

Passives, states, and roots in Malagasy

The nature of stative/resultative predicates has attracted some interest recently in current syntactic and semantic work (e.g. Kratzer 2000, Embick 2004). Statives in Malagasy are interesting in the context of this literature as they both confirm existing observations and provide intriguing additional information. This paper represents first an investigation of the Malagasy data, then an attempt to explain the differences between Malagasy and English.

Embick proposes the three types of similar constructions in English, (i) the eventive passive (1a), (ii) the resultative (1b), and (iii) the stative (1c). Much has been written about the distinction between verbal (eventive) passives and adjectival (resultative) passives (see e.g. Wasow) so Embick concentrates on distinguishing the resultative from the stative. He gives various tests, among them the licensing of manner adverbs (2), the interpretation of time related adverbs such as *recently* (3).

Malagasy, as described in Rajemisa-Raolison (1971), has (at least) four types of passive — suffix passive, *voa-*, *tafa-*, and root passives as exemplified in (4a-d). Many of the distinguishing characteristics of these three types of passives are the same as those mentioned by Embick. However, there is the obvious difference between English and Malagasy in that there is an additional type. Further, in all of the Malagasy cases, it is possible to realize the external argument as the examples in (0a-d) show, while in English, the external argument can only be realized in the eventive passive.

Among other things I will show that the Malagasy passives differ from each other along the following lines:

- (i) Eventive passives mark past and future tense while the *voa-*, *tafa-*, and root passives, like adjectives, mark only future tense (Rajemisa-Raolison 1971).
- (ii) Eventive passives (unlike the other three) have defeasible endpoints.
- (iii) While all four passives can realize external arguments, only eventive and *voa-* passives always have implicit agents when they are not realized.
- (iv) Future tense on *voa-* and *tafa-* passives (unlike eventive and root passives) has a future perfect reading (Rajemisa-Raolison 1971).
- (v) The adverbial phrase *tsy ela* ‘not long ago’ is possible with eventive, *voa-*, and *tafa-* passives but not with root passives (see (6)).

In the paper I will also review other distinctions that have been proposed that focus on the status of the external argument (whether or not it can be inanimate/non-volitional) or the nature of the cause predicate (whether or not it can license a manner adverb) and show that these are merely tendencies.

The account I provide is similar to Embick’s in that part of the solution is embedded in phrase structure distinctions, and part of the solution is embedded in the qualitative difference of the heads that appear in the phrase structure. Eventive passives are created with a dynamic *v* head while the other three passives have a *v* head that is stative. Further, eventive passives have a –telic aspectual head while the other three have a +telic aspectual head. *Voa-* and *tafa-*, as lexical items, encode a change of state which distinguishes them from the other stative predicate, the bare root passive. The distinction between *voa-* and *tafa-*, a contrast that does not exist in English, is that the root to which *voa-* attaches contains an obligatory external argument in its lexical conceptual structure, which *tafa-* attaches to roots that do not necessarily have this external argument. This leads to the final question of where the second difference from English comes from — the presence of the external arguments. I link this to work such as Travis (2002) where it is shown that telic markers can introduce external arguments in Malagasy.

- (1) a. The metal was flattened (by the smith). EVENTIVE PASSIVE
 b. The metal is flattened. RESULTATIVE
 c. The metal is flat. STATE
- (2) a. The package remained carefully opened.
 b.* The package remained carefully open.
- (3) a. the recently opened door ((i) was recently in an open state/(ii) recently became open)
 b. the recently open door ((i) was recently in an open state)
- (4) a. SUFFIX PASSIVE b. VOA- PASSIVE
 Tapahina ny tady Voatapaka ny tady
 cut-TT DET cord VOA-cut DET cord
 ‘The cord was cut.’ ‘The cord was cut.’
- c. TAF A- passive d. ROOT PASSIVE
 Tafavoha ny boaty Tapaka ny tady
 TAF A-open DET box √cut DET cord
 ‘The box was opened.’ ‘The cord is cut.’
- (5) a. Tapahin’ny lehilahy ny tady b. Voatapaky ny antsy ny tady
 cut-TT’DET man DET cord VOA-cut DET knife DET cord
 ‘The cord was cut by the man.’ ‘The cord was cut by the knife.’
- c. Tafavohan’ny lehilahy ny boaty d. Tapaky ny antsy ny tady
 TAF A-open’DET man DET box √cut DET knife DET cord
 ‘The box was opened by the man.’ ‘The cord is cut by the knife.’
- (6) a. Notapahina *tsy ela* ny tady
 PST.cut.TT NEG long.ago DET cord
 ‘The cord was cut not long ago.’
- b. Voatapaka *tsy ela* ny tady
- c. Tafapetraka *tsy ela* ny sari-vongona
 TAF A-stand NEG long.ago DET statue
 ‘The statue was stood up not long ago.’
- d. *Tapaka *tsy ela* ny tady

References

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