmed
Sheriff Abdulkadir

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Abstract

This paper intends to discuss how θ -role is assigned to passive structures in Arabic and Fulfulde. Although Arabic and Fulfulde are from different language phyla, Arabic is a Semitic language while Fulfulde is a Niger Congo language. Fulfulde has borrowed many lexical items from Arabic due to the religious affiliation between the two languages. In Fulfulde, θ -role is assigned at D.S that is on active sentence before movement of the arguments to derive the passive structures. In Arabic, both transitive and intransitive verbs take passive forms, while in Fulfulde only transitive verb has passive forms.

1.0 Introduction

This paper intends to discuss how θ -role is assigned to passive structures in Arabic and Fulfulde. θ -role is one of the sub-theories of Government and Binding theory that discusses the semantic relation between lexical items in a sentence. Θ -roles are assigned to arguments i.e. lexical items in nominal positions. In every sentence, there are two positions in θ -role assignment; an argument position and a non-argument position. Although θ -roles are assigned to argument positions, however not all argument positions are accessible to θ -role. Argument positions that are accessible to θ -role are referred to as A- positions and those that are not accessible to θ -role are A-bar positions. There are two types of arguments with regards to Θ -roles; internal and external. The verb assigns θ -role to the internal arguments i.e. the objects because the verb sub-categorizes the positions occupied by the internal arguments. The verb does not sub-categorize the position occupied by the subject (i.e. the external argument) but it assigns θ -role to it. There are finite universal sets of thematic functions from which every language gets its thematic functions; there are agents, theme, location, goal, beneficiary etc thematic functions. Assignment of θ -roles to arguments is controlled by the θ -criterion which states that:

THETA (θ) CRITERION

Each argument bears one and only one θ -role and each θ -role is assigned to one and only one argument. Sells (1985:37).

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The number of θ -roles to be assigned by a head (i.e. verb) depends solely on the number of arguments the head selects or sub-categories. If a head sub-categories the positions to be occupied by two objects, then it assigns two θ -roles to them. Thus, sub-categorization entails θ -role. This condition on θ -marking which Sells refers to as θ -marking condition states that:

THETA MARKING CONDITION

If α sub-categorizes the position occupied by β , then α θ -marks β .

The θ -marking condition controls the number of θ -roles to be assigned to an argument. Thus, movement from one sub-categorized position to another is prohibited. Following Chomsky (1981) and Sells (1985) in Ndimele (1992), “While θ -roles are assigned at D-structure, the θ -criterion applies at all levels, ensuring that heads and their arguments are in suitable configurations.”

Generally, passivization is seen in most languages as either the promotion of the object to subjecthood or demotion of the subject to objecthood of the sentence. Crystal (2008) defines passivization as a term use in the grammatical analysis of voice where the grammatical subject is the recipient or goal of the action denoted by the verb. In another definition, Radford (1997) refers to passivization as movement from being a complement of the passive participle to its subject. Despite the fact that passivization involves movements of lexical items particularly subjects and objects in languages, its derivation also varies from language to language depending on the structure of individual languages. In most languages with passive voice, it is the transitive verb that passivizes; the transitive verb becomes an intransitive one after been passivized. There are some few languages that allow passivization of intransitive verbs, for instance German and Arabic allow passivization of intransitive verbs as in the following sentence;

1. Es wurde gedacht/ gelacht
It was thought/ laughed
2. Rukiba ala al jabali
(Someone) climb on the mountain

2.0 Literature review

According to Kawasha (2007), passivization in Bantu languages is derived by means of a derivational suffix that is attached to the verb. In Lunda, a language spoken in Zambia, passive structures are derived by the de-transitivizing affix $-iw/ -ew$ that are suffixed to the verb resulting in the deletion of the agent (i.e. the subject) and promotion of the object to subject position as in the following active and passive sentences;

- 2a. ka- pela \varnothing - na- sum- i ka- sumbi

12-snake SAI- TAM- bite- FV 12- domestic fowl

Kapela nasumi kasumbi

‘A snake has bitten a domestic fowl’.

b. ka- sumbi ☉- na- sum- ew- i

12- domestic fowl- SAI- TAM- bite- pass-FV

Kasumbi nasumewi

‘A domestic fowl has been bitten’.

The sentence in 2a is in the active voice and the corresponding one in 2b is in the passive voice. The suffix *-ew* attached to the verbal root *sum-* marks passive voice. The post verbal noun phrase *kasumbi* ‘domestic fowl’ in 2a is the object of the active sentence whereas in 2b it occupies the subject position and becomes the subject of sentence 2b. The agent *kapela* ‘snake’ is dropped in the passive construction i.e. in 2b. According to Kawasha, Lunda has virtually lost this type of passive construction. Instead, it uses structures where the subject is a class 2 third person prefix and the object retains its syntactic function. The agent may be optionally expressed as an oblique argument headed by *kudi* ‘by’ as in the following sentences;

3a **Active Sentence**

Atwansi anata nyikabu

a- tu- ansi a- a- nat -a nyi- kabu

1-13-child SA2- TNS- throw-FV 4- fruit

‘The child threw the fruit’.

b. **Passive Sentence**

Anata nyikabu kudi atwansi

a- a- nat- a nyi- kabu kudi a- tu- ansi

SA2-TNS- throw- FV 4-fruit by 1-13-child

‘The fruits were thrown by the child.’

In this construction, the agent *atwansi* ‘child’ moves to an oblique position preceded by *Kudi* ‘by’ while the patient object *nyikabu* ‘fruits’ still remains in its post verbal position. The subject is now a class 2 third person prefix a-‘they’

In a similar discussion, Heather and Dennis (2008) argued that in Shona, passivization is expressed by the morpheme –w that is affixed to the verbal stem as in the following sentences;

Active Sentence

- 4a. Shinga a- ka- bik- a ma- nhanga
Shingi AGR1-PST-cook-FV CL6-pumpkins
'Shingi cooked pumpkins'.

Passive Sentence

- b. Ma- nhanga a-ka- bik- w-a na- shingi
CL 6-pumpkin AGR6-PST-cook-PASS-FV by-Shingi
'Pumpkins were cooked by Shingi'

The Shona passive appears like a typical passive; the 4a is introduced by a by-phrase in 4b, and the theme has become the subject of a passive-marked verb.

The case is not very far from what Hausa has as passive. According to Newman (2000) and Jaggar (2001), passive constructions are derived in Hausa by suffixing the grade 7 suffix –u and –a to a transitive verb of the basic grades, promoting the object to occupy the subject slot and drop the subject of the sentence. They went further to say that not all Hausa grade 7 verbs can be passivized. Consider the following sentences:

Active Sentences

- 5a. Aisha taa dafa abinci
Aisha 3F cook-GR1 food
'Aisha cooked food'.

Passive Sentences

- b. Abinci yaa daf-u
food 3M cook- GR7
'The food was cooked.'
- c. An daf-a abinci
someone cook food

In sentence 5a, the subject slot is occupied by the agent Aisha and in 5b it is the object *abinca* ‘food’ that occupies the subject position. The agent has been omitted in 5b and the verb has changed from grade 1 verb to a grade 7 verb.

3.0 Passivization in Arabic

Arabic expresses its passive construction in three ways; 1. With the subject of the sentence mentioned under the *by* phrase (e.g. *duriba alwaladu bisayyirati*= the boy was hit by a car),

2. With the subject of the sentence completely omitted (*Duriba alwaladu*= the boy was hit) and;

3. An impersonal passive e.g. *Qu'ida fi al-maqha*=‘(Someone) sat in the restaurant’ (where the agent is not mentioned). The first two types of passive in Arabic are derived through the following procedures:

- i. Delete the subject of the verb or move the subject of the verb to a *by*-phrase slot in the sentence.
- ii. Move the object of the verb to the subject slot of the sentence.
- iii. Change the verb from the form *faʿala* (active past tense) to *fuʿila* (passive participle verb).

Let us consider the following sentences:

Active Sentences

6a xaraga al naaru assawba

burn-pst fire-subj. cloth- obj

‘The fire burnt the cloth’

7a. Assayaratu darabat al walada

the car-subj. hit-past the boy-obj.

‘The car hit the boy’

Both sentences 6a and 7a are in the active voice, the two sentences reveal that Arabic has two word orders; VSO (verb, subject, object) and SVO (subject, verb, object) respectively. When these two active sentences are passivized, they take the following forms:

Passive Sentences

6b. Xuriga assawbu bi-nnari

Burn-pass cloth-obj by-fire

‘The cloth was burnt by fire.’

7b. Duriba al waladu bi-sayaarati

hit-pass the boy by- a car

‘The boy was hit by a car’.

In sentences 6b and 7b, the objects are promoted to the subject slots of the two sentences and the subject demoted to the object position under a *by*-phrase. The verbs have also changed from *xaraga* and *daraba* to *xuriga* and *duriba* respectively. As mentioned earlier, the subject of the verb of the active sentence can also drop instead of moving to the *by*-phrase position as in the following sentences:

Active Sentences

8a. Kataba al waladu al darsa

Wrote-pst the- boy the-lesson

‘The boy wrote the lesson’.

Passive Sentences

8b. Kutiba al darsu

Wrote-pass the lesson

‘The lesson was written’.

In sentence 8a, the subject is completely dropped in sentence 8b. The object *al darsu* has now taken the position of the subject and the verb has changed from a simple past tense verb to a passive participle. Arabic impersonal passive are derived with intransitive verbs. In Arabic impersonal passive, there is no promotion of objects in the sentence. Thus, no movement is involved as illustrated below:

9. Yubaau al- kutubu fil maktab

Sold-pass the-books in bookshop

‘Books are sold in the bookshop’.

10. Qu’ida fi al-maqha

Sat-pass in the- restaurant

‘(Someone) sat in the restaurant’.

Sentence 9 and 10 are passive sentences and they do not have active counterparts as in the other Arabic passive constructions discussed earlier.

4.0 **Passivization in Fulfulde**

Fulfulde has only one way of expressing its passive; it shows its passive by completely omitting the subject of the active sentence and promoting the object of the active sentence to the slot of the omitted subject. As Fulfulde attaches importance to its verb because of the role it plays in changing the grammatical function of the sentence, the active verb also changes its form when passivizes. A passive verb in Fulfulde has two forms; with a passive marker –aama and with an indirect object marker –an- followed by the passive marker –aama as illustrated in the following sentences:

Active Sentences

11a Usman hokk- i Aisa ceede

Usman give- TM Aisa money

‘Usman gave Aisa money’.

12a Usman sood- an- i Hamida saare

Usman buy- IOM-TM Hamida house

‘Usman bought a house for Hamida.’

Passive Sentences

11b. Aisa hokk- aama ceede

Aisa give- PASS money

‘Aisa was given money’.

12b. Hamida sood- an- aama saare

Hamida buy-IOM-PASS house

‘Hamida was bought a house’.

The sentences in 11a and 12a are in the active voice and those in 11b and 12b are the corresponding passive structures introduced by the passive marker –aama. In 12b, the passive

marker –aama is preceded by an indirect object marker –an-. In both 11b and 12b, the subjects of the active sentences have been omitted. The objects have been promoted to fill the omitted subject slot.

5.0 Theta (θ) role assignment in Arabic

Assignment of θ -roles to arguments in a sentence depends solely on the verb, the verb sub-categorizes the positions occupy by the arguments. If the verb sub-categorizes two positions, then it assigns two θ -roles. Let us see how θ -roles are assigned to arguments in Arabic sentence, sentences 6, 7 and 8 will be represented here as 13, 14 and 15 respectively for our analysis.

13a. Xaraga al-naaru assawba

Burn-PAST fire- SUBJ cloth-OBJ

‘The fire burnt the cloth’.

13b. Xuriga assawbu bi- nnari

Burn-PAST cloth-OBJ by- fire-SUBJ

‘The cloth was burnt by fire.’

14a. A-ssayaratu daraba al-waladu

The- car-SUBJ hit the- boy-OBJ

‘The car hit the boy’

14b. Duriba al-waladu bi-sayaarati

Hit-PASS the-boy-OBJ by- a car

‘The boy was hit by a car’

We assume in Arabic θ -roles are assigned to arguments at D.S (Deep Structure) in the active sentences so that when the arguments move as a result of passivization, they will move with their θ -roles to their new slots. This will stop the assigning of a second θ -role to the arguments at their new positions. Thus, *assawbu*, *al-waladu* and *alnnari*, *sayyaarati* are assigned patient and agent θ -roles respectively at D.S and they still maintain these θ -roles at S.S (surface-structure) even after passivization although they have changed positions after the movement. On the other hand if θ -role is allowed to be assigned at S.S, the arguments are likely to have two θ -roles each, that is one at D.S (i.e. on active sentences) and the second one at S.S (i.e. on the passive sentence) which violates the θ -criterion. The assignment of θ -roles to arguments in Arabic impersonal passive differs a bit with those discussed earlier. In Arabic impersonal passive, the arguments are assigned θ -roles at S.S because, Arabic impersonal passive do not have active

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counterparts as in the other passive constructions. Arabic impersonal passive sentences in 9 and 10 will be represented as 15 and 16 respectively.

15. Yubaau al-kutubu fi as-suuqi
Sold-PASS the-books-OBJ in the market
'Books are sold in the market'.

16. Qu'ida fi al-fasli
Sat-PASS in the- class
'(Someone) sat in the class'.

In 15, the verb *yabaau* assigns patient and locative θ -roles to *al-kutubu* and *as-suuq* respectively at S.S. This also applies to sentence 16 which has no patient, the verb *Quida* assigns only locative θ -role to the only argument that it sub- categorizes.

6.0 Theta (θ) role assignment in Fulfulde

Theta (θ) role in Fulfulde is assigned at D.S that is on active sentence before movement of the arguments to derive the passive structures. Fulfulde active and passive sentence discussed in 11 and 12 will be represented here as 17 and 18 respectively.

17a Usman hokk-i Aisa ceede
Usman give-TM Aisa money
'Usman gave Aisa money.'

b. Aisa hokk- aama ceede
'Aisa was given money.'

18a. Usman sood-an- i Hamida saare
Usman buy- IOM-TM Hamida house
'Usman bought a house for Hamida.'

b. Hamida sood- an- aama saare
Hamida buy-IOM-PASS house
'Hamida was bought a house'

In sentence 17a the verb sub-categorizes the positions occupy by the objects *Aisa* and *ceede* and assigns benefactive and patient θ -roles to them respectively. Although sentence 18a is an indirect object construction, the verb sub-categorizes the positions of the two objects *Hamida* and *saare* , thus assigns benefactive and patient θ -roles to them respectively. The subjects *Usman* in both sentences 17a and 18a are assigned agent θ -role by the verb also before they are omitted although the verb does not sub-categorize the position they occupy. Θ -role is assigned to arguments in Fulfulde at D.S. The arguments move to S.S with their θ -roles satisfying the θ -criterion.

7.0 Comparative Analysis

In both languages passivization is achieved by:

- a. A passive morpheme is inserted.
- b. An object NP is preposed (object promotion).
- c. A subject NP is postposed (subject demotion).

In Arabic, θ -roles are assigned to arguments at D.S (Deep Structure) in the active sentences so that when the arguments move as a result of passivization, they will move with their θ -roles to their new slots, as in examples 13 and 14. However example 15 and 16, Arabic impersonal passive, the arguments are assigned θ -roles at S.S because, Arabic impersonal passive do not have active counterparts as in the former two passive constructions (13 and 14). In Fulfulde, θ -role is assigned at D.S that is on active sentence before movement of the arguments to derive the passive structures. In Arabic, both transitive and intransitive verbs take passive forms, as in examples 15 and 16 respectively, while in Fulfulde only transitive verb has passive forms.

8.0 Conclusion

It is frequently claimed that passive constructions exist to fulfill either one or both of the following manipulations:

AGENT DEMOTION - removal of the Agent from prominent subject position and demotion to a less salient role in the syntactic structure.

PATIENT PROMOTION – promotion of the Patient from object to subject position.

This could be true for Fulfulde passives and Arabic transitive verbs. However In the Arabic passive of intransitive verbs, however, there is neither any agent demotion, nor any patient promotion, and the prominence of the single argument of the verb is not changed by the use of a passive structure.

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Aisha Iya Ahmed
Department of Languages and Linguistics
University of Maiduguri, Nigeria
Aishaahmed1958@yahoo.com

Sheriff Abdulkadir
Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies
University of Maiduguri, Nigeria
Sharafa123@yahoo.com