Implicit Arguments in Bùlì

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1. Introduction

Bùlì grammar, for example, allows for the constructions in (1a) and (1b). The verb *bɔ̀nì'* 'chop' is a transitive verb and thus require two arguments as in (1a). There is (1b), in which the internal argument is made the surface subject and crucially, the external argument cannot surface as a *by/for* phrase in the structure.

(1) Active sentences
   a. Asibi bɔ̀nì lāmmú.
      Asibi chop meat.DEF
      'Asibi chopped the meat.'
   b. Lāmmú bɔ̀nì.
      meat.def chop
      'The meat was chopped.'

The goal of this paper is to investigate and analyze the properties of the constructions in (1b). I will argue that this construction is a passive constructions and it will therefore be called Passives without Morphology (PwM) in this paper. The fact that it lacks morphology can be witnessed by the fact that the verb form in the PwM construction is the same as its active counterpart in (1a). If the construction in (1b) is indeed a passive, it raises a number of theoretical as well typological issues, chief among them being: is the external argument (the agent) ever projected in these constructions? Concretely, I show using a set of well-established diagnostics that the external argument in PwM constructions is syntactically present just like the external argument of the active sentences in (1a). The only difference being that while the external argument is overt in the active sentence, it is projected as an implicit argument (null pro) in PwM constructions.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: In section 2, I present some of the defining properties of PwM constructions. In section 3, I argue that the PwM constructions have a null external argument in their syntactic representation. I conclude the paper with a discussion in section (4).

2. Properties of Passive without Morphology

In this section, I outline some of the basic properties of the passive without morphology construction. One property of the PwM construction is that the external argument cannot be overtly expressed, (2).

(2) a. Lāmmú bɔ̀nì (*Asibi)
      meat.def chop (Asibi)
      Intended: 'The meat was chopped (by Asibi).'

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b. Gbáŋká chì:n (*bí:ká).
book.def read child.def
Intended: ‘ The book was read (by the child).’

Keenan and Dryer (2010) calls this the ‘basic passive’ which is characterized by the following (i) the lack of an agent phrase, (ii) the main verb in its non-passive form is transitive (cf.(1)), and (iii) the main verb expresses an action, taking agent subjects and patient objects in its non-passive form (Keenan and Dryer 2010: 328-329). These are similar to what Bodomo (1997) called Medio-passive Constructions in Dagaare. Since Bùlì is a language that has a passive without an agent phrase, it conforms to the generalization that “If a language has passives with agent phrases then it has them without agent phrases” Keenan and Dryer (2010:330).

A second property of PwM construction is that when an argument is introduced by way of *tè* ‘give/for’ as in (3), it must be understood as the beneficiary and not as an agent argument.

(3) a. Lāmmú bɔ̀nì tè Asibi.
meat.DEF chop give Asibi
‘The meat was chopped for Asibi’
b. Gbáŋká chì:n tè bí:ká.
book.DEF read give child.DEF
‘The book was read for the child.’

Another property of PwM constructions is that the internal argument must appear in subject position at PF, (4).

(4) a. *bɔnì lāmmú.
chop meat.DEF
Intended: ‘The meat was chopped.’
b. *chì:n gbáŋká.
read book.DEF.
Intended: ‘The book was read.’

We can tell that the internal arguments appear in subject positions by considering A bar extractions. Hiraiwa (2005), and Sulemana (2019) point out that when a subject is A-bar extracted, it is accompanied by the complementizer *ālì*, (5a) and non-subjects are followed by *ātì*, (5b). The following examples are taken from Sulemana (2019:4).

(5) a. (ká) wānā *(ālì) dìg lāmmú:?
Q who ALI cook meat.DEF
‘Who cooked the meat?’
b. (ká) b^{w}ā *(ātì) bí:ká dìgì:?
Q what ATI child.DEF cook
‘What is it that the child cooked?’

When the internal argument is A-bar extracted in a PwM construction (6), it is followed by *ālì* patterning with subject extraction in (6a), an indication that it is in subject position.

(6) (ká) b^{w}ā *(ālì) dìgì yā?
Q what ALI cook PRT
‘What was cooked?’

I will argue that PwM constructions exemplified in this section are indeed passive constructions. This will be done by showing that it shares more properties with passives in languages that have passive

morphology than with a closely related construction like the middle. As already noted, Keenan and Dryer (2010) calls this the 'basic passive'. The major differences between the Middle and the PwM constructions is that (i) unlike a middle, PwM constructions lack generic and modal readings often associated with middles (Williams 2014, and Bhatt and Pancheva 2017), (ii) PwM constructions can license purpose clauses, which middles, have been argued, cannot (Roeper 1987, Bhatt and Pancheva 2017, Gotah 2022).

3. Diagnosing the external argument

In this section, I am essentially arguing for (7):

(7) The implicit external (agent) argument in PwM constructions is syntactically present.

To argue for (7), I use a set of well-established diagnostics that indicate that PwM constructions participate in a number of grammatical dependencies that their active counterparts participate in. This is essentially the same diagnostics that is used in a number of works to make a similar point in other languages (Stroik 1992, Williams 2014, Bhatt and Pancheva 2017, Collins 2021, Gotah 2022). The diagnostics that I use here are based on binding, entailments, control and secondary predicates. All these are unified by the fact that they require syntactically present antecedents somewhere in the sentence in order to be licensed. Now we turn to the diagnostics in the following subsections.

3.1. pro-dēk-nyīŋ

Pro-dēᴋ-nyīŋ is an anaphoric constituent that can be translated roughly as: 'for the sake of the antecedent DP' and requires a syntactically present antecedent to be licensed.

(8) a. Asibi$_i$ bɔnì lāmmú wà$_{i/*j}$-dēk-nyīŋ.
Asibi chop meat.DEF 3SG-SELF-BODY
'Asibi chopped the meat for his own sake.'
b. Núrmà$_i$ bɔnì lāmmú bà$_{i/*j}$-dēk-nyīŋ.
people chop meat.DEF 3PL-SELF-BODY
'The people chopped the meat for their own sake.'
c. *Núrmà$_i$ bɔnì lāmmú wà$_{i/j}$-dēk-nyīŋ.
people chop meat.DEF 3SG-SELF-BODY
'The people chopped the meat for their own sake.'

Example (8a) is grammatical on the coindexed reading with *Asibi* because *Asibi* is an appropriate antecedent for the pronoun. The pronominal must also match in number with its antecedent (8b)-(8c), *núrmà* 'the people' is an appropriate antecedent for the pronoun in (8b) but not (8c). The data in (8) crucially show that unlike an ordinary pronoun, the referent of this pronominal cannot be provided by the context.

Also, the antecedent and pronoun must be in a local c-command relation. In (9), the pronoun must refer to *Asibi*'s parents and cannot refer to *Asibi,* since *Asibi* doesn't c-command the pronoun.

(9) Asibi$_i$ nyámmà$_j$ bɔnì lāmmú *wà$_i$/bà$_j$-dēk-nyīŋ.
Asibi parents chop meat.DEF 3SG/3PL-SELF-BODY
'Asibi's parents chopped the meat for their own sake.'

All in all, the pronoun in pro-dēᴋ-nyīŋ is an anaphoric constituent that requires a syntactically present locally c-commanding antecedent in order to be licensed. Essentially, it has similar distributions to reflexives, obeying condition A of the binding theory. Now that we have clearly stated the distributional requirement of pro-dēᴋ-nyīŋ, we can employ it in our diagnosis of the implicit external argument in PwM constructions. Consider its distribution with the PwM constructions in (10).

(10) a. Lāmmú bɔnì wà-dēk-nyīŋ.
meat.def chop 3SG-SELF-BODY
'The meat was chopped for his own sake.'
b. Tálímŭ kpài bà-dēk-nyīŋ.
farm.DEF weed 3PL-SELF-BODY
'The farm was weeded for their own sake.'

The data in (10) demonstrate that the pro-dēĸ-nyīŋ constituent can be licensed in PwM. How is this licensed considering the fact that it requires a syntactically present c-commanding antecedent? There are two possibilities: one of these has already been ruled out, which is to assume that it can be licensed in the context. The second which I am arguing for, is that it is licensed by the syntactically present implicit (null) external argument. This analysis predicts that if a construction lacks an external argument(overt or null) or an argument that can function as an antecedent for *pro-dēĸ-nyīŋ*, then it will not be licensed and that construction will be ungrammatical. The examples in (11) test this prediction. In the example (11), which lacks an external argument, *pro-dēĸ-nyīŋ* is not licensed. Given the analysis outline above, the ungrammaticality of (11) is expected since the anaphor lacks a c-commanding antecedent. Using anaphoric constituents as diagnostics for the presence of null/implicit arguments can be found in (Collins 2021), as well.

(11) *Tí:mú lɔ̀ bà-dēk-nyīŋ.
Tree.DEF fall 3PL-SELF-BODY
Intended' The tree fell for their own sake.'

3.2. Binding conditions A and B

A related argument suggesting the presence of the external argument comes from conditions A and B of the Binding theory: the implicit argument can bind a reflexive, and can also trigger condition B effects. There have been some discussions of the reflexives in Bùlì, focusing on different aspects of their behavior, such as the fact that the pronominal part of the reflexive agrees in phi-features with its antecedent (Agbedor 2002, Sulemana 2019). In these discussions, it is acknowledged that Bùlì reflexives are not different from the English reflexive in requiring a locally c-commanding antecedent, (12).

(12) a. Asibi$_i$ tòm gbáŋká tè wà$_i$-dēk.
Asibi send book.DEF give 3SG.SELF
'Asibi$_i$ sent the book to himself$_i$.'
b. *Asibi$_i$ wè:ni āyīn mì tòm gbáŋká tè wà$_i$-dēk.
Asibi say C 1SG send book give 3SG-SELF
Intended: 'Asibi$_i$ said that I sent the book to himself$_i$.'
c. *Asibi$_i$ doama tòm gbáŋká tè wà$_i$-dēk.
Asibi friend.DEF.PL send book.DEF give 3SG-SELF
Intended: 'Asibi's friends send the book to himself.'

The anaphor needs an antecedent within the same clause in order to be licensed (12a). When the antecedent is not local to the reflexive, the result is ungrammatical (12b). Similarly when the antecedent fails to c-command the anaphor, the result is ungrammatical (12c).

Now, let us consider the PwM construction in (13b) below in which a reflexive can be licensed. In (13a), the reflexive is referring to the sender which in this case is *Asibi* and thus the sender and recipient of the book must be the same individual. In (13b), the reflexive is referring to the sender and nobody else.

(13) a. Asibi$_i$ tòm gbáŋká tè wà-dēk$_{i/*j}$.
Asibi send book.DEF give 3SG.SELF
'Asibi$_i$ sent the book to himself$_i$.'

b. Gbáŋká tòm tè wà-dēk.
book.DEF send give 3SG-SELF
'The book was sent to himself.'

'*Wà-dēk*' is a reflexive pronoun obeying condition A of the binding theory in requiring the presence of a locally c-commanding antecedent in order to be licensed. In (13a), this antecedent is Asibi. In (13b), however, I argue that the antecedent of the reflexive is the implicit argument.

A similar example that uses the second person singular, but is equivalent to the generic *oneself* in English, is given in (14).

(14) a. Asī gbáŋká dīn tòm tè fì-dek, númà àlì mīŋ.
If book din send give 2SG.SELF, people.DEF FUT know
'If a book is sent to yourself/oneself, the people will know'
b. Asī gbáŋká dīn tòm tè fù, númà àlì mīŋ.
If book.DEF din send give 2SG., people.DEF FUT know
'If a book is sent to you, the people will know'

We observe the same condition A and B effects in (14) crucially, the sender and the recipient cannot be the same individual in (14b) due to condition B of the binding theory.

Also consider the examples in (15).

(15) a. Asibi$_i$ tòm gbáŋká tè wà$_{*i/j}$
Asibi send book.DEF give 3SG.
'Asibi sent the book to him$_{*i/j}$.'
b. Gbáŋká tòm tè wà.
book.DEF send give 3SG
'The book was sent to him.'

In (15a), the sender and the recipient of the book cannot be the same individual because of condition B. *Wà* is a pronoun, which is subject to binding condition B, and as such cannot take a locally c-commanding DP as its antecedent. As such, the pronoun cannot refer to *Asibi*. Similarly in the PwM construction in (15b), the sender and the recipient cannot refer to the same individual. I argue that this is as a result of the implicit argument present in PwM constructions. Because the implicit argument c-commands the pronoun, it precludes any coreference relation between them. These facts follow straight forwardly from the assumptions that the external argument is syntactically present as an implicit argument. This implicit argument of the PwM constructions can bind a reflexive pronoun (15a), its presence also triggers condition B effects (15b). Since reflexives and pronouns are subject to Conditions A and B of the Binding Theory respectively, the data suggest that the implicit argument of PwM constructions is syntactically present.

3.3. Entailment and DEK

A further evidence supporting the syntactic presence of the external argument in PwM constructions comes from entailments (Keyser and Roeper 1984, Williams 2014, Bhatt and Pancheva 2017, Collins 2021) and the distribution of *DEK* '-self' in Bùlì. Specifically, *DEK* '-self' is incompatible with PwM constructions. Consider the examples in (16).

(16) a. Lāmmú bɔ̀nì.
meat.DEF chop
'The meat was chopped.'
b. Gbáŋká chì:n.
book.DEF read.
'The book was read.'

c. Lì:kǎ mɔ̀bì.
pot.DEF break
'The pot broke.'

The sentences in (16a)-(16b) entail that someone chopped the meat and someone read the book. If it is true that the meat is chopped, then it is true that somebody chopped the meat. Similarly, if is it true that the book was read, then it is true that somebody read the book. The entailment relations can be taken as evidence for the presence of an agent argument. Such an entailment relation is absent in (16c), an indication that it lacks an external argument. The fact that the sentences in (16a)-(16b) have entailment relations can be made particularly clearly with the distribution of *DEK* '-self'.

DEK 'self' attaches to a DP that is either the agent or has the ability to undergo an action/event described by the predicate without an external causer (17).

(17) a. Asibi-dēᴋ álī bɔ̀nì lāmmú.
Asibi-SELF ALI chop meat.
'Asibi chopped the meat (by) himself.'
b. Tí:mú-dēᴋ álī lɔ̄.
Tree.DEF-SELF ALI fall
'The tree fell (by) itself.'

In (17a), the subject DP is the agent of the verb. In (17b), the subject can undergo the action of the predicates without an external causer, that is, a tree can fall by it-self. Therefore (17b) does not require an agent. This explains why the subjects in (17) are able to license *DEK*.
Consider (18) in contrast where *DEK* is not licensed.

(18) a. *Lāmmú-dēᴋ álī bɔ̄nī.
meat.DEF-SELF ALI chop
'The meat was chopped (by) itself.'
b. *Gbáŋká-dēᴋ álī chī:n.
book.DEF-SELF ALI read.
'The book was read (by) itself.'

The subjects in (18) are unable to take *DEK* because they cannot by themselves undergo the actions described, they require an external argument. That is, the meat cannot be chopped by itself and the book cannot read by itself. I assume that it is the requirement for the presence of the external arguments that excludes the cooccurrence of *DEK* with the subject DPs in the sentences in (18). Given these distributions of *DEK* in (17), we must conclude that the requirement for the presence of the external arguments in (18) excludes the licensing of *DEK*. This external argument, I argue, is theimplicit argument.

3.4. Control into purpose clauses

Another piece of evidence supporting the syntactic presence of an implicit external argument comes from control into purpose clauses (Roeper 1987, Bhatt and Pancheva 2017, Gotah 2022). PwM constructions are able to license purpose clauses, (19).

(19) a. Lāmmú bɔ̀nì wà chārī.
meat.DEF chop 3SG distribute
'The meat was chopped in order to distribute. '
b. Tálímŭ kpà bà bōrī zá:
farm.DEF weed 3PL plant millet
'The farm was weeded in order to plant millet.'

Example (20) in contrast cannot license a purpose clause.

(20) a. *Tí:sà-ŋá lɔ̀ wà sē yérí.
Trees-DEF fall 3SG build house
'The trees fell in order to build a house.'

The external argument, I assume is responsible for licensing the PRO subject of the rationale clause in the PwM constructions in (19). Its absence in (20) means that the PRO subject of the rationale does not have a controller, hence the ungrammaticality. The ability to control into rationale clauses has also been used to distinguish between middles and passives. Middles have been observed to not license rationale clauses (21) as opposed to passives that readily allow them, thus, PwM constructions patterns more with passives than middle constructions.

(21) (Bhatt and Pancheva 2017:2)
a. This ship was sunk [PRO to collect the insurance].
b. *This ship sinks easily [PRO to collect the insurance].

3.5. Secondary predicates

Depictive secondary predicates licensing presents another context where we can test the presence of an implicit argument. This argument is predicated on the assumption that secondary predicates need to be licensed by a locally c commanding DP (See Collins 2021 for more on this issue). Consider the following examples:

(22) a. George left the party angry. (Schultze-Berndt & Himmelmann 2004:60).
b. At the commune, the campers usually eat breakfast nude. (Collins 2021:29).

Secondary predicates modify arguments of the main predicate. In the sentences above, the 'controller' of the depictive secondary predicate is *George* in (22a) and *the campers* in (22b). Thus, a syntactic 'controller' is required in order to license these predicates. Several authors including (Roeper 1987, Baker 1988, Sroik 1992, Collins 2005, 2021) have shown that secondary predicates are possible with passive constructions. Collins (2005, 2021) explain this by arguing that secondary predicates are licensed by the implicit external argument in the passive.

We observe in Bùlì that secondary predicates are licensed in PwM constructions (23), a fact I take to suggest that there is a syntactically projected implicit argument in these constructions.

(23) a. Asibi bɔ̀nì lāmmú chābōlā.
Asibi chop meat.DEF naked
'Asibi chopped the meat naked.'
b. Lāmmú bɔ̀nì chābōlā.
meat.DEF chop naked
'The meat was chopped naked.'
c. *Tí:mú lɔ̄ chābōlā.
Tree.DEF fall naked
'The tree fell naked.

In example (23a), the secondary predicate *chābōlā* 'naked' is licensed by the external argument *Asibi*, indicating that *Asibi* chopped the meat while being naked. In (23b) also, the secondary predicate is licensed by the presence of the implicit external argument. The absence of this argument in (23c) renders it ungrammatical because the secondary predicate does not have a c-commanding DP as a licensor.

4. Discussions and conclusions

In this paper, we have demonstrated that PwM constructions are able to participate in syntactic processes that require syntactically present arguments, including licensing of anaphors, secondary

predicates and purpose clauses, and also excludes dēĸ 'self'. We essentially argued that the external argument of PwM constructions is syntactically present as an implicit argument. Thus, despite the non-overtness of the external argument in PwM, these constructions have two structural arguments just like their active counterparts: the overt theme in subject position and an implicit argument. The observed facts appear to require an analysis in which the null external argument is projected in the syntax. The major theoretical contribution of this paper is that it motivates an analysis of implicit arguments that requires that they be syntactically projected (Stroik 1992,1995,1999; Hoekstra and Roberts 1993; Sichel 2009; Collins 2021; Gotah 2022). Alternative analyses where an implicit argument is not syntactically present (Fiengo 1980; Roberts, 1987; Fagan 1992,1988; Condoravdi 1989; Zribi-Hertz 1993; Ackema and Schoorlemmer 1995; Bruening 2013; Sigurðsson and Wood 2021; Newman 2020) are unable to capture the Bùlì data.

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