

THE PASSIVE ANALOG IN LANGO

Michael Noonan, Edith Bavin Wood

State University of New York at Buffalo

0 A major concern of relational grammar has been a universal characterization of passives. Recent attempts to characterize passives have been of a formal nature involving the relation-changing processes of promotion and demotion. Keenan (1975), for example, in arguing for a relationally-based passive over a structurally-based one, discusses promotion and demotion as separate grammatical processes. Perlmutter and Postal (1977) argue that passives cannot be given a universal characterization in terms of word order, case or verbal morphology. They propose, instead, a language independent characterization of passive in terms of the grammatical relations within clause structures with the direct object of an active clause becoming the subject of the corresponding passive. However, these and other discussions of grammatical relations and relation-changing processes indicate that a clear notion of terms like 'subject' is necessary together with a clear idea of what a change in grammatical relations really means and how such changes are to be identified. Using data from Lango, a Nilotic language spoken in Uganda, we will attempt to show in this paper that properties associated with grammatical relations may be lost or gained only in part, indicating that the notions of 'promotion' and 'demotion' need to be examined. Secondly, we will claim that certain properties associated with subjects follow from other aspects of their syntax and semantics, not from the grammatical relations themselves.

1 Lango is an SVO language with no case markings and no morphological passive. However, it does have a construction created by a rule which we call NP-fronting. This construction contrasts both syntactically and semantically with clefting. It functions in certain respects like a passive in that the fronted NP may assume some, but not all, of the properties associated with subjects in Lango. We are using 'subject' intuitively here to refer to the NP which fills the first slot in a basic SVO word order sentence. The NP-fronting rule, illustrated in (1) and (2), advances an NP to sentence initial position. The (b) sentences represent the NP-fronted constructions. As illustrated in (3), an NP can also be fronted in a subordinate clause. If the NP is an object pronoun or the object of a preposition, a pronominal copy of the advanced NP is left in its original position as shown in sentence (4).

(1) a) dákó ò-jwát-ò lóca  
woman 3-s+hit man The woman hit the man.

b) lóca dákó ò-jwát-ò  
man woman 3-s+hit

- (2) a) ɲò-ɲwát-ò      rwót      What hit the chief?  
           what        hit        chief
- b) rwót      ɲò      ɲwát-ò  
       chief    what     hit
- (3) a) dákó      òtámò      ní      àtín      òɲwátò      lóca  
           woman    thought    comp.    child        hit        man
- b) dákó      òtámò      ní      lóca      àtín      òɲwátò  
           woman    thought    c.     man        child        hit

The woman thought the child hit the man.

- (4) a) dákó òjwátá  
woman hit+ls The woman hit me.
- b) án dákó òjwátá  
1-s woman hit+1-s
- (5) a) lóca òmfò mèt bèt àtín  
man gave gift to child The man  
gave a  
gift to  
the child.
- b) àtín 'lóca òmfò mèt bètè  
child man gave gift to 3-s

Dative movement may apply to sentence (5a) giving (6a), in which case, a pronominal copy of the fronted NP will not appear in the corresponding NP-fronted construction (6b).

- (6) a) lóca      òmfò      àtfn      mòt  
man      gave      child      gift      The man gave the  
child a gift.
- b) àtfn      lóca      òmfò      mòt  
child      man      gave      gift

As can be seen from these examples, no special morphology is involved in the NP-fronted construction save for pronominal copies when the fronted NP originates as the object of a preposition or is itself pronominal. The subject is not demoted to *chômeur* status in an NP-fronted construction since it retains many of its basic properties. However, the fronted NP does take over some of the properties associated with subjects in Lango. These will now be examined.

I. Coreference with subordinate clauses: Coreference across clause boundaries is associated with the subject in a non-fronted construction. However this property can be taken over by a fronted NP. In sentence (7a), *te* is a conjunction meaning 'and then'. Verbs following this conjunction are infinitives and therefore not inflected with subject prefixes. In (7a), *dáko*, the subject of the main verb, is also interpreted as the subject of the

- a) The woman saw the man and then she hit him.  
b) The man was seen by the woman and then he hit her.

II. Conference in succeeding sentences: A fronted NP can be interpreted as the subject of a following sentence in discourse as illustrated in (8). In (8b), the fronted NP lòcà controls coreference in the succeeding sentence.

- The woman saw the man. She left.

- The man was seen by the woman. He left.

III. Switch reference: In sentence (9a), both predicates are inflected with the 3rd person singular subject affix. In this sentence, however, the 3rd person of the subordinate clause cannot be coreferential with *dákó* in the main clause.

- The woman said that he/she would eat meat.

- The woman, said that she, ate meat.

In (9b), a special 3rd person subject agreement affix, ε is used on the subordinate verb. This prefix can only be used when the subject of the main clause and subordinate ni clause are coreferential and it can only be used in subordinate clauses. It indicates non-switch reference (see Noonan and Bavin Wook, 1977). This special non-switch reference agreement is used in NP-fronted constructions also, indicating that fronted NP's can become

coreferential with subjects of complement clauses. Consider the sentences in (10).

- (10) a) dákó      òkóbbì      lóca      ní      é' bínó      dòk  
          woman,      3-s told      man      comp.      3-s, go      back

The woman told the man she will go back.

- b) lóca      dákó      òkóbbé      ní      é' bínó      dòk  
          man,      woman      told      comp.      3-s, go      back

The man was told by the woman that he will go back.

In (10b), the fronted NP is coreferential with the special non-switch reference affix in the complement clause.

IV. Quantifier floating: Quantifier floating applies to subjects of intransitive verbs only in Lango, as illustrated in (11).

- (11) a) àwóbé      dúcú      òcém̃      pì      dákó  
          boys      all      ate      because      woman

All the boys ate because of the woman.

- b) àwóbé      òcém̃      dúcú      pì      dákó  
          boys      ate      all      because      woman

The boys all ate because of the woman.

- c) àwóbé      ònéno      dúcú      gwóggí  
          boys      saw      all      dogs

\*The boys all saw the dogs.

When an NP is fronted, any modifying quantifiers are normally fronted also. If the fronted NP leaves a pronominal copy, the quantifier may be left in its original position. As already stated, pronominal copies are necessary when fronted NP's are objects of prepositions or are pronominal. So, in (12b), the quantifier modifies the pronominal copy of the fronted NP. If the quantifier is floated to the post-verbal position as in (13), it is interpreted as modifying the fronted NP.

- (12) a) mon      'óóí      kèdè      gwóggí      dúcú  
          women      tired      with      dogs      all

The women are tired of all the dogs.

- b) gwóggí      món      'óóí      kédgí      dúcú  
          dogs      women      tired      with + them      all

The women are tired of all the dogs.

- (13) gwóggí món 'óóí dúcú kédgí

The women are tired of all the dogs.

Floating of quantifiers is, then, a property taken over by fronted NPs.

V. Word order: The fronted NP usurps the left-most NP slot which is reserved for subject NP's in basic word order sentences.

We have presented evidence to show that a fronted NP takes over some of the properties associated with subjects in Lango. Now we will examine those properties which are retained by the basic subject.

I. Verb Agreement: In Lango, a verb is inflected for person and number by means of a prefix vowel. In sentence (4a), the verb prefix o is the 3rd singular marker agreeing with dákó. In (4b), the verb still carries the 3rd person prefix, not the 1st person marker a. Verb agreement, then, is a property that continues to be controlled by the basic subject in NP-fronted constructions. This property is further illustrated in (14) where the basic subject is an inanimate agent and the fronted NP is animate.

- (14) a) gwén òcélá  
stone 3-s+hit+1-s The stone hit me.
- b) án gwén òcélá  
1-s stone 3-s+hit+1-s I was hit by the stone.

The point is made clear in sentences where the basic subject only appears as an inflection on the verb. This happens with pronominal subjects which are optional in Lango, as illustrated in (15). (In the future tense the 3rd singular prefix is a and the plural is o.)

- (15) a) àbíno cèggò dògólá pói  
3s+fut close door many

He will close many doors.

- b) dògólá pói àbíno cèggò  
door many 3s+fut close

Many doors will be closed (by him/her). <sup>1</sup>

- c) dògólá pói òbíno cègérá  
door many 3p+fut close+refl

When the object NP is fronted in (15), the verb prefix a cannot be interpreted as being coreferential with dògólá, which is plural in (15b) and would require an o prefix. The reflexive from of the verb is required for an interpretation with dògólá as subject, as shown in (15c) which is not an NP fronted construction.

II. Indispensibility: Although pronominal subjects in Lango are dispensible, subject agreement on the verb is necessary for finite verb forms. In this sense, the subject is indispensable in Lango because overt reference is always made to a subject. It has been illustrated in (15) that the basic subject continues to control verb agreement in NP-fronted constructions and this applies even if the agent is unspecified as in (15b). Lango has no impersonal constructions.

III. Use of Activity-naming (AN) and Secondary-Orientation (SO) forms: In Lango, most verbs distinguish morphologically between a full transitive form and either an activity-naming form or a secondary orientation form, or both. The AN form directly references only the subject, while the object of the corresponding transitive must be non-distinct. On the other hand, the SO form directly references the object of the corresponding transitive making it the subject, while the subject of the corresponding transitive must be a non-distinct argument. These forms are illustrated in (16).

- (16) a) dákó 'bínó nènnò lóca (transitive)  
           woman will see man  
           The woman will see the man.  
       b) dákó 'bínó nénò (AN) The woman will see.  
       c) lóca bínó nèn (SO) The man will be visible.

In (16), NP-fronting does not result in a change of verbal form; the transitive form continues to be used if the basic form was transitive to begin with, as we show in sentences (16').

- (16') a) lóca dákó 'bínó nènnò The man will  
       b) \*lóca dákó 'bínó nénò be seen by  
       c) \*lóca dákó 'bínó nèn the woman.

The form of the verb, whether transitive, AN or SO is determined by the initial (basic) argument frame. It is not affected by NP-fronting in any way.<sup>2</sup>

IV. Equi-Deletion: Only the basic subject can be equi-deleted. Sentence (17a), for example, can be transformed into (b) via equi-deletion, the subordinate verb surfacing as an infinitive.

- (17) a) dákó òmítò (dákó òjwátò lóca)  
       b) dákó òmítò jwátò lóca  
           woman wanted hit(infin) man  
           The woman wanted to hit the man.

But (c) cannot be transformed into (d) or any similar construction. Only (e), utilizing the subjunctive and with no equideletion, is possible.

- c) dákó òmítò (dákó 'lóca òjwátò)  
       d) \* dákó òmítò lóca jwátò  
           The woman wanted to be hit by the man.

- e) dákó òmítò ní 'dákó 'lócà jwát  
 woman wanted comp. woman man hit (subj.)

The woman wanted to be hit by the man.

V. Word order: As noted earlier, the basic word order in Lango is SVO. All examples of the NP-fronted construction show that the basic subject retains its immediate pre-verbal position which is criterial for subjects.

VI. Reflexivization: Reflexivization in Lango is controlled by a subject NP. In an NP-fronted construction, the subject, not the fronted NP, continues to control reflexivization. In sentence (18b), lócà is coreferential with the reflexive pronoun è. The fronted NP, dákó cannot be coreferential with è.

- (18) a) loca òkwáò dákó pìré kènè  
 man asked woman about + 3-s self

The man asked the woman about \*herself/himself.

- b) dákó 'lócà òkwáò pìré kènè  
 woman man asked about + 3-s self

The man asked the woman about himself/\*herself.

VII. Addressee of Imperatives: It has been claimed (Keenan 1976) that a subject has the property of expressing the addressee phrase of an imperative. In Lango, imperatives are formed using the basic verb stem. The assumed subject is always second person as in (19) and (20).

- (19) a) kwán 'búk  
 read book Read the book!

- b) búk kwán Read the book!

- (20) a) jwátá  
 hit+1-s Hit me!

- b) án jwátá  
 1-s hit 1-s Hit me!

2 We have shown that certain properties are retained by the basic subject in an NP-fronted construction. However, other properties have been shown to be usurped by the fronted NP. Below is a list of the properties which are lost or retained by the subject:

-properties of 'basic subjects' usurped by fronted NP:

1. coreference across sentences
2. coreference with subordinate clauses
3. control of switch reference

4. leftmost NP
5. ability to launch quantifiers

-properties retained by 'basic subjects':

1. verb agreement
2. control of verb type (i.e. transitive, activity-naming, secondary-orientation forms)
3. immediate preverbal position
4. control of reflexive
5. addressee of imperative
6. is an indispensable NP
7. ability to be equi-deleted

Yet it cannot be claimed that the fronted NP has been promoted to subject. We propose that NP-fronting in Lango functions as an orientation-changing rule and that those properties taken over by the fronted NP should be considered as properties of the leftmost NP which, in basic word order sentences coincides with the subject NP. The fronted NP construction does, in fact, serve to change the clause orientation as does the passive in English. However, unlike the English passive, the advanced element in Lango does not take on all the subject coding properties. Noonan (1977) argues that, in a language like English, sentence initial position provides the sentence orientation, delimiting the frame within which the rest of the sentence is interpreted, and, under ordinary circumstances, functions as well as the highest-ranking syntactic slot in the rolemarking system, i.e. functions as the subject. In an English passive, the promoted NP takes in all subject properties, including those associated with the sentence orientation.

In support of our claims that Lango NP-fronting is an orientation-changing rule we note that of those properties usurped by the fronted NP, properties 1-4 are all directly connected with the sentence orientation. Leftmost position is the universally preferred orientation slot. Control of coreference across sentences and with subordinate clauses and control of switch reference forms are all predictable consequences of assuming the sentence orientation. The ability to launch quantifiers is also a consequence of assuming the sentence orientation, as pointed out by Schachter (1977). An NP quantified by a form like all has the property of being necessarily referential (definite) or generic in interpretation. Sentence orientation including fronted NP's are always definite or generic, but in Lango an unqualified noun that is not the sentence orientation may receive either a definite or indefinite interpretation. If a quantifier were allowed to float away from any position other than the sentence orientation in Lango, the noun would no longer obligatorily receive a definite interpretation and hence a conflict could arise between this interpretation and the obligatory definite interpretation associated with quantified nouns. In the case of floating from fronted-NP position or subject position in the absence of a fronted-NP, no such conflict arises. If these were the only characteristic features of NP-fronting,



then it could justifiably be claimed that the construction was a straightforward example of topicalization like the Mandarin topic construction described by Li and Thompson (1976), since the Mandarin construction shares with NP-fronting control of coreference and leftmost position. In addition, the Lango fronted NP shares with the Mandarin topic the property of having an obligatory interpretation as definite or generic. But there are a number of important properties of the NP-fronting construction which serve to differentiate it from an ordinary topicalization construction. The first of these properties is the clause-boundedness of NP-fronting. Topicalization, clefting, and similar constructions are sentence-level, as opposed to clause-level, unbounded constructions and in this way contrast with passive which is a clause-level construction. NP-fronting resembles passive in this respect. To demonstrate this, we will contrast NP-fronting with the Lango cleft construction. Syntactically, a clefted NP, illustrated in (21b), differs from the fronted NP in (21a) in that the clefted NP is followed by an invariable pronoun én and the relative marker ám'é.

- (21) a) àtín 'dákó òmíò mòt bótè  
child woman gave gift to 3s  
The child was given the gift by the woman.

- b) àtín 'én àm'é dákó òmíò mòt bótè  
It's the child that the woman gave the gift to.

NP-fronting cannot apply to front NP's in subordinate clauses, but cleft, which is unbounded, can front NP's from subordinate clauses, as we note in (22).

- (22) a) dákó òdíò lóca 'nì 'kwáì gwèò  
woman forced man comp. steal chicken  
The woman forced the man to steal the chicken.

- b) \*gwèò dákó òdíò lóca 'nì 'kwáì (NP-fron.)

- (cleft) c) gwèò én àm'é dákó òdíò lóca 'nì 'kwáì  
It's the chicken that the woman forced the man to  
kill.

NP-fronting can apply to NP's in relative clauses, but cleft, as an unbounded sentence-level rule, cannot, as we note in (23)

- (23) a) búk á'mé dákó òmíò lóca dwón  
book rel. woman gave man big  
The book that the woman gave the man is big.

- b) búk á'mé lóca dákó òmíò dwón  
(NP-fronting with RC)

- c) \*búk á'mé lóca én á'mé dákó òmíò dwón  
(clefting within RC)

Since NP-fronting is basically a clause-level reorienting rule, it cannot apply to subjects, which are already the sentence orientation. Cleft, however, can apply to subjects.

- (24) a) dákó òmfò lóca búk  
The woman gave the man the book.
- b) búk én á'mé dákó òmfò lóca (cleft on DO)
- c) \*dákó 'búk én á'mé òmfò lóca (NP-fronting of Su)
- d) lóca búk én á'mé dákó òmfò (NP-fronting of IO)

One further difference between NP-fronting and ordinary topicalization is that the topic NP needn't be an argument of the verb -- it may be an oblique or other dependant, or bear no syntactic relation to any element in the sentence as we note from the following Mandarin example (from Li and Thompson, 1976).

- (25) neì-chang huǒ xìngkuí xītaofang-duì lái de kuài  
that-clas. fire fortunate fire-brigade come adv. quick
- That fire (topic), fortunately the fire-brigade came quickly.

As noted above, NP-fronting cannot extract NP's from subordinate clauses, nor could a sentence analogous to (25) with a fronted NP be formed in Lango. Fronted NP's cannot be moved beyond their clause and must be an argument of the verb.<sup>3</sup>

3 We claimed in the last section that NP-fronting is not a topicalization construction. It now remains to decide what sort of construction NP-fronting is. NP-fronting is not straightforwardly a passive since the initial subject retains a large number of basic subject properties. Of those properties that are retained by the initial subject, control of verb agreement seems to be in large part a reflex of the retention of immediate preverbal position. Retention of this position in turn reflects the origin of NP-fronting in topicalization (see Noonan & Bavin-Woock forthcoming 1978a). Control of reflexive is certainly a role determined property (see Schachter 1977) as is the role of addressee in imperatives. Verb types (transitive, AN, and SO forms) are a response to deeper semantic properties of sentences and arguments and would not be expected to change with a simple change in orientation (see Noonan & Bavin-Woock, forthcoming 1978b, for discussion). The indisposability of the initial subject and its monopoly on equideletibility just reflect the importance of the subject NP and serve to emphasize that we are not dealing here with a structural passive of any sort. The initial subject retains all the properties of the primary argument of the verb, and only loses those properties associated with the sentence orientation.

The NP-fronting construction then does not meet the criteria for a structural passive, but it does appear to meet the criterion for a functional passive. A functional passive can be defined as a clause-internal rule that changes orientation. This is what the English passive does and this is what NP-fronting does. We might suggest that any rule that did not meet the functional criterion for passive could not be considered as a structural passive, regardless of the syntactic effect of such a rule, but that the reverse is certainly possible, with Lango as a prime example.

4 In summary, NP-fronting is not a simple topicalization rule since it is clause-bounded and applies only to arguments of verbs. In addition, it can't apply to subjects. However, NP-fronting is not quite a passive either, since many basic subject properties are retained by the basic subject. NP-fronting performs the minimum functional requirements of a passive in that it is a clause-internal rule that changes orientation but a NP-fronted construction is not a structural passive in the relational sense since basic subjects are not demoted and fronted NP's are not obviously promoted. So, NP-fronting is an example of a construction that meets the requirements for a functional passive without meeting the requirements for a structural passive.

It is probably best to view the basic Lango sentences as including two slots -- one the orientation slot in sentence initial position, and the other, the subject slot in immediate preverbal position -- that are usually filled by the same entity. These properties we have claimed are usurped by the fronted NP are, in fact, just those associated with the sentence orientation, and those retained by the subject are just those properties that are 'real' subject properties, unaffected by change of orientation.<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This construction can be used for both unspecified agent and with agents with third person singular anaphora.

<sup>2</sup>This aspect of the Lango verb system will be discussed in our forthcoming paper Argument Orientation Systems of Verbs.

<sup>3</sup>NP's bearing a genitival relation to an argument of the verb may be fronted under certain circumstances as in

(a) lóca dákó òjwátò gwógg'è

man woman hit his+dog

The man's dog was hit by the woman.

<sup>4</sup>Keenan's (1976) subject properties list (SPL) should be re-examined in light of these data from Lango. One reason for the viability of the SPL to make predictions about the behavior of subjects lies in the confusion of real subject properties with orientation properties. If these are properly distinguished, the SPL might prove more useful.

## REFERENCES

- Keenan, E.; 1975; 'Some universals of passive in relational grammar'; CLS 11
- \_\_\_\_\_; 1976; 'Toward a universal definition of subject'; in Li, ed., Subject and Topic.
- Li, C. and S. Thompson; 1976; 'Subject and topic, a new typology of language'; in Li, ed., Subject and Topic.
- Noonan, M.; 1977; 'On subjects and topics'; BLS III.
- Noonan, M., and Bavin-Woock, E.; 1977; 'The Semantic Basis of Complementation in Lango'; Winter L. S. A. paper (to appear in Buffalo Working Papers in Linguistics I)
- \_\_\_\_\_; 1978a; 'On the Assumption of Subject Status' (forthcoming)
- \_\_\_\_\_; 1978b; 'The Argument Orientation System of Verbs' (forthcoming)
- Perlmutter, D. and P. Postal; 1977; 'Toward a universal characterization of passivization'; BLS III.
- Schachter, P.; 1977; 'Reference related and role related properties of subject'; Cole and Sadock, Syntax and Semantics 8.