

Mandinka antipassive and causative in historical perspective (abstract)

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Most Manding varieties have a nominalization marker *-li* whose use is particularly common with transitive verbs whose second argument is not expressed. This nominalization marker is however also found with intransitive verbs, and is compatible with the expression of the second argument of transitive verbs (see for example Dumestre 2003: 74-5 on Bambara). In Mandinka, *-ri* (which has the allomorph *-diri* with stems ending with a nasal) is exclusively found with transitive verbs whose second argument is not expressed, which constitutes the characteristic distribution of antipassive markers. It differs from typical antipassive markers in that, with most transitive verbs, the *ri*-form cannot be used in verbal predicate function, but only as an action noun. There is however an exception, *dómo* ‘eat’, whose antipassive form *dómó-ri* has a verbal use, as in Ex. (2):

(1) *Díndín-o ye mbúur-oo dómo.*
child-DEF PF.POS bread-DEF eat
‘The child ate the bread.’

(2) *Díndín-o dómó-rí-ta.*
child-DEF eat-ANTIP-PF.POS
‘The child ate.’

The hypothesis that the distribution of Mandinka *-ri* represents a more ancient stage in the evolution of this marker than the distribution of its cognates in other Manding varieties (and not the other way round) is supported by the fact that Sooninke has a perfectly canonical antipassive marker *-ndì* (Creissels 1991) probably cognate with these Manding suffixes:

(3) *Fàatú dà kómpè η cèllà.*
Fatou PF.POS room DEF sweep
‘Fatou swept the room.’

(4) *Fàatú séllá-ndì.*
Fatou sweep-ANTIP
‘Fatou did the sweeping.’

Mandinka causativization provides additional evidence that Mandinka *-ri* originates from a formerly canonical antipassive marker. Mandinka has a causative suffix *-ndi* which has no cognates in other Manding varieties but is probably cognate with the causative marker of Sooninke *-ndí* (tonally distinct from antipassive *-ndi*). This suffix is mainly used to causativize intransitive constructions, and its use in the causativization of transitive constructions is marginal. But Mandinka also has a suffix *-rindi* (which has the allomorph *-dirindi* with stems ending with a nasal) used exclusively to causativize transitive constructions, as in ex. (5).

- (5) *Kew-ó ye díndíŋ-o fóo-ríndi tooñáa la.*
 man-DEF PF.POS child-DEF tell-CAUS truth.DEF OBL
 ‘The man made the child tell the truth.’

In a synchronic perspective, the segmentation of *fóoríndi* ‘make tell’ as *fóo-rí-ndi* [tell-ANTIP-CAUS] must be rejected, since the causative suffix *-ndi* cannot attach to nominal stems, and *fóo-ri* [tell-ANTIP] cannot be used as a verb. Such a segmentation would however be perfectly possible in the case of *dómo* ‘eat’, as indicated in Ex.(6), to be compared with (2) above, and would be consistent with the syntactic properties of *dómóríndi* ‘make eat’: *-ri* encodes the demotion of the object, making it possible for the initial subject to move to object position when a causer is introduced in subject position.

- (6) *Kew-ó ye díndíŋ-o dómó-rí-ndi mbúur-oo la.*
 man-DEF PF.POS child-DEF eat-ANTIP-CAUS truth.DEF OBL
 ‘The man made the child eat the bread.’

In a historical perspective, it is consequently reasonable to think that, at some stage in the history of Mandinka, the atypical antipassive marker *-ri* attested in the present state of this language was a canonical antipassive marker whose combination with the causative suffix *-ndi* yielded causative forms of transitive verbs in a perfectly regular way.

Abbreviations

CAUS: causative, DEF: definite, OBL: postposition in oblique marker function, PF: perfective, POS: positive.

References

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 Dumestre, G. 2003. *Grammaire fondamentale du bambara*. Paris: Karthala.