

## **Bare passives in (selected) Bantu and Western Nilotic languages**

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“Bare passives”, “pseudo-passives” or “zero-coded passives” are a crosslinguistically common phenomenon. They have been reported in a growing number of languages, stemming from various language families. According to Cobbinah & Lüpke (2009), they consist in sentences that “fullfill all or most criteria for being called a passive but one: morphological or periphrastic marking of the verb phrase”.

In the present paper, we concentrate on (selected) Bantu and Western Nilotic bare passive strategies and lay out the basis for a typology of transitive passive structures in these languages. Interestingly, the Bantu family is characterized by its rich verbal morphology. Several of the languages discussed in the present paper have morphological means to encode changes in diathesis and thus depart from Western Nilotic languages as well as the languages discussed by Cobbinah & Lüpke, which tend to display a paucity of morphological categories.

Concentrating on impersonal passives, zero-coded (“functional”) passive left dislocation and so-called “subject-object reversal” (i.e. OVS passive with object-verb “subject-agreement”), we propose that the main motivation for these strategies is that they allow promoting objects without departing from the default linking between the argument carrying the highest thematic role and the subject position (Spec,TP).

Furthermore, we argue that whenever objects are located in the preverbal domain, they are located in an inflectional-domain-internal Topic projection (Spec,TopP) right above TP. This allows accounting for previous observations that in functional passive left-dislocation, the left-dislocated object is syntactically comparable to a genuine grammatical subject rather than to discourse-given or contrastive left-peripheral topics.

Finally, we argue that the oft-discussed OVS order found in Kirundi/Kinyarwanda, is derived through a movement of the verb above TP, to the above-mentioned Topic projection. In our view, subject agreement between pre-verbal object and verb is configurational in nature. It follows from the requirement for the phrase controlling noun class features on the verb to be in a Spec-Head configuration with it, rather than to the topical nature of the object. We will show that in Kinyarwanda/Kirundi, this bare passive OVS strategy additionally fullfils a general requirement for focused phrases to align with the right edge of the clause.