

**Soninke (West Mande),
an otherwise well-behaved ‘accusative’ language
with fully productive antipassive derivation**

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1. Introduction

Soninke, spoken in Mali, Mauritania, Gambia, and Senegal, by approximately 2 million speakers, belongs to the western branch of the Mande language family. In the long-standing debate about the relationship between antipassive and accusativity/ergativity, it provides crucial support to the view that, as discussed by Janic (2013), accusative languages may have fully productive antipassive derivations, the only differences with antipassive derivations in ergative languages being that:

- (a) they are less visible, since in an accusative language, the coding properties of an A noun phrase converted into the sole core argument of an intransitive predication do not change,
- (b) one of the functions fulfilled by antipassive derivations in ergative languages (making A’s accessible to operations to which P’s and S’s only have access) has no equivalent in accusative languages.

In this presentation, building on Creissels (1991), Creissels and Diagne (2013), Creissels and Dramé (to appear 2016), and recent fieldwork, I discuss the most salient typological characteristics of Soninke antipassive.

The examples I quote in the following sections are all from the Soninke variety spoken in Kingi (**Kíngí**), a traditional Soninke province in North West Mali whose main urban center is Nioro (**Ñóoró**), but I am aware of no dialectal variation that would affect the aspects of Soninke morphosyntax discussed in this presentation.

2. Verbal predicative construction and alignment in Soninke

In Soninke, as in the other Mande languages, verbal predication is characterized by a rigid constituent order that can be schematized as S pm (O) V (X). The subject (S), a grammatical relation that conflates the A term of the basic transitive construction and the unique core argument of intransitive predication, is the only nominal term of the construction whose presence is an absolute requirement in independent assertive or interrogative clauses. Predicative markers (pm) are grammatical words occupying a fixed position immediately after the subject. They express grammaticalized TAM distinctions and polarity (positive vs. negative), and also participate in transitivity marking – see below. There is no indexation of the core syntactic terms S and O. As regards flagging, Soninke has a differential subject marking mechanism involving an enclitic **-n** which occurs exclusively with interrogative phrases or NPs marked as focalized by the focus marker **yà/yá**, and only if such phrases fulfill the subject function. This subject marker must not be confused with the definiteness marker (or rather default determiner) **-`n**, which has the same segmental form but different tonal properties (and a very different distribution).

- (1) a. **Kó-n ìì?** **Múusá yà-n ìì.**
 who-S come Moussa FOC-S come
 ‘Who came?’ MOUSSA came.

- b. **Kó-n dà Hàatú yàxì?** **Múusá yà-n dà Hàatú yàxì.**
 who-S TR Fatou marry Moussa FOC-S TR Fatou marry
 ‘Who married Fatou?’ ‘MOUSSA married Fatou.’
- c. **Án dà kó qìrì?** **Ñ dà Móusá yà qìrì.**
 2SG TR who call 1SG TR Moussa FOC call
 ‘Who did you call?’ ‘I called MOUSSA.’
- d. **Án góllí kó dànná?** **Ñ góllí Móusá yà dànná.**
 2SG work who for 1SG work Moussa FOC for
 ‘For whom did you work?’ ‘I worked for MOUSSA.’

The alignment between transitive and intransitive construction is therefore neutral in indexation, but accusative in flagging. Moreover, accusative alignment is found in constituent order too, since as illustrated by Ex. (2) and (3), the unique core argument in intransitive predication and the A term in transitive predication equally precede the predicative markers, whereas the P term in transitive predication occurs between the predicative markers and the verb. The predicative markers in Ex. (2) and (3) are **má** ‘completive, negative’, and **wá** ‘incompletive positive’.¹ With **wá** and its negative counterpart **ntá**, the verb is in a suffixed form I call gerundive, otherwise it occurs in its bare lexical form.

- (2) a. **Ké yúgó má qàrà.**
 DEM man CPL.NEG study^L
 S pm V
 ‘This man did not study.’
- b. **À wá táaxú-nú dàagó-n kànmá.**
 1SG ICPL sit-GER mat-D on
 S pm V X
 ‘He is sitting on the mat.’
- (3) a. **Lémúnù-n má qálisí kità.**
 child.PL-D CPL.NEG money get^L
 S pm O V
 ‘The children haven’t got money.’
- b. **À wá dòròkê-n qóbó-nó yàxàré-n dànná.**
 1SG ICPL dress-D buy-GER woman-D for
 S pm O V X
 ‘He will buy a dress for the woman.’

Predicative constructions with two or more terms encoded in the same way as the patient of typical monotransitive verbs (so-called ‘multiple object constructions’) are not possible, and in the construction of semantically trivalent verbs like **kínì** ‘give’ in Ex. (4), one of the arguments (here, the recipient) is an ‘oblique argument’ that nothing distinguishes from adjuncts: like adjuncts, oblique arguments are encoded as postpositional phrases that follow the verb.

- (4) **Múusá dà qálisí-n kìnì Dénbà yí.**
 Moussa TR money-D give Demba POSTP
 S pm O V X
 ‘Moussa gave the money to Demba.’

Oblique arguments are found with some semantically bivalent verbs too. In Soninke, not all bivalent verbs can be constructed transitively: some of them, like **mùngú** ‘forget’ in Ex. (5), select an

¹ Although cognate with the locational copula **wá** / **ntá**, the incompletive predicative marker **wá** / **ntá** has several properties that require treating it as a distinct unit in a synchronic description of Soninke.

‘extended intransitive’ coding frame with one of the two arguments encoded as the subject, and the other one encoded as an oblique.

- (5) a. **Ń Ø mùngú dò ké léminé tòxó-n ñà.**
 1SG forget with DEM child name-D^{LH} POSTP
 S pm V X
 ‘I have forgotten the name of this child.’
- b. ***Ń dà ké léminé tòxó-n mùngú.**
 1SG TR DEM child name-D^{LH} forget
 S pm O V

A salient feature of Soninke is the particularly clear-cut distinction between transitive and intransitive predications, due to the following three phenomena:

- in the completive positive and in the imperative plural, a morpheme **dà** analyzed here as a transitivity marker is obligatorily found in transitive constructions, but does not occur in the corresponding intransitive constructions – Ex. (6);²
- the subjunctive positive is marked by **ñà** in transitive constructions and **ñàn** in intransitive constructions – Ex. (7);³
- in clauses including a focalized term, the incompletive marker has two variants depending on the transitivity of the construction: **Ø** in intransitive constructions, and **ñà** (homonymous with the subjunctive positive marker) in transitive constructions – Ex. (8).

- (6) a. **Ń gidá dàgá Hàràncì.**
 1SG elder_brother^{LH} go France
 ‘My elder brother went to France.’
- b. **Yàxàré-n dà tíyè-n qóbó sàxà-n ñá.**
 woman-D TR meat-D buy market-D POSTP
 ‘The woman bought meat at the market.’
- c. **Qà dà léminè-n dèemá!**
 2PL.IMPER TR child-D help
 ‘Help_{pl} the child!’
- (7) a. **Lémúnù-n ñàn táaxú yíttè-n ñùré.**
 child.PL-D SUBJ.INTR sit tree-D under
 ‘The children should sit under the tree.’
- b. **Lémúnù-n ñà tíyè-n ñígá.⁴**
 child.PL-D SUBJ.TR meat-D eat
 ‘The children should eat meat.’
- (8) a. **À wá sállì-ní.**
 3SG ICPL pray-GER
 ‘He is praying.’

² **Dà** is sometimes labeled ‘completive positive marker’, but this label is hardly compatible with its use in the imperative plural. Alternatively, given its position, it could be analyzed as an ergative postposition or accusative preposition with a restricted distribution. However, there is no decisive evidence for analyzing **dà** as forming a phrase with either the subject or the object, and this is the reason why I prefer the more neutral label ‘transitivity marker’. Note that, in some Soninke varieties, this transitivity marker occurs as **dè** or **dì**.

³ The form labeled here ‘subjunctive’ combines with noun phrases in subject function in uses broadly similar to those fulfilled by forms traditionally labeled ‘subjunctives’ in grammars of European languages, but it is also found without an overt subject in uses broadly similar to those of European infinitives.

⁴ **Yígá** ‘eat’ occurs here as **ñígá** because of an alternation that automatically modifies the initial of Soninke words in contact with a nasal belonging to the preceding word. In this context, r → l, w → ŋ, y → ñ, s → c, h → p, and an initial ŋ is added to the words that have no initial consonant.

- b. **À Ø sállì-ní yà.**
 3SG ICPL pray-GER FOC
 ‘He is PRAYING.’
- c. **À wá hàrê-n gáagà-ná.**
 3SG ICPL donkey-D sell-GER
 ‘He is selling the donkey.’
- d. **À nà hàrê-n gáagà-ná yà.**
 3SG ICPL donkey-D sell-GER FOC
 ‘He is SELLING the donkey.’

3. Constraints on the expression of subjects and objects, and on the intransitive use of transitive verbs

In independent assertive or interrogative clauses, null subjects or objects are not allowed: the subject position to the left of predicative markers cannot remain empty, and an overt object phrase must obligatorily be present between the predicative markers that unambiguously belong to the transitive paradigm and the verb. This means that, whenever a potentially transitive verb is found in a construction with just one NP to its left, the construction cannot be analyzed as a transitive construction with a null subject or object, and must be analyzed as an intransitive construction with the sole NP to the left of the verb in subject function.

A crucial point in the analysis of the predicative constructions of Soninke is that the position occupied by the predicative markers rules out an analysis according to which clauses such as (9b), with a bivalent verb preceded by a single noun phrase representing the patient-like participant, might have a transitive construction with a null subject. In such clauses, the predicative markers occur after the unique noun-phrase preceding the verb, not before it, as it should be the case if this noun phrase occupied the object position in a transitive construction with a null subject. Moreover, the analysis of clauses such as (9b) as intransitive clauses with the patient in subject function is confirmed by the absence of the transitivity marker **dà** in the corresponding completive positive clause (9d), and more generally by the choice of the intransitive variant of the predicative markers that have distinct forms in transitive and intransitive clauses.

- (9) a. **Múusá wá ké dáagó bàyì-ní.**
 Moussa ICPL DEM mat lay_out-GER
 ‘Moussa will lay out this mat.’
- b. **Ké dáagó wá bàyì-ní.**
 DEM mat ICPL lay_out-GER
 ‘This mat will be laid out.’
- c. ***Ø Wá ké dáagó bàyì-ní.**
 ICPL DEM mat lay_out-GER
- d. **Ké dáagó bàyí.**
 DEM mat lay_out
 ‘This mat was laid out.’

In other words, **bàyí** must be analyzed as a P-labile verb whose intransitive construction has a passive reading.

Similarly, in (10), the absence of the transitivity marker **dà** in the completive positive (10d) shows that (10b) is not a transitive construction with a null object, but rather an intransitive construction. In other words, **sòxó** is an A-labile verb whose intransitive construction has an unspecified object reading.

- (10) a. **Múusá wá ké té sòxò-nó.**
 Moussa ICPL DEM field cultivate-GER
 ‘Moussa will cultivate this field.’
- b. **Múusá wá sòxò-nó.**
 Moussa ICPL cultivate-GER
 ‘Moussa will cultivate.’
- c. **Múusá dà ké té sòxó.**
 Moussa TR DEM field cultivate
 ‘Moussa has cultivated this field.’
- d. **Múusá sòxó.**
 Moussa cultivate
 ‘Moussa has cultivated.’

To summarize, in Soninke, the absence of an object NP in a clause headed by a potentially transitive verb implies that the verb in question is labile, and that the TAM-polarity markers sensitive to the transitive vs. intransitive distinction have the form characteristic of intransitive predication.

In the lexicon, the distinction between strictly transitive verbs, A-labile verbs, P-labile verbs, and A/P-labile verbs (which have the ability to be used intransitively in their underived form with a subject representing any of their two core arguments), is quite rigid. A-labile and A/P labile verbs are very few in the verbal lexicon of Soninke, which means that almost all the verbs that have the ability to be used transitively are either strictly transitive verbs or P-labile verbs. In both cases, they are incapable of expressing non-specificity of their patientive argument by being simply used intransitively with their agentive argument in subject function, and this is where antipassive derivation comes in.

4. The derivational suffixes involved in antipassive constructions

Soninke has three verbal suffixes encoding operations on the valency of the verb. One of them is a causative suffix, the other two are valency-decreasing suffix. Both valency-decreasing suffixes can be involved in antipassivization, but one of them is a dedicated antipassive suffix, whereas the other is a multipurpose detransitivizing suffix acting as an antipassive marker with a limited number of verbs. There is no semantic distinction between the antipassive constructions involving these two suffixes, and the choice is just a lexical property of the individual verbal lexemes.

4.1. The detransitivizing suffix *-i*

Most verbs that have a transitive stem ending with a, o, or u also have an intransitive stem that can be analyzed as derived from the transitive stem by the addition of a tonally neutral detransitivizing marker whose underlying form is /i/. However, this detransitivizing marker surfaces as a distinct segment (*-yi*) with monosyllabic stems only (for example **tù-yí** ‘be known’ < **tú** ‘know’). With non-monosyllabic stems, its presence is manifested by the following changes in the last vowel of the stem (and sometimes also in the preceding vowel):

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| a + i → e | as in káré ‘break (intr.)’ < kará ‘break (tr.)’ |
| o + i → e | as in sòxé ‘be cultivated’ < sòxó ‘cultivate’ |
| u + i → i | as in kátí ‘be hit’ < kátú ‘hit’ |

One can therefore argue that the impossibility of forming distinct detransitivized forms of non-monosyllabic verbs ending with e or i by means of this suffix follows from the fact that the phonological process manifesting its presence would apply vacuously to such stems. This explanation is consistent with the fact that all the potentially transitive verbs ending with e or i are P-labile.

Functionally, **-i** may express various detransitivizing operations, but it is not equally productive in all its possible uses. Agent demotion is by far its most productive use. Two semantic subtypes can be recognized. In the anticausative subtype, the agent is suppressed from argument structure, and the event is presented as occurring spontaneously, or at least without the involvement of an agent, as in Ex. (11b). In the passive subtype, the agent is semantically maintained, but it is not expressed, as in Ex. (12b).

- (11) a. **Lémínè-n dà qóllè-n kára.**
 child-D TR calabash-D break
 ‘The child broke the calabash.’
- b. **Qóllè-n karé.**
 calabash-D break.DETR
 ‘The calabash broke.’
- (12) a. **Yàxàré-n dà yillè-n gòró.**
 woman-D TR millet-D pound
 ‘The woman pounded the millet.’
- b. **Yillè-n gòré.**
 millet-D pound.DETR
 ‘The millet was pounded.’

This distinction between agent-backgrounding and agent-suppressing deagentive derivation is not rigid. With many verbs, both readings are equally available, depending on the context. What seems to be crucial is the semantic distinction between processes likely to occur for a variety of reasons not always easy to identify (such as ‘break’), and processes that require the intervention of an agent (such as ‘become pounded’).

With a few verbs among those that can combine with the detransitivizing marker **-i** in deagentive function, the same form also has a reflexive or autocausative use, as illustrated by **bóorè** ‘undress oneself’ < **bóorà** ‘undress (tr.)’ in Ex. (13).⁵

- (13) a. **Yúgò-n dà í rèmmê-n bóorà.**
 man-D TR REFL son-D^{LH} undress
 ‘The man undressed his son.’
- b. **Yúgò-n bóorè.**
 man-D undress.DETR
 ‘The man undressed.’

The detransitivizing marker **-i** may also have a depatientive function. There is a clear asymmetry between the deagentive and depatientive uses of **-i**: many of the intransitive verbs derived by means of **-i** can only be used in deagentive function, but none can be used exclusively in depatientive function. As illustrated by **yígé** < **yígá** ‘eat’ – Ex. (14) – the intransitive verbs derived by means of **-i** that can be used in depatientive function also have a deagentive (anticausative or passive) use.

- (14) a. **Lémúnù-n dà tíyè-n ñígá.**
 child.PL-D TR meat-D eat
 ‘The children ate the meat.’
- b. **Lémúnù-n ñígé.**
 child.PL-D eat.DETR
 ‘The children ate.’

⁵ Soninke has two pronouns used productively to express reflexivity: **í** is a long-distance reflexive used in logophoric contexts, and as a reflexive possessive (as in (13a)), whereas **đú** is a local reflexive used for object or oblique reflexivization.

- c. **Tíyè-n ñígé.**
 meat-D eat.DETR
 ‘The meat was eaten.’

4.2. The antipassive suffix *-ndì* ~ *-ndí*

This suffix has dissyllabic allomorphs with monosyllabic stems (for example **kà-yìndí** < `ká ‘insult’). With non-monosyllabic stems, it may surface as **-ndì** or **-ndí** (depending on the tone pattern of the stem), and triggers no segmental modification of the stem. Its two allomorphs are conditioned as follows: **-ndì** if the tone pattern of the stem includes no LH sequence, **-ndí** if the tone pattern of the stem includes a LH sequence.

The antipassive suffix is exclusively used in depatientive function, as in Ex. (15), and it is very productive. The transitive verbs that can be used intransitively in their underived form with a subject representing the agent are very few, the transitive verbs with which the detransitivizing marker **-i** can be used in depatientive function are not very numerous either, and all transitive verbs that do not belong to one of these two subsets are compatible with the antipassive marker **-ndì** ~ **-ndí**.

- (15) a. **Sámáqqè-n dà léminè-n qíñí.**
 snake-D TR child-D bite
 ‘The snake bit the child.’
- b. **Sámáqqè-n qíñí-ndì.**
 snake-D bite-ANTIP
 ‘The snake bit (someone).’

5. The function and semantics of antipassive derivation

The frequency of antipassive constructions in Soninke is entirely due to their use as a strategy making it possible to use transitive verbs without specifying their patientive argument. It must be remembered that, in addition to a morphologically marked distinction between transitive and intransitive predication, Soninke has a strict ban on null objects in transitive constructions, and except for a tiny minority, transitive verbs cannot feature in an intransitive construction with their agentive argument in subject function.

Interestingly, such constraints are quite common in Mande languages, but the strategies they commonly use to get around them are the use of maximally vague nouns (‘thing’, ‘people’) in object function, or periphrases in which the nominalized transitive verb is the object of the verb ‘do’, and Soninke seems to be the only one that has developed a fully productive antipassive derivation.

Accessibility to some syntactic operations is not a possible motivation of antipassive constructions in Soninke, since there is no restriction to the accessibility of transitive subjects to any kind of syntactic operation, which is of course not surprising in a morphologically accusative language.

Soninke has no interaction between antipassive and aspect either. This may seem more surprising, but in fact, this lack of interaction between antipassive and aspect is consistent with the use of antipassive constructions as the preferred strategy for not specifying the patientive argument of transitive verbs: if the use of antipassive constructions were bound to conditions on aspect, other strategies should have been developed in complementarity with antipassive constructions, which is not the case.

Soninke has no constraint restricting the use of the antipassive form of transitive verbs to the encoding of habitual events or stereotyped activities. Sentences such as (14b) or (15b) above can refer to specific events that have just occurred, and do not exclude that the speaker is aware of the identity of the patientive argument.

Ex. (16b-c) further illustrates the ability of antipassive constructions to refer to specific events, provided no specific patient is mentioned. This example also shows that antipassive constructions in which the patientive argument is expressed as an oblique are possible.

- (16) a. **Hàatú dà yúgó sàará dáàrú.**
 Fatou TR male give_birth yesterday
 ‘Fatou gave birth to a boy yesterday.’
 (transitive construction)
- b. **Hàatú sàaré dáàrú.**
 Fatou give_birth.DETR yesterday
 ‘Fatou had a baby yesterday.’
 (antipassive construction with unexpressed P argument)
- c. **Hàatú sàaré tì lénñúgó yì.**
 Fatou give_birth.DETR with son POSTP
 ‘Fatou gave birth to a son.’
 (antipassive construction with demoted P argument)

The only difference between antipassive constructions such as (16c) and transitive constructions is that they highlight the involvement of the agentive participant in the event. Antipassive constructions with the patientive argument expressed as an oblique are however extremely rare in spontaneous discourse.

6. Antipassive and object incorporation

In Soninke, incorporation can be defined as a morphological operation that creates compound verbal lexemes by attaching the non-autonomous form of a nominal lexeme to the left of a verbal lexeme. Incorporated nouns precede the verbal lexeme with which they form a compound, and the distinction between incorporated nouns and nouns occupying a syntactic position immediately to the left of the verb is ensured by the following two particularities of nominal and verbal morphology in Soninke:

- (a) most nouns have a non-autonomous form distinct from their free form, and this non-autonomous form is used whenever nouns occur as non-final formatives within compound or derived lexemes. For example, the non-autonomous form of **sélinḡé** ‘chicken’ (plural **sélinḡú**) is **sélin-**;
- (b) in some conditions (for example, in combination with some negative markers) the inherent tonal melody of the verb is replaced by an entirely low melody, and this tonal change affects incorporated nouns as part of a compound verb stem, but not nouns occupying a syntactic position immediately to the left of the verb – Ex. (17).

- (17) a. **Ì wá sélinḡú-n gáagà-ná.**
 3PL ICPL chicken.PL-D sell-GER
 ‘They are selling the chickens.’
- b. **Ì ntá sélinḡú-n gàagà-nà.**
 3PL ICPL.NEG chicken.PL-D sell-GER^L
 ‘They are not selling the chickens.’
- c. **Ì wá sélin-gáagè-né.**
 3PL ICPL chicken-sell.DETR-GER
 ‘They sell chickens.’
- d. **Ì ntá sèlin-gàagè-nè.**
 3PL ICPL.NEG chicken-sell.DETR-GER^L
 ‘They don’t sell chickens.’

In addition to the neutralization of the singular vs. plural distinction, a general characteristic of incorporation is that it excludes the presence of the various types of adnominals that may modify non-incorporated nouns.

Three functional subtypes of incorporation can be distinguished in Soninke: possessive incorporation, object incorporation, and oblique incorporation:

- in possessive incorporation, the construction with an incorporated noun can be paraphrased by a construction in which this noun is the head of a noun phrase in subject function, with a genitival modifier corresponding to the subject of the compound verb – Ex. (18);
- in object incorporation, the construction with an incorporated noun can be paraphrased by a construction in which this noun is the head of a noun phrase in object function – Ex. (19);
- in oblique incorporation, the construction with an incorporated noun can be paraphrased by a construction in which this noun is the head of a noun phrase in oblique function – Ex. (20).

- (18) a. **Múusá bùttê-n bí.**
 Moussa liver-D^{LH} burn
 'Moussa got furious.'
 lit. 'Moussa's liver burnt.'
- b. **Múusá búttí-n-bí.**
 Moussa liver-EP-burn⁶
 'Moussa got furious.'
 lit. 'Moussa liver-burnt.'
- (19) a. **Yàxàrú-n dà kónpè-n cèllà.**
 woman.PL-D TR room-D sweep
 'The women swept the room.'
- b. **Yàxàrú-n kónpó-sèllè.**
 woman.PL-D room-sweep.DETR
 'The women did room sweeping.'
- (20) a. **À yàxí qòò qùsô.**
 3SG get_married like girl.D
 'He got married like a girl (i.e. very early).'
- b. **À qùsù-n-ñàxí.**
 3SG girl-EP-get_married⁷
 'He got married like a girl (i.e. very early).'

Possessive incorporation and oblique incorporation do not modify the transitivity properties of verbs. By contrast, object incorporation detransitivizes transitive verbs. Syntactically, all the mechanisms sensitive to transitivity unambiguously show that object incorporation yields intransitive compound verbs, and this is consistent with the fact that, as can be observed in (17c) and (19b) above, object incorporation triggers detransitivization marking.

The detransitivization marking observed in object incorporation is consistent with the functional similarity between object incorporation and antipassive derivation. There is however an important distinction: detransitivization triggered by object incorporation is always marked by the multipurpose detransitivization marker **-i**, never by the dedicated antipassive marker **-ndì ~ ndí**. For

⁶ In possessive incorporation and oblique incorporation, an epenthetic **-n-** is inserted between the incorporated noun and the verb. This epenthetic **-n-** also occurs in some types of nominal compounds, but as discussed by Diagona (1995), its occurrence cannot be predicted by a general rule. It must be emphasized that it is probably not cognate with the determination marker **-n** suffixed to nouns, since the determination marker includes a floating L tone, whereas the epenthetic **-n-** is tonally inert.

⁷ See Footnote 7.

example, the antipassive form of **séllà** ‘sweep’ is **séllá-ndì**, as in (21c), but the incorporation of the object triggers the use of the detransitivized form **séllè**, which in the absence of an incorporated noun can only have a passive reading – (21d).

- (21) a. **Yàxàrú-n dà kónpè-n céllà.**
 woman.PL-D TR room-D sweep
 ‘The women swept the room.’
- b. **Yàxàrú-n kónpó-séllè.**
 woman.PL-D room-sweep.DETR
 ‘The women did room sweeping.’
- c. **Yàxàrú-n céllá-ndì.**
 woman.PL-D sweep-ANTIP
 ‘The women did the sweeping.’
- d. **Kónpè-n céllè.**
 room-D sweep.DETR
 ‘The room was swept.’

A consequence of this rule is that detransitivization marking in object incorporation is not apparent with verbs ending with *i* or *e*.

Semantically, object incorporation restricts the lexical meaning of the transitive verb to a given category of potential patients, implying a non-specific reading of the incorporated noun. However, exactly like antipassive derivation, object incorporation is compatible with reference to specific events.

7. Causativization of antipassive verbs and antipassivization of causative verbs

Although the causativization of derived antipassive forms encoding patient demotion is perfectly conceivable semantically (‘a causer makes a causee act on an unspecified patient’), it does not seem to be possible in Soninke.

By contrast, derived verbs with an ending decomposable as ‘causative suffix’ + ‘antipassive suffix’ are possible, and the antipassive marker operates on causative verbs in the same way as on non-derived transitive verbs: the meaning of such forms is that a causer manipulates an unspecified causee – Ex. (22).

- (22) a. **Té-n bònó.**
 field-D become_spoilt
 ‘The field was spoilt.’
- b. **Nàa-nú-n dà té-n bònò-ndí.**
 cow-PL-D TR field-D become_spoilt-CAUS
 ‘The cows caused damage to the field.’
- c. **Nàa-nú-n bònò-ndì-ndí.**
 cow-PL-D become_spoilt-CAUS-ANTIP
 ‘The cows caused damage.’

It is however striking that antipassivization of causative constructions is not frequent in spontaneous discourse, and not always easily accepted in elicitation. My discussions with consultants suggest that this may be due to the fact that speakers find it difficult to process forms including two successive suffixes that have the same segmental form and express distinct operations on valency.

8. The origin of the suffixes involved in antipassivization

Comparative evidence suggests that the multifunction detransitivizing suffix **-i** was originally a reflexive marker (possibly cognate with a reflexive pronoun ***i**) that developed anticausative,

passive, and antipassive uses. For a detailed account of the evidence supporting this hypothesis, see Creissels (Forthcoming).

As regards the dedicated antipassive suffix **-ndì ~ ndí**, the crucial question is whether the formal similarity with a causative marker found as **-ndí** in Soninke, **-ndi** in Mandinka, and **-ni** in Bozo (the closest relative of Soninke) is due to chance, or must rather be analyzed as evidence for a common etymology.

Of course, a purely accidental similarity cannot be excluded. But if we could find also a formally similar lexical item reconstructable at Proto-West-Mande level with a meaning that would make it a possible source of both causative and antipassive markers, the hypothesis that precisely the lexical item in question constitutes the common source of all these suffixes would become highly plausible.

Verbs with the meaning ‘do, make’ commonly occur in causative periphrases, and constitute a well-known source of causative markers. But such verbs are also very commonly involved in constructions that can be viewed as antipassive periphrases, although they are not commonly referred to as such, and the possibility that verbs with the meaning ‘do, make’ involved in such constructions grammaticalize as antipassive markers must be considered

For example, French has a causative construction in which **faire** ‘do, make’ combines with the infinitive of the verb expressing the caused event, as in Ex. (23a), but the use of **faire** with an event noun in object role is also a very common strategy to avoid specifying the object of transitive verbs with which the mere omission of the object does not constitute the normal way to simply omit specifying the object, as in Ex. (22b).

(22) French

a. **La femme a fait acheter le pain par son fils.**

the woman has made buy the bread by her son

‘The woman made her son buy the bread.’

b. **La femme a fait des achats.**

the woman has made some buying

‘The woman did some shopping.’

In most Mande languages, the verbs expressing ‘do, make’ are reflexes of two Proto-Mande roots reconstructable as ***ma** and ***kɛ**, which quite obviously cannot be the source of the suffixes we are dealing with. But ***ma** and ***kɛ** are not the only roots reconstructable at least at Proto-West-Mande level with the meaning ‘do, make’. In Mandinka, ‘do’ is commonly expressed as **ké**, but Mandinka also has a verb **tɪŋ ~ tɪnnà ~ túnnà** ‘cause’, and this verb is probably cognate with Bozo Jenaama **tɪn** (compl.) **tɪná** (incompl.) ‘do’. Given the position of Mandinka and Bozo in the genealogical tree of Mande languages, a Proto-West-Mande root ***tɪn** ‘do’ can be reconstructed, and the hypothesis I propose is that all the suffixes mentioned above result from the grammaticalization of ***tɪn** ‘do’, either in causative periphrases or in antipassive periphrases.

These grammaticalization processes may have occurred at different periods, and we will probably never be able to reconstruct the details of the constructions in which they occurred, and of the phonological processes responsible for the precise forms taken by the suffixes in question, but this hypothesis provides at least a plausible explanation for a formal similarity between antipassive and causative markers that otherwise would remain unexplained.

Conclusion

In this presentation, I have tried to put forward a description of Soninke antipassive emphasizing aspects particularly relevant for a general typological discussion of antipassive constructions. Synchronically, the crucial point is that the productivity of antipassive derivation in Soninke follows from the use of antipassive constructions as the preferred strategy for not specifying the patientive argument of transitive verbs in a language in which null objects are not allowed, and only a tiny minority of transitive verbs can be used intransitively with a subject representing their

agentive argument. Diachronically, there is evidence that the dedicated antipassive suffix **-ndì** ~ **-ndí** results from the grammaticalization of a verb 'do' in a cross-linguistically common type of antipassive periphrasis.

Abbreviations

ANTIP = antipassive, CAUS = causative, CPL = completive, D = default determiner, DEM = demonstrative, DETR = detransitivization marker, EP = epenthetic **n**, FOC = focus marker, GER = gerundive, H (superscript) = high morphotoneme, ICPL = incompletive, IMPER = imperative, L (superscript) = low morphotoneme, LH (superscript) = low-high morphotoneme, NEG = negative, O = object, PL = plural, pm = predicative marker, POSTP = multifunction postposition, PROH = prohibitive, PROJ = projective, Q = question marker, REFL = reflexive, S = subject, SBD = subordination marker, SG = singular, SUBJ = subjunctive, TR = transitivity marker, V = verb, X = oblique.

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