Voice Alternations in Bonggi

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1. Introduction

Bonggi, a Western Austronesian language of Sabah, Malaysia, has three ways to express semantically transitive clauses, as seen in (1a) (cf. (2a)), (1b) (cf. (2b)) and (1c) (cf. (2c)).

(1) a. Sia ngo-lompukng asu na.
    3SNOM ACT-fat dog the
    'He is fattening the dog.'

    b. Asu na lumpung-un nya.
    dog the fat-UND 3SGEN
    'He is fattening the dog.'

    c. Asu na nuan nya ngo-lompukng.
    dog the PASS 3SGEN ACT-fat
    'The dog is being fattened by him.'

(2) a. Sia nga-labad asu na.
    3SNOM ACT-hit dog the
    'He is hitting the dog.'

    b. Asu na labad-adn nya.
    dog the hit-UND 3SGEN
    'He is hitting the dog.'

    c. Asu na nuan nya nga-labad.
    dog the PASS 3SGEN ACT-fat
    'The dog is being hit by him.'

Like other Philippine-type languages, the verb cross-references one nominal in every verbal clause. In (1a) and (2a) the verb cross-references the actor and is in active voice, whereas in (1b) and (2b) the verb cross-references the undergoer and is in passive voice. Clauses like (1a), (1b), (2a) and (2b) are common in Philippine languages, and I argue below that the cross-referenced argument in these clauses is the syntactic pivot. However, clauses
such as (1c) and (2c) are uncommon in Philippine languages. In these clauses the verb cross-references the actor, but I show below that the syntactic subject is the undergoer which is cross-referenced by the passive auxiliary muan. Such clauses are periphrastic passive constructions. Thus, under my analysis, Bonggi has two types of passive constructions, undergoer cross-referenced constructions as in (1b) and (2b) and periphrastic passive constructions as in (1c) and (2c).

The primary goal of this paper is to demonstrate that Bonggi has a canonical passive construction (e.g. (1c) and (2c)) which is distinct from the undergoer cross-referenced construction (e.g. (1b) and (2b)). This goal is interesting for two reasons. First, Bonggi is a Philippine-type language and Philippine languages do not generally have a passive construction distinct from the cross-referencing system. In fact, much of the argument surrounding passives in Philippine languages has centered around the issue of whether undergoer cross-referenced constructions such as (1b) and (2b) are passives or not. Second, many different types of constructions are referred to as 'passive' in the linguistic literature. This variation in construction type has led a number of linguists to the conclusion that there is no single property which all the so-called 'passive' constructions have in common; yet, other linguists have come to the conclusion that there is a passive prototype which has been called various names including true passive, canonical passive, prototypical passive and personal passive. This is the type of passive that I describe here for Bonggi, not impersonal passives, lexical passives, mediopassives, reflexive passives, adversative passives, or any other noncanonical constructions which have been labelled 'passive' in the literature.

I begin in §2 with a description of the formal properties of active constructions and both types of passive constructions. §3 discusses functional properties of these three types of constructions, and §4 reviews some implications of this paper for Philippine language typology.

2. Formal properties of active and passive clauses

Voice alternations consist of two or more different ways of presenting a verb with its arguments. (3a) and (3b) illustrate an alternation between active and passive voice in English. In active voice the subject is the actor as in (3a) where the subject (he) is the actor. In passive voice the subject is the undergoer as in (3b) where the subject (the dog) is the undergoer.
(3)  a. *He is fattening the dog.*

b. *The dog is being fattened by him.*

This section briefly compares the formal properties of active constructions, undergoer cross-referenced constructions, and periphrastic passive constructions. The formal differences between actor cross-referenced constructions (e.g. (1a) and (2a)), undergoer cross-referenced constructions (e.g. (1b) and (2b)), and periphrastic passive constructions (e.g. (1c) and (2c)) are the result of choosing which argument is the subject. Differences in subject choice result in differences in verbal cross-referencing morphology, case assignment, and word order. Thus, the primary concern is establishing which argument is the syntactic subject in these constructions. §2.1 discusses morphological properties of these constructions, whereas §2.2 discusses syntactic properties of these constructions.

Throughout this section I usually refrain from using the term passive for undergoer cross-referenced constructions such as (1b) and (2b); instead, I use the noncontroversial term undergoes cross-referenced constructions (cf. §3).

2.1. **Morphological properties**

Two aspects of morphology are dealt with: verbal cross-referencing and nominal case marking. My assumption is that these two aspects of morphology function together to signal which argument is the subject. §2.1.1 shows that the subject is the argument which is cross-referenced by the verb, whereas §2.1.2 shows that some subjects occur in nominative case while others occur in genitive case.

2.1.1. **Verbal cross-referencing**

The unmarked choice for subject in Bonggi is the actor. When the subject of a transitive verb is the actor as in (1a) and (2a), the verb is prefixed by *ng- 'ACT'. The marked choice for subject is the undergoer. When the subject of a transitive verb is the undergoing as in (1b) and (2b), the verb is suffixed by *-en. (1a) and (1b) illustrate imperfective verbs; the same verbs in perfective aspect are illustrated in (4a) and (4b). As seen in (4b), transitive verbs which cross-reference the undergoer are not suffixed in perfective aspect; instead, perfective aspect is marked by the infix *-in- which is realized as [i] in (4b).
(4) a. Sia i-ngo-lompukng asu na.
   3SNOM PERF-ACT-fat dog the
   'He fattened the dog.'

   b. Asu na l-i-ompukng nya.
      dog the -PERF.UND-fat 3sGEN
      'He fattened the dog.'

In languages which have active and passive voice alternations, the passive is normally signalled by special morphology on the verb or in the verb phrase. The most common way of expressing the passive is attaching an affix to the verb (Haspelmath 1990:28). However, some languages, including English and Bonggi, have periphrastic or analytic passives which are constructed by combining an auxiliary verb with the verb.

In active constructions (e.g. (1a), (2a), (4a), and (5a)) and periphrastic passive constructions (e.g. (1c), (2c), and (5b)) the morphology on the verb always cross-references the actor as seen by the presence of the prefix ngo- 'ACT' in (5a) and (5b). However, in periphrastic passive constructions the presence of a passive auxiliary such as nuan in (5b) indicates that the subject (e.g. sia '3sNOM' in (5b)) is an undergoer.

(5) a. Ou ngo-lompukng nya.
    1SNOM ACT-fat 3SACC
    'I am fattening him.'

   b. Sia nu-an ku ngo-lompukng.
      3SNOM PASS-UND 1SGEN ACT-fat
      'He is being fattened by me.'

Three different forms of the passive auxiliary are used to cross-reference undergoers: nuan which is used for imperfective aspect (e.g. (1c), (2c), and (5b)), inamu which is used for perfective aspect (e.g. (6)), and nua7 (e.g. (7)). These three forms of the passive auxiliary are morphologically related with the initial /a/ of the root being deleted when the root is suffixed. Synchronously, the root is anu with -an used for imperfective aspect (e.g. (1c), (2c), and (5b)), -in- used for perfective aspect (e.g. (6)) and -a7 used for imperatives (e.g. (7)).

(6) Barabm pa in-anu nya i-ngo-lompukng.
   many more PERF.UND-PASS 3sGEN PERF-ACT-fat
   'Many more were fattened by him.'