

Dogon mediopassive, transitive, and causative verb derivation

Jeffrey Heath

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mediopassive vs. transitive

A number of eastern and northwestern Dogon languages have two forms for many verbs, one with a suffix here called **mediopassive** (or **middle**) and the other with a suffix here called **transitive**. The terms are unsatisfactory but no better labels have occurred.

Both the mediopassive and transitive forms are active verbs, i.e. they have full aspectual paradigms. The mediopassive prototypically denotes a transition into a state, such as ‘lie down’ (intransitive) or ‘put (a baby) up on one’s back (to carry it)’. The latter is already syntactically transitive, but emphasizes the state of the carrier rather than the impact on the babe. The transitive derivative adds an external agent: ‘put (sb) to sleep’ or ‘put (a baby) up on the back of (sb)’. The transitive derivative is therefore similar to a causative (see below), but the flavor of mediopassive/transitive alternations is closer to that of ambi-valent verbs like English break (*Y broke, X broke Y*).

Mediopassive verbs generally also correspond to a phonologically related stative verb describing the resulting state, and not marked for aspect, e.g. ‘be lying down (=in lying position, prone)’ and ‘be holding (or: have) a baby on one’s back’.

Each language with the mediopassive/transitive alternation also has some cases of suffixed mediopassives or transitives paired with an unsuffixed base.

In some languages the mediopassive/transitive alternation is productive in certain semantic domains, including stance, wearing clothes, and carrying/holding. In other languages the alternation is absent or vestigial. For example, in Jamsay there are a few remaining causatives that continue the old transitive suffix. In such languages, however, there are many trisyllabic verbs that probably originated as mediopassive or transitive derivatives but are no longer segmentable.

Attested forms of the suffixes and indications of productivity of the alternation are in (1). Less common variants are parenthesized. The suffixal vowel quality is often variable due to harmonization with the vowels of the stem (“v” means a variable vowel). Tones are omitted (they are predictable from the morphological context). Predictable nasalization of suffixal *r* to *rⁿ* by regular nasalization-spreading is also omitted.

| (1) | | productive? | mediopassive | transitive |
|--------------|------------|-------------|------------------------|--|
| eastern | | | | |
| | Donno So | yes (very) | <i>-i: ~ -ε: ~ -e:</i> | <i>-rv ~ -ndv</i> |
| | Togo Kan | yes | <i>-i: ~ -ε:</i> | <i>-rv</i> |
| | Nanga | yes | <i>-yí/é</i> | <i>-rí/é</i> |
| | Bankan Tey | yes | <i>-yí/é</i> | <i>-rí/é</i> |
| | Ben Tey | slightly | <i>-yí/ú/é</i> | <i>-rí/ú/é</i> |
| | Jamsay | no | — | <i>-rv</i> (rare causative) |
| | Toro Tegu | no | — | <i>-rv</i> (rare causative) |
| | Tommo So | no | <i>-iyε/e/ɔ/o</i> | <i>-irε/e/ɔ/o</i> |
| | Yorno So | yes | <i>-i: ~ -ε:</i> | <i>-rʋ</i> |
| | Tomo Kan | yes | [zero or fused] | <i>-ri</i> |
| northwestern | | | | |
| | Najamba | yes (very) | <i>-yε/i</i> | <i>-re/i, -le/i</i> |
| | Tiranige | yes | <i>-yo/ɔ-</i> | <i>-ro/ɔ- (-do/ɔ-)</i> |
| | Dogul Dom | yes | <i>-yε/e</i> | <i>-re/e</i> |
| | Tebul Ure | somewhat | <i>-i: ~ -e: ~ -ε:</i> | <i>-rv</i> |
| | Yanda Dom | yes | <i>-yv ~ -jv</i> | <i>-dv (-rv)</i> |
| southwestern | | | | |
| | Penange | yes | <i>-ye ~ -yε</i> | <i>-re- ~ -re (-de ~ -de, -nde ~ -nde)</i> |
| | Mombo | yes | <i>-yê: ~ -yê:</i> | <i>-re- ~ -re</i> |
| | Ampari | yes | <i>-yε</i> | <i>-dv</i> |
| | Bunoge | yes | <i>-Ce ~ -Cε</i> | <i>-re ~ -re (-de ~ -de, -le ~ -le)</i> |

[C copied from preceding stem consonant]

It is likely that the original mediopassive form was **-yε* and the basic transitive form was **-dv* or **-rv* with variable vowel.

The mediopassive suffix may also be productive in deadjectival inchoative verbs ('become black/big/...'). However, in some languages it is added to an already transitivized deadjectival factitive verb, resulting in suffix sequences like *-nd-íyé* ~ *-nd-íyé* (Tommo So).

irregular transitive forms in *-ndv*

A number of irregular transitive forms with final *-ndv* (Yanda Dom, Donno So, Najamba) or *-nv* (Jamsay, Togo Kan, Yorno So) may have been offshoots of the transitive derivation with **-dv* or **-rv*. The typical stem shape is *Cv:-n(d)v*, probably contracted from **CvNv-dv*.

Yanda Dom has a recognizable transitive verb pattern *Cv̄:-ndv̄*. Each such stem is semantically related either to a mediopassive derivative (suffix *-yv*, after a nasla *-jv*) or to an underived stem. The phonological relationships are messy and idiosyncratic, though we can usually make sense of them historically.

Yanda Dom examples with a corresponding mediopassive are: *ʔi:jí-yé* ‘(sth) stop’ with transitive *í:-ndé* ‘stop (sth)’, *nún-jó* (< **nún(ú)-yó*) ‘get dressed’ with transitive *nú:-ndó* ‘dress (sb)’, and *yú:lí-yé* ‘(sb) wake up’ with transitive *yú:-ndé* ‘rouse, wake (sb) up’. In the majority of these cases, the transitive form probably reflects **Cv(:)Nv-dv* with a medial nasal (‘wake up’ is the only one with a medial lateral). The historical phonological process was probably the loss of the medial nasal consonant, giving rise to a nasalized long vowel (**Cv̄:ⁿ-dv̄*), becoming *Cv:-ndv* after reanalysis.

The cases of Yanda Dom transitive *-ndv* paired with an underived stem divide into one subset where a similar historical phonological analysis is possible, and a second subset where *-ndv* may be ancient. An example of the first subset is *zǎŋ* ‘fight’ and transitive (here causative) *zá:-ndé* (**zǎŋá-dé*) ‘incite (sb) to fight’. In the second subset is *bǎ:* ‘be full’, transitive *bá:-ndé* ‘fill (sth)’. For Yanda Dom *gó* ‘go out’ with transitive *gò-ndó* ‘take out’, and *súwó* ‘go down’ with transitive *sú:-ndó* ‘take down’, see the relevant sections below.

M-causative

Each language also has a productive causative derivational suffix, converting a wide range of input verbs (including transitives) to causative verbs. The causative may be added to an already derived verb (reversive, mediopassive, occasionally transitive).

Productive causatives usually go back to a prototype **-mɔ*, and I will call them **M-causatives**. Unlike most derivational suffixes, M-causatives often do not harmonize suffixal vocalism to stem vocalism, even in languages where verb stems including other suffixal derivatives normally respect at least ATR-harmony. This points to an origin of the causative as a fused verb chain. Nevertheless, the vowel of the causative suffix is often variable depending on which inflectional suffix follows it, and the vowel is subject to apocope/syncope in some languages. In (2), “v” = variable vowel.

(2) primary causative minor causatives (excluding “transitive”)

eastern

| | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Donno So | <i>-mv</i> | <i>-gvlv</i> |
| Togo Kan | <i>-mv</i> | <i>-gv, -ɲv</i> |
| Nanga | <i>-mi</i> | <i>-gí, -ɲí</i> |
| Bankan Tey | <i>-mí</i> | |
| Ben Tey | <i>-wv</i> | <i>-gi</i> |
| Jamsay | <i>-wv</i> | <i>-gv ~ -ɲv</i> |
| Toro Tegu | <i>-mv</i> | <i>-kv, -m-kv</i> |
| Tommo So | <i>-mɔ</i> | |
| Yorno So | <i>-mɔ́</i> | <i>-gʋ́</i> |
| Tomo Kan | <i>-mí</i> | |

northwestern

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------|------------|
| Najamba | <i>-m</i> | <i>-gi</i> |
| Tiranige | <i>-mú</i> | <i>-gó</i> |
| Dogul Dom | <i>-mé ~ -mɛ́</i> | |
| Tebul Ure | <i>-m</i> | |
| Yanda Dom | <i>-mɔ́</i> | |

southwestern

| | | |
|---------|--------------|------------------|
| Penange | <i>-m(i)</i> | |
| Mombo | <i>-mì</i> | |
| Ampari | <i>-m(i)</i> | |
| Bunoge | <i>-mì</i> | <i>-gì, -ɲgè</i> |

Fulfulde causative suffix *-in-* occurs in a number of loanwords especially in northern (northeastern and northwestern) Dogon country. In those cases where both an underived verb and the causative have been borrowed, a dimly identifiable *-in-* (or resegmented *-nv-*) causative suffix might be said to exist in Dogon languages. Example: Fulfulde *jan̄gi* ‘X study’, *jan̄gine* ‘Y teach X’.

passive/causative syncretism (M-passive)

In most Dogon languages, a handful of syntactically transitive verbs such as ‘see’, ‘hear’, ‘get’ and ‘encounter’ use the same suffix as in the M-causative to form a passive of the type ‘be VERB-able’.

Examples based on transitive ‘get, obtain’ (*bèlé, bèré*, etc.) are the passives (‘be obtainable, available’) *bèrù-má* (Toro Tegu), *bèlè-mɔ́* (Donno So, Tommo So), *bèlé-mɛ́* (Tommo So), *bèrè-wé* (Jamsay), *bèré-mí* (Nanga), *bèrè-wú* (Ben Tey), *bě-m̄* (Togo Kan), and *bèlà-mà* (Bunoge).

Penange has a somewhat similar passive in -mû:, segmentable as “causative” -m- and an ending -û: that is also attested in the same sense in one form without -m-, namely *kàn-û:* ‘be do-able, be (routinely) done’ from transitive *kání* ‘do’.

irregular causative ‘take out, remove’

The verb ‘go/come out, exit’ reconstructs as *gǒ(:), with perfective *gwe- or *ge-. The original perfective generalizes in some languages. The corresponding causative ‘cause to exit’ and in context ‘take out (e.g. money from pocket)’ or ‘remove, take away, get rid of’ is sometimes synchronically regular, especially in north- and southwestern languages (productive causative suffix -mv). Eastern and some western languages have an irregular causative. One type reflects *gò:-ndó (Tommo So, Donno So, Yorno So) or *gò-ndó (Nanga, Bankan Tey, Ben Tey, Yanda Dom). Another appears to reflect *gùṅó (Toro Tegu, Togo Kan, Jamsay). It is possible that the proto-language had more than one of these forms, since in southeastern languages (Penange, Bunoge) even intransitive ‘exit’ has multiple forms.

(xxx) ‘Exit’ and ‘take out’

| language | ‘go out, exit’ | ‘take out, remove’ |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| eastern | | |
| Tommo So | <i>gǒ:</i> | <i>gò:ndó</i> |
| Donno So | <i>gǒ:</i> | <i>gò:ndó</i> |
| Yorno So | <i>gǒ:</i> | <i>gǒ:nó</i> |
| Nanga | <i>gǒ:</i> | <i>gòndó</i> |
| Bankan Tey | <i>gó</i> (??) | <i>gòndó</i> |
| Ben Tey | <i>gǒ</i> | <i>gòló</i> |
| Toro Tegu | <i>gó</i> | <i>gùṅó</i> |
| Togo Kan | <i>gǒ:</i> | <i>gǔṅó</i> |
| Jamsay | <i>gǒ:</i> ¹ | <i>gǒ:</i> ⁿ |
| Tomo Kan | ?? | ?? |
| northwestern | | |
| Najamba | <i>gwé</i> < /góé/ | <i>gǒ-m</i> |
| Tiranige | <i>gó:</i> | <i>gó-m(ú)</i> |
| Dogul Dom | <i>gě:</i> | ?? |
| Tebul Ure | <i>gǒ</i> | ?? |
| Yanda Dom | <i>gó</i> | <i>gòndó</i> |

¹ Incorrectly *gó:* in the published Jamsay grammar (this H-toned form is the imperative).

| | | | |
|--------------|--|--|---|
| southwestern | | | |
| Penange | gú:ndè ‘go out, exit’ gó:ngè ‘emerge’ gwé: ‘depart, leave’ | | gó-m-dè |
| Mombo | gwé: | | gó:-mì |
| Ampari | ?? | | ?? |
| Bunoge | gê:, gó:ngè, gú:ndè | | gòngó-mì (‘cause to go out’) gó:-mì (‘take out, remove’) |

irregular causative ‘take down’

Another motion verb that often has an irregular causative is ‘go/come down, descend’. The intransitive appears to reconstruct as something like *súgó with perfective *súgé ~ *sígé. Leaving aside the synchronically regular causatives in southwestern Dogon (productive causative suffix *-mv*), most of the causative forms (‘cause to descend, take down, unload’) appear to reflect *súgú/ó-ndǎ, most obviously Tommo So and the northwestern languages. Variants are due to nasalization-spreading (*súnú-ndó for the Donno So form) and metathesis (*súnú-(ŋ)gó for Jamsay and Togo Kan). Toro Tegu *sító* is difficult to explain. A contracted variant *sí-ndé, originally perfective, is reflected in Nanga, Bankan Tey, Ben Tey, and (Nanga-influenced) Pergué dialect of Jamsay.

(xxx) ‘Descend’ and ‘take down’

| language | ‘go down, descend’ | ‘take down’ (causative) |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| eastern | | |
| Nanga | sígé | síndé- |
| Bankan Tey | síyé | síndé |
| Ben Tey | síyé | sílé |
| Jamsay (Pergué) | sígé | sílé |
| Tommo So | súgó | súgú-ndó |
| Donno So | súgò | súnù-ndò ~ súgù-ndò |
| Jamsay | súgó | súnú-ŋó |
| Togo Kan | súgó | súnú-gó |
| Toro Tegu | sígó | sító |
| Yorno So | súgó | pá:rá (noncognate) |
| Tomo Kan | ?? | ?? |

| | | |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| northwestern | | |
| Najamba | <i>súgí</i> | <i>súgó-ndí</i> |
| Tiranige | <i>sígó</i> | ?? |
| Dogul Dom | <i>sìgé ~ sùgé</i> | <i>sìgù-ndé</i> |
| Tebul Ure | <i>súgó</i> | ?? |
| Yanda Dom | <i>súwó</i> | <i>sú:-ndó</i> |
| southwestern | | |
| Penange | <i>sígé</i> | <i>jàngú-lè</i> (noncognate) |
| Mombo | <i>sígé</i> | <i>sígó-mì</i> |
| Ampari | ?? | ?? |
| Bunoge | <i>sígè</i> | <i>sígó-mí</i> |