



Passive Construction 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 Southern Nation Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, Ethiopia. The passive suffix *-int-* is also morphologically involved in reciprocal, reflexive, and spontaneous constructions. So, it can be regarded as a valency-reducing suffix having a de-transitivizing 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 effect, OSV word order is used because the initial noun phrase of a sentence becomes a 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 happened 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.

1. Introduction

This paper² deals with the passive construction in Basketo³, a North Omotic language predominantly spoken in Basketo Special Woreda, Ethiopia. Basketo is one of the least studied languages in Ethiopia. There are some recent studies conducted. Amha (1993, 1995) deals with noun morphology while Treis (2014) dealt with interrogativity. Yet, no one attempted to study the passive. Sottile (2002) investigated a descriptive grammar of Basketo with a focus on passive briefly (Sottile, 2002, pp. 145-6). Amha (1994) deals with Omoto verb derivation and introduced the passive and reciprocal forms of Basketo briefly with the other three Omoto languages.

2. Middle Semantics

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

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

¹ 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.

³ 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, ɓ, dɓ, s, ʃ, 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.

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

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 an **active transitive** verb is defined as an event in which 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 the 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 act in a single event. The semantic relation between the participants is prototypical of affectedness.

The **spontaneous** construction⁴ indicates a change of state of an entity (a patient). No agent entity does not receive 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 an inherent characteristic of that entity that enables the event to take place. On the other hand, the **impersonal passive** does not refer 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.

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)

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 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 discussed this point in the section below.

- (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 meef̃-**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 de-transitivizing effect on the transitive, while the causative suffix **-is-** is valency-increasing, making intransitive verbs transitive, as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. It seems that the detransitivizing by passive **-int-** is similar to spontaneous function.

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

<i>Transitive</i>	<i>Intransitive</i>
ááŋ-íre ‘hide’	ááŋ- int -íre ‘be hidden’
bekk’-íre ‘see’	bekk’- int -íre ‘be seen’
búŋ-íre ‘mix’	búŋ- 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 the 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, 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 topic⁵, and so active OSV word order⁶ is preferred for this purpose. Especially, first- and second-person pronouns tend to come to an initial position of a sentence, and the simpler active forms can be selected rather than the passive which involves complicated 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).

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)

⁶ 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).

- (5a) néení í-bara bukk-**int**-íne.
 2SG.NOM.TOP 3MS-INSTR hit-PASS-PF
 “You are hit by him.”
- (5b) néénáná 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) táánáná Bálaj-i bukk-íne.
 1SG.ACC.TOP Balay-NOM hit-PF
 “Me, Balay hit.”
- (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, as 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’, *ímmíre* ‘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 order⁷. If this noun phrase is marked by instrumental (comitative) case *-bara*, the suffix **-int-** of derived verb stems must be interpreted as reciprocal while it must be interpreted as passive with accusative case (Object).

The verb *wongíre* ‘buy or sell’ has the senses ‘sell’ and ‘buy’. Its interpretation in an active clause is determined by the case of the noun phrase immediately preceding it. The dative case (Goal) implies ‘sell’ shown by (10a) while the 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 aphil-í ízá-bo wong-íne.

3MS.NOM clothes-ACC 3FS-DAT buy/sell-PF

⁴ 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.

“He sold her clothes.”

- (10b) íjí aphil-í ízá-ppo wong-íne.
 3MS.NOM clothes-ACC 3FS-ABL buy/sell-PF

“He bought clothes from her.”

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

- (10c) ízá aphil-í í-bara wong-**int**-íne.
 3FS.NOM clothes-ACC 3MS-INSTR buy/sell-REC-PF

“They bought/sold each other clothes.”

- (10d) ízá í-bara aphil-í wong-**int**-íne.
 3FS.NOM 3MS-INSTR clothes-ACC 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 *immire* ‘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 the accusative case, it must be interpreted as passive shown by (11b) and (12b) while this noun is in the instrumental case and it is 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 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 steal-REC-PF

“We (I and thief) stole each other’s cows.”

(12a) íjí 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 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 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 while the latter is 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 a verbal noun followed by the present auxiliary verb *wóde* ‘exist’. Examples (13a-17a) show the previous action and examples (13b-17b) are subjective resultative.

- (13a) íjí ojdá gallá doʔ-íde⁸.
 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 fia ájfa-d-ani éédǎ-áde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP 3MS-DAT this meat-DEF-ACC get-PF
 “I have just gotten this meat for him.”

- (15b) táání íjá-bo fia ájfa-d-ani éédǎ-í wóde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP 3MS-DAT this meat-DEF-ACC get-VNexist.IMPF
 “I have this meat for him.”

- (16a) táání dabdabbá-d-ani ts’aaǎ-áde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP letter-DEF-ACC write-PF
 “I have just written the letter.”

- (16b) táání dabdabbá-d-ani ts’aaǎ-í wóde.
 1SG.NOM.TOP letter-DEF-ACC write-VN exist.IMPF

⁵ Basketo has two perfective forms; *-ine* and *-ide/-ade*. The former indicates the past perfective with the temporal adverbials like as *zináábo* ‘yesterday’ or *tabbi lájsappo tíni* ‘ten years ago’ and the latter the recent past perfective, referring to a time immediately before utterance time with the aspectual adverbial *határ* ‘just now’ optionally (Inui 2017: 21f.).

“I have the letter written.”

- (17a) táání kífíl-ítti mats'ááḥa-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 kífíl-ítti mats'ááḥa-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 the 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 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 *wóde* ‘exist’. Examples (18-20) show resultative constructions with passive forms.

- (18) fia ájḥa-d-i íjá-bo éédḥ-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'aaḥ-ínt-í wóde.
 letter-DEF-NOM write-PASS-VN exist.IMPF

“The letter has been written.”

- (20) mats'ááḥa-d-i kífíl-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 do not express the resulting state with a previous action. The implied (non-terminative verbs⁹) cannot make resultative constructions irrespective of their being transitive or intransitive as shown by examples (21b-24b).

⁹ 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 wóðe.
rain-NOM fall-VN exist.IMPF
- (22a) íjí dong-íne.
3MS.NOM dance-PF
“He danced.”
- (22b) *íjí dong-í wóðe.
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-**int**-í wóðe.
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’-**int**-í wóðe.
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 sentences¹⁰. 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).

This construction is used productively for expressing stative situations as 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, the North Omotic language predominantly spoken in Basketo Special Woreda in Ethiopia. We described and exemplified

⁷ Koreete has similar constructions marked by personal ending for 3PL (cf. Binyam 2008: 78-82).

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

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, and if 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 express a state of affairs, functioning as a marker of habitual or generic activity.

Abbreviations

1 first person 2-second person 3 third person

ABL ablative ACC accusative DAT dative

DEF definite Ffeminine 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

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