

## A sketch of Bambara argument structure

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**Abstract.** *Bambara has just one valency changing derivational morpheme, but Bambara verbs very commonly have a variety of constructions reflecting the various types of valency changes that cross-linguistically tend to be encoded by means of derivational affixes. After a brief presentation of the situation of Bambara from the point of view of alignment typology (transitive construction and intransitive alignment – section 2, ditransitive alignment – section 3) and of causative derivation (section 4), this paper is mainly devoted to a presentation of the various types of transitivity alternations (i.e., the possible types of relations between an intransitive and a transitive construction of the same verb), alternations between two transitive constructions of the same verb, and alternations involving the reflexive construction.*

### 1. Introduction

Bambara, the largest language of Mali, belongs to the Manding dialect cluster, included in the Northern branch of the Mande language family. The variety considered here, commonly designated as Standard Bambara or Bamako Bambara, is the variety used in Bamako and other urban centers.

The transcription used in this paper is the official orthography with the addition of tonal diacritics according to the conventions used in Dumestre's *Grammaire fondamentale du bambara* (Dumestre 2003), which constitutes the main reference description of Bambara.<sup>1</sup>

The morphosyntactic organization of Bambara (and of other Manding dialects) is characterized by the following features:

- an extreme degree of rigidity of the *APVX* constituent order;
- the scarcity of verbal inflectional affixes, and the systematic use of 'predicative markers' following the NP in A / S role;
- a system of categories characterized by some degree of fluidity (in particular, with respect to the distinction between nominal and verbal lexemes), and by the existence of a set of forty odd lexemes considered by Dumestre as constituting a distinct category of adjectives, but treated in other works as a particular type of verbs;<sup>2</sup>
- the total absence of agreement mechanisms, either between head nouns and their dependents, or between NPs in core syntactic roles and the verb;

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<sup>1</sup> The tonal notation used by Dumestre is not a phonetic transcription, but rather a conventional notation of elements of the tonal structure of words on the basis of which a person knowing Bambara tone rules can predict most of their other tonal characteristics. This notation does not indicate the tonal modifications distinguishing the definite form of nouns (glossed as 'DEF') from their indefinite form, but it must be taken into account that the so-called definite form of Bambara nouns contrasts with the indefinite form in a limited range of contexts only (mainly in interrogative and negative contexts).

<sup>2</sup> See Vydrine 1999.

- the absence of core syntactic term marking (even with pronouns).

Relatively detailed descriptions of the valency properties of Bambara verbs can be found in the works of Dramane Koné (*Koné 1984*) and Valentin Vydrine (*Vydrine 1994 & Vydrine 1995*). Most of the data discussed here have already been presented in these works. Bailleul’s Bambara-French dictionary (*Bailleul 1996*) is also an important reference for the study of Bambara argument structure, in spite of the fact that the indications it provides on the possible constructions of verbs are often incomplete.

## 2. Transitive and intransitive constructions

### 2.1. Coding characteristics of the core terms of the transitive construction

Independent assertive clauses headed by prototypical action verbs are characterized by a construction that can be described as follows:

- NPs in A and P role bear no mark of their role, and obligatorily precede the verb in the order A P V;
- a predicative marker expressing TAM and polarity distinctions is obligatorily present between A and P;<sup>3</sup>
- with the only exception of NPs introduced by the associative preposition *ní* ‘with, and’ (see ex. (3a-b) for an illustration), no NP representing additional participants or circumstances of the event can be inserted between A and P or between P and V. Obliques follow the verb, and some of them only (mainly temporal adjuncts) can be fronted to the left of A.

Ex. (1) illustrates this construction reduced to its core, with the couples of predicative markers *bé/té* (imperfective)<sup>4</sup> and *yé/má* (perfective).

- (1) a. [<sub>A</sub> *séku*] *bé*      [<sub>P</sub> *tìga*]      *sènɛ*  
          Sékou    IPF.POS    groundnut.DEF    cultivate  
          ‘Sékou cultivates groundnuts’
- b. [<sub>A</sub> *séku*] *té*      [<sub>P</sub> *tìga*]      *sènɛ*  
          Sékou    IPF.NEG    groundnut    cultivate  
          ‘Sékou does not cultivate groundnuts’
- c. [<sub>A</sub> *séku*] *yé*      [<sub>P</sub> *tìga*]      *sènɛ*  
          Sékou    PF.POS    groundnut.DEF    cultivate  
          ‘Sékou cultivated groundnuts’
- d. [<sub>A</sub> *séku*] *má*      [<sub>P</sub> *tìga*]      *sènɛ*  
          Sékou    PF.NEG    groundnut    cultivate  
          ‘Sékou did not cultivate groundnuts’

<sup>3</sup> On the predicative markers of Bambara, see *Creissels 1997, Idiatov 2000, Tröbs 2003*.

<sup>4</sup> These two predicative markers occur also as copulas in non-verbal predication, and their use in combination with verbs can therefore be viewed as an instance of auxiliarization.

## 2.2. Obliques

Ex. (2) illustrates transitive constructions with additional oblique terms.

- (2) a. [<sub>A</sub> *án*] *yé* [<sub>P</sub> *bá*] *tìgɛ* [<sub>X</sub> *kúrun*] *ná*  
 1P PF.POS river.DEF cross boat.DEF POSTP  
 ‘We crossed the river by boat’
- b. [<sub>A</sub> *ála*] *y’* [<sub>P</sub> *án*] *kísi* [<sub>X</sub> *kóngɔ*] *mà*  
 God PF.POS 1P save hunger.DEF POSTP  
 ‘God saved us from hunger’
- c. [<sub>A</sub> *án*] *yé* [<sub>P</sub> *fòro*] *sènɛ* [<sub>X</sub> *í*] *yé*  
 1P PF.POS field.DEF cultivate 2S POSTP  
 ‘We cultivated the field for you’
- d. [<sub>A</sub> *án*] *yé* [<sub>P</sub> *séku*] *yé* [<sub>X</sub> *súgu*] *lá*  
 1P PF.POS Sékou see market.DEF POSTP  
 ‘We saw Sékou at the market’

As illustrated by ex. (2), obliques most commonly appear as postpositional phrases. Note however that:

(a) unmarked obliques are marginally attested (some examples are given at the end of section 2.5);

(b) comitative adjuncts require the combination of the associative preposition *ní* with the postposition *yé*, and the same combination *ní ... yé* is used, in competition with the postposition *lá*, to encode instrumental adjuncts; *ní* alone occurs only in a construction N1 *ní* N2 used to express NP coordination, but not restricted to this function – ex. (3).<sup>5</sup>

- (3) a. *séku ní músa nà-na*  
 Sékou with Moussa come-PF.POS  
 ‘Sékou and Moussa came’
- b. *séku ní dími nà-na*  
 Sékou with anger.DEF come-PF.POS  
 ‘Sékou came angry’
- c. *séku nà-na ní músa yé*  
 Sékou come-PF.POS with Moussa POSTP  
 ‘Sékou came with Moussa’

<sup>5</sup> Some details in the use of the associative preposition are different in other Manding dialects, for example, in Kita Maninka – see *Creissels To appear*.

d. *séku yé jiri tìgɛ ní jéle yé*  
 Sékou PF.POS tree.DEF cut with axe.DEF POSTP  
 ‘Sékou cut the tree with the axe’

e. *séku yé jiri tìgɛ jéle lá*  
 Sékou PF.POS tree.DEF cut axe.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (d)

### 2.3. Possibilities of core term deletion in the transitive construction

The term A can be absent in the imperative only. In independent assertive clauses, whatever the intended meaning and the environment in which the clause is uttered, an NP or pronoun must be present in A position (to the left of the predicative marker): Bambara ignores null anaphora, and the omission of a A cannot be used to express indeterminacy either.

By contrast, the omission of the term inserted between the predicative marker and the verb is always *formally* possible, but with most verbs occurring in the transitive construction, it implies a change in the semantic relation between the remaining terms.

The various types of transitivity alternations will be described in sections 5 & 6, but a particularly common pattern is the *passive alternation* illustrated by ex. (4) & (5): in the absence of an NP inserted between the predicative marker and verb, in the construction of verbs such as *sènɛ* ‘cultivate’ or *dún* ‘eat’, the NP to the left of the predicative marker cannot be interpreted as representing the agent. In spite of the absence of anything that could be analyzed as passive morphology, the construction of these verbs with just one nominal term to the left of the verb is clearly a passive construction in the sense that the role assigned to P in the transitive construction is assigned to the only remaining core term, and an oblique marked by the postposition *fè* (whose basic meaning is proximity) can optionally represent the argument fulfilling the A role in the corresponding transitive construction.

(4) a. *séku má tìga sènɛ*  
 Sékou PF.NEG groundnut cultivate  
 ‘Sékou did not cultivate groundnuts’

b. \**séku má sènɛ*  
 Sékou PF.NEG cultivate

c. *tìga má sènɛ (séku fè)*  
 groundnut.DEF PF.NEG cultivate Sékou POSTP  
 ‘The groundnuts have not been cultivated (by Sékou)’

(5) a. *wùlu má sògo dún*  
 dog.DEF PF.NEG meat.DEF eat  
 ‘The dog did not eat the meat’

b. *wùlu má dún (jàra fɛ̀)*  
 dog.DEF PF.NEG eat lion.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The dog has not been eaten (by the lion)’

c. *sògo má dún (wùlu fɛ̀)*  
 meat.DEF PF.NEG eat dog.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The meat has not been eaten (by the dog)’

In Bambara, the standard way to use verbs having this behavior without mentioning a patient is a construction in which a nominalized form of the verb (either derived by affixation, as in the case of *dún*, or identical with the verb, as in the case of *sɛ̀nɛ*) fulfills the P role in the construction of *ké* ‘do’ – ex. (6).

(6) a. *wùlu yé dùmuni ké*  
 dog.DEF PF.POS eat.NOM.DEF do  
 ‘The dog ate’

b. *séku yé sɛ̀nɛ ké*  
 Sékou PF.POS cultivate.NOM.DEF do  
 ‘Sékou cultivated’

#### 2.4. Intransitive alignment

Verbal clauses that are not fully aligned on the pattern described in section 2.1 have a structure that differs from this pattern on two points only:

- the verb is preceded by one NP only;
- the inventory of predicative markers is slightly different: ‘perfective positive’ is not marked by *yé* in the canonical position of predicative markers, but by *-rá* (with allomorphs *-lá* and *-ná*) suffixed to the verb; note that there is a strict complementarity between these two markers, depending on the number of core NPs preceding the verb.

(7) a. [<sub>S</sub> *séku*] *bé bòli*  
 Sékou IPF.POS run  
 ‘Sékou runs’

b. [<sub>S</sub> *séku*] *té bòli*  
 Sékou IPF.NEG run  
 ‘Sékou does not run’

c. [<sub>S</sub> *séku*] *bòli-la*  
 Sékou run-PF.POS  
 ‘Sékou ran’

d. [<sub>S</sub> *séku*] *má bòli*  
 Sékou PF.NEG run  
 ‘Sékou did not run’

In intransitive constructions, the term to the left of the verb shares with the term A of the transitive construction the absolute impossibility to be omitted, except in the imperative. Since Bambara has neither core term marking nor indexation, constituent order is crucial to the characterization of intransitive alignment as accusative rather than ergative, and the decisive observation is that, with respect to the predicative markers that are common to transitive and intransitive constructions, the unique core term of intransitive constructions occupies the same position as A in the transitive construction:

A	pr	P	V	X
S	pr	—	V	X
~ S	—	—	V-pr	X

### 2.5. Bivalent verbs in intransitive constructions

Like most African languages, Bambara shows no particular restriction to the possibility to treat semantically bivalent verbs that are not typical action verbs within the frame of the transitive construction. In particular, experiencers can be encoded as the term A of transitive constructions (for example, *dón* ‘know’, *kànu* ‘love’, *yé* ‘see’ are transitive verbs) an arguments encoded as the term A of a transitive construction are not necessarily animate. However, not all bivalent verbs are syntactically assimilated to typical action verbs. Ex. (8) provides some illustrations of semantically bivalent verbs occurring in intransitive constructions with an oblique argument. The postpositions occurring in this example, when used to encode satellites, express the following meanings: *lá* ‘location, instrument’, *kó* (< *kó* ‘back’) ‘behind’, *nyé* (< *nyé* ‘eye’) ‘before’, *kóro* (< *kóro* ‘bottom’) ‘under’.

- (8) a. *à ká sàya bàla-la bée lá*  
 3S GEN death.DEF surprise-PF.POS all POSTP  
 ‘His death surprised everybody’
- b. *ń bé síga à ká kúma ná*  
 1S IPF.POS have doubts 3S GEN word.DEF POSTP  
 ‘I have doubts about what he said’
- c. *à nyìnε-na kúma fó-len kó*  
 3S forget-PF.POS word say-PTC.DEF POSTP  
 ‘He forgot what had been said’
- d. *à fó-ra ń kó*  
 3S miss-PF.POS 1S POST  
 ‘He did not find me’
- e. *ń té síran sà nyé*  
 1S IPF.NEG be afraid snake.DEF POSTP  
 ‘I am not afraid of the snake’

- f. *à dími-na ní kóro*  
 3S get angry-PF.POS 1S POSTP  
 ‘He got angry at me’

The postposition *mà* deserves special attention. It has the particularity to be used mainly to encode oblique arguments. There is evidence that it originates from an ancient noun meaning something like ‘contact’, which is no more productively used as a noun and is attested in a handful of frozen expressions only, but in the present state of the language, the role it assigns to its complement often has no obvious connection with this original meaning.

- (9) a. *à sòn-na ò mà*  
 3S agree-PF.POS DEM POSTP  
 ‘He agreed with that’

- b. *án yàfa-rá í mà*  
 1P forgive-PF.POS 2S POSTP  
 ‘We forgave you’

However, in spite of the fact that *mà* has very few concrete spatial uses, it is remarkable that it is used to encode the second argument of the intransitive verbs *sé* ‘reach’ and *sín* ‘direct oneself towards’, and that, more generally, most of its uses are compatible with the idea that, in the present state of the language, it has a basic meaning of orientation, and its complement can often be characterized as an aim or target.

This notion of orientation carried by *mà* must not be confused with destination of movement. In Bambara, movement verbs whose second argument is the source or destination of movement do not combine with specialized postpositions expressing source or destination: their second argument can be marked by any postposition able to encode location, and the interpretation of an NP combined with a spatial postposition as encoding localization, source or destination entirely depends on the predicate.

- (10) a. *à bé súgu lá*  
 3S COP.POS market.DEF POSTP  
 ‘(S)he is at the market’

- b. *à táa-ra súgu lá*  
 3S go-PF.POS market.DEF POSTP  
 ‘(S)he went to the market’

- c. *à nà-na súgu lá*  
 3S come to-PF.POS market.DEF POSTP  
 ‘(S)he came to the market’

- d. *à bó-ra súgu lá*  
 3S come from-PF.POS market.DEF POSTP  
 ‘(S)he came from the market’

Note also that a limited class of nouns (including in particular many toponyms, but not all) shares with locative adverbs the ability to be used as spatial arguments or adjuncts without combining with postpositions.

- (11) a. *à b'é kíta*  
 3S COP.POS Kita  
 '(S)he is in Kita'
- b. *à táa-ra kíta*  
 3S go-PF.POS Kita  
 '(S)he went to Kita'
- c. *à bó-ra kíta*  
 3S come from-PF.POS Kita  
 '(S)he came from Kita'
- d. *ń y' à yé kíta*  
 1S PF.POS 3S see Kita  
 'I saw him/her in Kita'

### 3. Ditransitive alignment

#### 3.1. General remarks

In Bambara clauses, the number of core syntactic terms, characterized by their position to the left of the verb, is strictly limited to two. There is never evidence that terms in postverbal position should be considered as syntactically distinct from ordinary obliques.

This means that, in the case of semantically trivalent verbs, two participants only can be encoded as core terms (A and P), and the remaining argument must be treated as an oblique.

In section 8, we will see that some of the verbs likely to be considered as semantically trivalent verbs show variations in their construction that can be explained as instances of applicative or causative alternation. In the following subsections of section 3, the observations will be restricted to trivalent verbs whose construction does not show such alternations.

#### 3.2. 'Give'

Bambara has two equally usual verbs corresponding to English 'give'. With one of them (*dí*), the gift is encoded in the same way as the monotransitive patient, and the recipient is encoded as an oblique, marked by the postposition *mà*. With the other one (*són*), the recipient is encoded in the same way as the monotransitive patient, and the gift is encoded as an oblique, marked by the postposition *lá*.

Quite regularly (see section 2.3), each of these verbs has an intransitive construction with a passive reading in which S corresponds to the term P of the transitive construction.

- (12) a. *mùso yé dúmuni dí ń mà*

woman.DEF PF.POS food.DEF give 1S POSTP  
 ‘The woman gave me food’

b. *mùso yé ní sòn dùmuni ná*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS 1S give food.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

c. *dùmuni dí-ra ní mà (mùso fè)*  
 food.DEF give-PF.POS 1S POSTP woman.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The food was given to me (by the woman)’

d. *ní sòn-na dùmuni ná (mùso fè)*  
 1S give-PF.POS food.DEF POSTP woman.DEF POSTP  
 ‘I was given food (by the woman)’

The use of *lá* in the construction of *sòn* is consistent with the instrumental value of this postposition,<sup>6</sup> and the use of *mà* in the construction of *dí* is consistent with the hypothesis of a basic meaning of direction – see section 2.5.

In the construction of *dí*, some speakers use the locative adverb *yàn* ‘here’ instead of first person pronouns combined with *mà* to encode first person recipients – ex. (13).

(13) a. *dùmuni dí ní mà*  
 food.DEF give 1S POSTP  
 ‘Give me some food’

b. *dùmuni dí yàn*  
 food.DEF give here  
 same meaning as (a)

### 3.3. ‘Bring’, ‘send’, etc.

Not surprisingly, transfer verbs such as *cí* ‘send’ or *lá-se* ‘bring’ (< *sé* ‘reach’) have a construction identical to that of *dí* ‘give’, and use the same postposition *mà* to mark the destination of the transfer. The same construction is found also with *kàlifa* ‘entrust’, *fèere* ‘sell’<sup>7</sup>, and it is interesting to observe that the postposition *mà* is also used to mark the oblique representing the target in the construction of *fili* ‘throw’.

(14) a. *séku yé létere cí músa mà*  
 Sékou PF.POS letter.DEF send Moussa POSTP  
 ‘Sékou sent a letter to Moussa’

<sup>6</sup> Verbs ‘give’ with the recipient in P role and the gift encoded as an oblique argument are common among Mande languages, and their construction regularly involves an instrumental (or comitative-instrumental) adposition.

<sup>7</sup> *Bailleul 1996* mentions the possibility to use *fèere* with the same alternation as *sàn* (see section 7.3.2), but most speakers ignore this possibility, and interpret *fèere* as ‘sell’ even in the absence of the oblique marked by the postposition *mà*.

b. *séku yé nègeso kàlifa músa mà*  
 Sékou PF.POS bicycle.DEF entrust Moussa POSTP  
 ‘Sékou entrusted the bicycle to Moussa’

c. *mùso yé mángoro fèere ní mà*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS mango.DEF sell 1S POSTP  
 ‘The woman sold me a mango’

d. *séku yé kábakuru filí músa mà*  
 Sékou PF.POS stone.DEF throw Moussa POSTP  
 ‘Sékou threw a stone to Moussa’

### 3.4. ‘Deprive’

*jè* ‘deprive someone of something’ has the same construction as *són* ‘present someone with something’.

(15) *í kàna fàantan jè dàhirime ná*  
 2S HORT.NEG poor.DEF deprive food.DEF POSTP  
 ‘You should not deprive the poor man of food’

### 3.5. Recipients and beneficiaries

In Bambara, obliques representing beneficiaries can be added freely to the construction of any verb without necessitating any other change in the construction. The postposition used in Bambara to encode beneficiaries (*yé*) is different from the postposition used to mark the recipient in the construction of *dí* ‘give’.<sup>8</sup>

(16) a. *séku yé báara ké ní yé*  
 Sékou PF.POS work.DEF do 1S POSTP  
 ‘Sékou worked for me’

b. *ù yé fòro sène ní yé*  
 3P PF.POS field.DEF cultivate 1S POSTP  
 ‘They cultivated the field for me’

### 3.6. ‘Tell’

*fó* ‘tell (something to someone)’ has a construction similar to that of *dí* ‘give’. However, the oblique representing the addressee is marked by the postposition *yé* (used also to encode

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<sup>8</sup> In Bambara, *yé* has also a meaning of identification, and occurs in constructions implying comparison, change of state, accompaniment (in combination with the associative preposition *ní*). These uses of the postposition *yé* are difficult to relate to its benefactive meaning, and this situation may result from the conflation of the uses of two originally distinct postpositions, since other Manding dialects use *yé* with a benefactive meaning only, and have another postposition (*dí* or *tí*) for identification or accompaniment (see *Creissels To appear*).

beneficiaries – see section 3.5) and not *mà* (used to mark recipients, or the direction of a transfer – see sections 3.2 & 3.3).

- (17) *ń yé tìnyε fɔ́ í yé*  
 1S PF.POS truth.DEF tell 2S POSTP  
 ‘I told you the truth’

### 3.7. ‘Show’

*jìra* ‘show’ has a construction in which the person to whom something/somebody is shown is encoded as an oblique marked by the postposition *lá*.

- (18) *ù yé síra jìra ń ná*  
 3P PF.POS way.DEF show 1S POSTP  
 ‘They showed me the way’

### 3.8. ‘Ask’, ‘inform’

*nyininka* ‘ask someone about something’ has a construction in which the person questioned is encoded as P, and the object of the question is represented by an oblique marked by the postposition *lá*. *sàra* ‘inform someone about something’ has the same construction.

- (19) *ń m’ í nyininka fóyi lá*  
 1S PF.NEG 2S ask nothing POSTP  
 ‘I did not ask you about anything’

*sómi* ‘inform’ has the same construction, but can be analyzed as an unmarked causative, since *sómi* in an intransitive construction with an oblique argument marked by the postposition *lá* expresses the meaning ‘suspect’.

## 4. Causative derivation

### 4.1. The preverb *lá* as a causative marker

The addition of the preverb *lá*<sup>9</sup> (probably cognate with the postposition *lá*) to verbs occurring in intransitive constructions is a productive way to derive verbs occurring in a transitive construction in which A represents a causer, and P represents a causee identified to the S argument of the corresponding intransitive construction, as illustrated by ex. (20).

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<sup>9</sup> This unit is currently considered a prefix and written as such, but it does not show the phonological behavior that would be expected from a true affix. Bambara has two other preverbs, *mà* and *rɔ́*, also cognate with postpositions, but *lá* is the only one productively used as a valency operator. The other two preverbs may change the construction of individual verbs with which they combine, but no regularity can be made apparent.

- (20) a. *dén*      *má*      *kúnu*  
 child.DEF    PF.NEG    wake up  
 ‘The child did not wake up’
- b. *mùso*      *má*      *dén*      *lá-kunu*  
 woman.DEF   PF.NEG    child.DEF   CAUS.wake up  
 ‘The woman did not wake up the child’

Given that there is no phonological evidence that the preverb *lá* should be analyzed as prefixed to the verb, it is necessary to prove that it forms a unit with the verb, and cannot be analyzed as a postposition forming a constituent with the preceding NP.<sup>10</sup> Evidence supporting this decision is provided by the fact that sentences such as (20b) participate in the passive alternation already presented in section 2.3, and that, in the passive construction, *lá* remains in contact with the verb and has no NP immediately preceding it.

- (21) a. *dén*      *má*      *kúnu*      ‘The child did not wake up’  
 S            pr            V
- b. *mùso*      *má*      *dén*      *lá-kunu*      ‘The woman did not wake up the child’  
 A            pr      P      V
- c. *dén*      *má*      *lá-kunu*      ‘The child was not woken up’  
 S            pr            V

#### 4.2. Morphologically marked causativization and transitivity

The addition of the causative preverb *lá* is often possible with verbs that are not strictly intransitive, but in such cases, the derived verb never has a construction and a meaning that could be explained as a regular causative transformation of transitive uses of the non-derived verb. For example, *bòli* can be used intransitively with the meaning ‘run’ and transitively with the meaning ‘ride’, but *lá-boli* can express ‘make run’ only, and is not available to express ‘make ride’.

At first sight, *dún* seems to be an exception to the rule according to which transitive constructions cannot be causativized by means of a morphological derivation, since this verb has a causative construction in which it occurs in a derived form – ex. (22).

- (22) *jàtigi*      *yé*      *dúnan*      *dúmuni*  
 host.DEF    PF.POS    guest.DEF    eat.DER  
 ‘The host gave food to the guest’

However, it would be incorrect to analyze *dúmuni* as *dún* + *causative suffix*. *dúmuni* is basically a nominalized form of *dún* ‘eat’, with the two possible meanings ‘eating’ and ‘food’ – see section 2.3, ex. (6), and section 3.2, ex. (12). What occurs here is not a causative

<sup>10</sup> In other words, it is necessary to show that *lá* is really involved in causative derivation, and not in a mechanism of differential P marking.

derivation, but rather the conversion of a noun N into a transitive verb with the meaning ‘provide someone with N’. This conversion is more usual with *dúmuni* ‘food’ than for other nouns, and consequently bambara dictionaries signal the use of *dúmuni* as a verb meaning ‘provide with food’, but a similar possibility of conversion is sporadically attested with other nouns, for example *sàbara* ‘shoe’ → ‘provide someone with shoes’.

#### 4.3. Lexicalized uses of *lá*

In addition to its productive use to form derived causatives with a transparent meaning, it must be noted that with many verbs, the preverb *lá* also has more or less lexicalized meanings, as in *dòn* ‘go/come in’ → *lá-don* (a) ‘make go/come in’, (b) ‘attend to someone’.

Sometimes the regular causative meaning seems to have been lost, and the derived causative is only attested with lexicalized meanings whose original semantic motivation may be more or less difficult to reconstitute.

The particular case of *mén* ‘hear’ → *lá-mén* ‘listen’ deserves attention, since at the same time the semantic relation between the two verbs is obvious, but the construction of the derived verb cannot be analyzed in terms of causation in the usual sense of this term, since there is no change in the number of participants involved. In this particular case, the addition of *lá* can only be analyzed as encoding a change in the semantic role of A (experiencer with *mén*, more agent-like with *lá-mén*).

- (23) a. *ń yé mánkan mén*  
 1S PF.POS noise.DEF hear  
 ‘I heard a noise’
- b. *ń y’ í lá-mén*  
 1S PF.POS 2S CAUS-hear  
 ‘I listened to you’

However, the case of *mén* / *lá-mén* is isolated, and no other couple of verbs lends itself to exactly the same analysis.

In some cases, for example *cí* ~ *lá-cí* ‘send’, the verb to which *lá* is added does not have intransitive uses that could justify a causative derivation, and the addition of *lá* does not change anything, either in the transitivity properties of the verb or in the semantic roles assigned to its arguments.

#### 5. Transitivity alternations in which P is assigned a semantic role identical or partially identical to that of S

A transitivity alternation is a type of relation between the semantic roles assigned to A, P and S in a transitive construction and an intransitive construction of the same verbal lexeme. The absence of any morphological element that could be analyzed as encoding either transitivity or detransitivity is essential in this notion.

### 5.1. The passive alternation

In the passive alternation, already presented in section 2.3, the intransitive construction implies a participant that could be encoded as the term A of a transitive construction in which P is assigned the same role as S.

Ex. (24) to (26) provide additional illustrations of this alternation. Note that, in ex. (...), the alternation triggers the use of a different predicative marker. However, it would not be correct to analyze the use of *-ra/la/na* as passive marking, since this change in the predicative marker is the mere consequence of the complementary distribution between the two predicative markers expressing ‘perfective, positive’, *yé* (used exclusively in transitive constructions) and *-ra/la/na* (used exclusively in intransitive constructions).

(24) a. *músa b'é b'ála f'ó b'ì*  
 Moussa IPF.POS xylophone.DEF play today  
 ‘Moussa will play the xylophone today’

b. *b'ála b'é f'ó b'ì*  
 xylophone.DEF IPF.POS play today  
 ‘The xylophone will be played today’

(25) a. *dén yé jí mìn*  
 child.DEF PF.POS water.DEF drink  
 ‘The child drank water’

b. *jí mìn-na*  
 water.DEF drink-PF.POS  
 ‘The water has been drunk’

(26) a. *séku má jíri tìgɛ*  
 Sékou PF.NEG tree.DEF cut  
 ‘Sékou did not cut the tree’

b. *jíri má tìgɛ*  
 tree.DEF PF.NEG cut  
 ‘The tree has not been cut’

An important property of intransitive constructions participating in the passive alternation is that, in spite of the absence of any passive morphology, they can include an oblique with a semantic role identical to that of the term A of the transitive construction – ex. (27).

(27) a. *b'ála b'é f'ó músa f'è b'ì*  
 xylophone.DEF IPF.POS play Moussa POSTP today  
 ‘The xylophone will be played by Moussa today’

b. *jí mìn-na dén fè*  
 water.DEF drink-PF.POS child.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The water has been drunk by the child’

c. *jíri má tìgè séku fè*  
 tree.DEF PF.NEG cut Sékou POSTP  
 ‘The tree has not been cut by Sékou’

Note that the passive alternation is totally productive with transitive constructions produced by causative derivation, giving rise to intransitive constructions in which the presence of the causative marker triggers a passive reading, as in ex. (28).

(28) a. *cè sábalí-la*  
 man.DEF calm-PF.POS  
 ‘The man calmed down’

b. *mùso yé cè lá-sabali*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS man.DEF CAUS-calm  
 ‘The woman calmed the man’

c. *cè lá-sabali-la (mùso fè)*  
 man.DEF CAUS-calm-PF.POS woman.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The man was calmed (by the woman)’

With many verbs occurring in a transitive construction, passive alternation is the only possible transitivity alternation. In other words, the intransitive use of these verbs always implies a participant that can be encoded in the same construction as an oblique with the postposition *fè*, and would be treated as the term A of the corresponding transitive construction. This is for example the case of *dún* ‘eat’, *tóbi* ‘cook’, *wéle* ‘call’, *tà* ‘take’, etc.

But there are also many cases of intransitive constructions whose correspondence with the transitive construction(s) of the same verb lends itself to several interpretations. As explicitly stated by Vydrine (Vydrine 1994:75-82), Bambara has very few restrictions on the possibility to convert transitive constructions into intransitive constructions with a passive reading,<sup>11</sup> and in the following sections we will see examples of verbs having both intransitive constructions participating in various other types of transitivity alternations and an intransitive construction analyzable as passive.

## 5.2. The causative alternation

The causative alternation can be illustrated by the verb *tòli* ‘rot’ – ex. (29). Much in the same way as its English equivalent, this verb occurs both in an intransitive construction denoting the process of becoming rotten without implying the intervention of an external cause, and a transitive construction in which the referent of P is characterized as undergoing

<sup>11</sup> The only general restriction noted by Vydrine concerns transitive constructions in which P represents a body part through which the referent of A achieves a motion, as in *à y’á sèn npàana* ‘(S)he spread his/her legs’.

the same process as the referent of S in the intransitive construction, but under the influence of an external cause encoded as the term A of the transitive construction. The same relation holds between the two constructions of *sìmi* ‘coagulate’ illustrated by ex. (30).

(29) a. *jéǵe tòli-la*  
 fish.DEF rot-PF.POS  
 ‘The fish rotted’

b. *fùnteni yé jéǵe tòli*  
 heat.DEF PF.POS fish.DEF rot  
 ‘The heat rotted the fish’

(30) a. *jòli béna sìmi jóona*  
 blood.DEF FUT.POS coagulate soon  
 ‘The blood will coagulate soon’

b. *fínye béna jòli sìmi jóona*  
 wind.DEF FUT.POS blood.DEF coagulate soon  
 ‘The wind will coagulate the blood soon’

This alternation is very productive: *fà* ‘fill up’, *fún* ‘go mouldy’, *jà* ‘dry’, *jòrò* ‘worry’, *kónonafili* ‘be abashed’, *nyígin* ‘get wet’, *sègin* ‘return’ etc.

*fà* ‘fill up’ illustrates the case of a verb having an unmarked causative construction with two possible choices (in terms of semantic roles) for the participant encoded as A – ex. (31). Note that, if A represents an agent (and only in this case), a causative construction marked by the preverb *lá* is also possible.

(31) a. *dàga fá-ra*  
 pot.DEF fill-PF.POS  
 ‘The pot filled up’

b. *jí yé dàga fá*  
 water.DEF PF.POS pot.DEF fill  
 ‘The water filled the pot’

c. *mùso yé dàga fá (jí lá)*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS pot.DEF fill water.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The woman filled the pot (with water)’

d. *mùso yé dàga lá-fa (jí lá)*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS pot.DEF CAUS-fill water.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (c)

### 5.3. Causative alternation and causative derivation

Causative alternation and causative derivation imply the same kind of semantic relation between intransitive and transitive constructions. Both mechanisms are productive, and with many verbs used intransitively to denote a one-participant process conceived as involving no external cause, there seems to be no difference in meaning between transitive constructions with or without the causative marker *lá*. This is in particular the case with *kúnun* ‘wake up’, whose causative derivation has already been illustrated above.

- (32) a. *cè kúnu-na*  
 man.DEF wake-PF.POS  
 ‘The man woke up’
- b. *kása dúman yé cè (lá-)kúnu*  
 smell pleasant.DEF PF.POS man.DEF (CAUS-)wake  
 ‘The pleasant smell woke up the man’

*Vydrine 1994:82-88* notes that there are variations in the judgments of Bambara speakers about the combinability of the preverb *lá* with individual verbs, and *Dumestre 2003:180* observes that verbs usually considered as strictly intransitive verbs that require the addition of *lá* to be causativized may be sporadically attested in unmarked causative constructions. He cites *táa* ‘go’, *síran* ‘be afraid’, and *sé* ‘arrive, reach’.

However, in many cases, the use of the preverb *lá* is not only a matter of norm, since the unmarked causative construction and the construction involving the causative marker *lá* imply different kinds of causation. An illustration has already been given at the end of section 5.2 – ex. (30).

When both solutions are available with different semantic implications, causative alternation typically implies direct causation and/or a relatively low degree of agentivity of the causer, whereas causative derivation tends to be preferred to express indirect causation and/or a relatively high degree of agentivity of the causer. A consequence of this general principle is that, very often, the choice between causative alternation and causative derivation is correlated with variations in the animacy of the protagonists – ex (33) to (36).

- (33) a. *sò bé bòli*  
 horse.DEF IPF.POS run  
 ‘The horse is running’
- b. *cè bé sò bòli*  
 man.DEF IPF.POS horse.DEF run  
 ‘The man is riding the horse’
- c. *cè bé sò lá-boli*  
 man.DEF IPF.POS horse.DEF CAUS-run  
 ‘The man is making the horse run’

- (34) a. *cè bó-ra bón kónɔ*  
 man.DEF go/come out-PF.POS room.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The man went/came out from the room’
- b. *mùso yé jí bó kòlon ná*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS water.DEF go/come out well.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The woman took water from the well’
- c. *kóniya yé bilisi lá-bɔ ségu*  
 hatred.DEF PF.POS Bilisi CAUS-go/come out Ségou  
 ‘Hatred was the cause of Bilisi’s departure from Ségou’
- (35) a. *sánji bé nà*  
 rain.DEF IPF.POS come  
 ‘It is raining’ (lit. ‘The rain is coming’)
- b. *fíyɛn bé sánji nà*  
 wind.DEF IPF.POS rain.DEF come  
 ‘The wind brings rain’
- c. *màa sí té sé kà sánji lá-na*  
 person no IPF.NEG be able INF rain.DEF CAUS-come  
 ‘Nobody can make the rain come’
- (36) a. *dímɔgɔ sìgi-ra à bólo lá*  
 fly.DEF settle-PF.POS 3S arm.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The fly settled on his arm’
- b. *mùso yé bárama sìgi tá kàn*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS cooking-pot.DEF settle fire.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The woman put the cooking-pot on the fire’
- c. *cè yé dén lá-sigi sò kàn*  
 man.DEF PF.POS child.DEF CAUS-settle horse.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The man made the child sit on the horse’

This hypothesis regarding a possible difference in meaning between causative alternation and causative derivation explains also the case of verbs whose unmarked causative construction corresponds to some of the possible meanings of the intransitive construction only, and whose intransitive construction has other meanings that can be causativized by means of causative derivation only. For example *sà* can be used intransitively with the two meanings ‘die (person, animal)’ and ‘die out (fire, light)’, and can be used transitively with the meaning ‘put out (fire, light)’, but cannot be used transitively with the meaning ‘kill’ or ‘make die’: ‘kill’ is expressed by a different verb (*fàa*), and ‘make die’ (indirect causation) by the derived causative verb *lá-sa*.



b. *dími bé kún séku lá*  
 pain.DEF IPF.POS fit Sékou POSTP  
 ‘Sékou endures pain’

c. *séku bé dími kún*  
 Sékou IPF.POS pain.DEF fit  
 same meaning as (b)

There seems to be no other verb with exactly the same possibility of alternation (i.e., with the possibility to treat an experiencer, either as an oblique argument in an intransitive construction, or as the term A of a transitive construction).

### 5.6. *bì má* ... ‘long ago’

In Bambara, it is possible to express that an event normally encoded by means of an intransitive construction occurred long ago by using a transitive construction in which:

- (a) *bì* ‘today’ fulfills the A role,
- (b) the predicative marker is *má* ‘perfective negative’, and
- (c) P represents the participant encoded as S in the intransitive construction.

In ex. (39), sentences (a) and (b) are canonical intransitive constructions with *bì* ‘today’ in oblique role (either in the canonical position of obliques, or fronted), and sentence (c) illustrates this atypical use of *bì* ‘today’ as the term A of a transitive construction, whose literal meaning is therefore something like ‘Today is not involved in Sékou’s coming’.

- (39) a. *séku má nà bì*  
 Sékou PF.NEG come today  
 S pr V X  
 ‘Sékou did not come today’
- b. *bì séku má nà*  
 today Sékou PF.NEG come  
 X S pr V  
 ‘Today Sékou did not come’
- c. *bì má séku nà*  
 today PF.NEG Sékou come  
 A pr P V  
 ‘Sékou came long ago’

This construction is very strange from the point of view of the syntax of European languages, but it is consistent with the fact that, more generally, the temporal and locative adverbs of Bambara can fulfill core syntactic roles much more freely than their equivalents in European languages.

## 6. Transitivity alternations in which the same semantic role is assigned to A in the transitive construction and to S in the intransitive construction

### 6.1. The delimitative alternation

The intransitive and the transitive construction involved in the delimitative alternation represent the same one-participant event; the unique participant is encoded as S / A, and P encodes the temporal or spatial delimitation of the event. This alternation is particularly common with movement verbs – ex. (40) & (41), but is not restricted to them.

(40) a. *à táama-na*

3S walk-PF.POS

‘He walked’

b. *à yé tile sàba táama*

3S PF.POS day three walk

‘He walked three days’

(41) a. *à yáala-la súgu lá*

3S wander-PF.POS market.DEF POSTP

‘He wandered through the market’

b. *à yé súgu yáala*

3S PF.POS market.DEF wander

same meaning as (a)

c. *à yé tile béε yáala súgu lá*

3S PF.POS day.DEF whole wander market.DEF POSTP

‘He spent the whole day wandering through the market’

The use of *ké* with the meaning ‘spend a period of time in a place’ can be viewed as a case of delimitative alternation. This verb is currently glossed as ‘do’, ‘make’, but occurs in various constructions requiring other English translations: ‘become’, ‘transform’, ‘put’. In particular, *ké* can occur in an intransitive construction in which it supplies the incompatibility of the copula with predicative markers. As illustrated by ex. (42) this construction, in which *ké* expresses ‘be in a place’, can be related to its use with the meaning ‘spend a period of time in a place’ by delimitative alternation.

(42) a. *séku bé kíta*

Sékou COP Kita

‘Sékou is in Kita’

b. *séku má ké kíta*

Sékou PF.NEG be Kita

‘Sékou has not been in Kita’

- c. *séku má tile sàba ké kita*  
 Sékou PF.NEG day three be Kita  
 ‘Sékou has not spent three days in Kita’

Ex. (43) shows that a verb participating in this alternation (sentence (c)) can also have a transitive construction of the unmarked causative type (sentences (d-e)).

- (43) a. *kòno pán-na*  
 bird.DEF jump-pf.POS  
 ‘The bird flew away’
- b. *cè pán-na*  
 man.DEF jump-pf.POS  
 ‘The man jumped’
- c. *à yé dúkene pán*  
 2S PF.POS yard.DEF jump  
 ‘He flew through the yard’
- d. *í kàna kòno pán*  
 2S PROHIB bird.DEF jump  
 ‘Don’t make the bird fly away’
- e. *síran yé cè pán*  
 fear.DEF PF.POS man.DEF jump  
 ‘Fear made the man jump’

Note also that transitive constructions in which P expresses the spatial or temporal delimitation of the event can be passivized in the same way as transitive constructions encoding two-participant events – ex (44).

- (44) a. *cè bòli-la*  
 man.DEF run-pf.POS  
 ‘The man ran’
- b. *cè yé métere tán dóròn bòli*  
 man.DEF PF.POS meter ten only run  
 ‘The man ran only ten meters’
- c. *métere tán dóròn bòli-la cè fè*  
 meter ten only run- PF.POS man.DEF POSTP  
 lit. ‘Ten meters only were run by the man’

## 6.2. The resultative alternation

The verbs concerned by resultative alternation represent events resulting in the creation of a new entity, encoded by the term P of the transitive construction; in the corresponding intransitive construction, the entity created by the event is either encoded as an oblique, or not mentioned – ex. (45) & (46). In ex. (45), sentence (c) shows that transitive constructions lending themselves to this characterization can be passivized in the same way as transitive constructions encoding two-participant events.

- (45) a. *mùsokərɔnin bé ɲunuɲunu*  
 old woman.DEF IPF.POS mumble  
 ‘The old woman is mumbling’
- b. *mùsokərɔnin bé kílisi-w ɲunuɲunu*  
 old woman.DEF IPF.POS incantation-PL mumble  
 ‘The old woman is mumbling incantations’
- c. *kílisi-w bé ɲunuɲunu mùsokərɔnin fè`*  
 incantation-PL IPF.POS mumble old woman.DEF POSTP  
 ‘Incantations are being mumbled by the old woman’
- (46) a. *mùso wólo-la dénke lá*  
 man.DEF give birth-PF.POS son.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The woman gave birth to a son’
- b. *mùso yé dénke wólo*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS son.DEF give birth  
 same meaning as (a)

The preceding examples show that this alternation is typically found with emission verbs. It is however possible with verbs of other semantic types, as illustrated by ex. (47).

- (47) a. *à bàga-ra à siginyɔɔɔn mà*  
 3S attack-PF.POS 3S neighbor.DEF POSTP  
 ‘He attacked his neighbor’
- b. *à yé kèlɛ bàga à siginyɔɔɔn mà*  
 3S PF.POS fight.DEF attack 3S neighbor.DEF POSTP  
 ‘He started a fight with his neighbor’

## 6.3. The applicative alternation

In the applicative alternation, A in the transitive construction represents the same participant as S in the intransitive construction, and P represents a second participant which is not treated as a core term in the corresponding intransitive construction. Two varieties of this

alternation can be distinguished according to the possibility to treat this participant as an oblique argument in the intransitive construction.

6.3.1. In the *first type of applicative alternation*, the participant encoded as the term P of the transitive construction is not mentioned in the intransitive construction. This can be illustrated by *báara* ‘work’, used transitively with the meaning ‘work a material’, ‘treat’, and by extension ‘cast a spell on someone’ – ex. (48).

- (48) a. *mùso báara-la*  
 woman.DEF work-PF.POS  
 ‘The woman worked’
- b. *nùmu-w tòn bé bèlè báara*  
 blacksmith.DEF-PL PAST IPF.POS ore.DEF work  
 ‘The blacksmiths used to work ore’
- c. *dòkòtòrò yé jólida báara*  
 doctor.DEF PF.POS wound.DEF work  
 ‘The doctor treated the wound’
- d. *sóma yé mùso báara*  
 witch doctor.DEF PF.POS woman.DEF work  
 ‘The witch doctor cast a spell on the woman’

Here again, the passive alternation results in a potential ambiguity of the intransitive construction of such verbs. For example, sentence (48a) can be interpreted not only as ‘The woman worked’, but also as ‘A spell has been cast on the woman’ (lit. ‘The woman has been worked on’).

Ex. (49) provides another illustration of the possibility to passivize transitive constructions involved in applicative alternation.

- (49) a. *mùso m̀nyu-na*  
 woman.DEF be patient-PF.POS  
 ‘The woman was patient’
- b. *mùso yé tóoròya ní s̀gen m̀nyu*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS pain.DEF with tiredness.DEF endure  
 ‘The women endured pains and tiredness with patience’
- c. *tóoròya ní s̀gen m̀nyu-na mùso f̀*  
 pain.DEF with tiredness.DEF endure-PF.POS woman.DEF POSTP  
 ‘Pains and tiredness were endured by the woman with patience’

Ex. (50) illustrates the possibility of a double reading of the transitive construction of verbs that can be involved both in applicative alternation (sentence (b)) and in causative alternation (sentence (c)).<sup>13</sup>

- (50) a. *án tìgɛ-ra kúrun ná*  
 1P cross-PF.POS boat.DEF POSTP  
 ‘We crossed by boat’
- b. *án yé bá tìgɛ kúrun ná*  
 1P PF.POS river.DEF cross boat.DEF POSTP  
 ‘We crossed the river by boat’
- c. *ù y’ án tìgɛ kúrun ná*  
 3P PF.POS 1P cross boat.DEF POSTP  
 ‘They made us cross by boat’

Example (51) illustrates the case of a verb (*wàsa*) with a transitive construction in which it can be glossed as ‘satisfy’, ‘be sufficient for someone’ (sentence (a)), and two intransitive constructions. One of these two constructions (in which *wàsa* can be glossed as ‘be satisfied (with something)’, as in sentence (b)) is related to the transitive construction by causative alternation, whereas the other one (in which *wàsa* can be glossed as ‘be sufficient’, as in sentence (c)) is related to the transitive construction by the first variant of the applicative alternation.

- (51) a. *wári yé cèkòròba wàsa*  
 money.DEF PF.POS old man.DEF satisfy  
 ‘The money was enough for the old man’
- b. *cèkòròba wàsa-ra (wári lá)*  
 old man.DEF be satisfied-PF.POS money.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The old man was satisfied (with the money)’
- c. *wári wàsa-ra*  
 money.DEF be enough-pf.POS  
 ‘The money was sufficient’

Ex. (52) illustrates the possibility for the same verb to have a transitive construction participating in the first variant of the applicative alternation (sentence (b)), and another one participating in the delimitative alternation (sentence (c)).

- (52) a. *npògotigi kàsi-ra*  
 girl.DEF cry-PF.POS  
 ‘The girl cried’

<sup>13</sup> The verb *tìgɛ* has already been encountered in section 5.1 with the meaning ‘cut’, but in this meaning, it does not participate in applicative alternation, and can be used intransitively with a passive reading only.

b. *npògotigi ye cè sù kàsi*  
 girl.DEF PF.POS man.DEF corpse.DEF cry  
 ‘The girl cried on the corpse of the man’

b. *npògotigi yé sú béé kàsi*  
 girl.DEF PF.POS night.DEF whole cry  
 ‘The girl spent the whole night crying’

6.3.2. In the *second type of applicative alternation*, illustrated by ex. (53) to (56), the term P of the transitive construction corresponds to an oblique argument in the intransitive construction.

(53) a. *mùso mànyuma-na fàantan ná*  
 woman.DEF pity-PF.POS poor man.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The woman pitied the poor man’

b. *mùso yé fàantan mànyuma*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS poor man.DEF pity  
 same meaning as (a)

(54) a. *í bé míri mùn dè lá?*  
 2S IPF.POS think what? FOC POSTP  
 ‘What are you thinking about?’

b. *í bé mùn dè míri?*  
 2S IPF.POS what? FOC think  
 same meaning as (a)

(55) a. *ń té yàfa kúma ìn ná*  
 1S IPF.NEG forgive word.DEF DEM POSTP  
 ‘I will not forgive these words’

b. *ń té kúma ìn yàfa*  
 1S IPF.NEG word.DEF DEM forgive  
 same meaning as (a)

(56) a. *à béna bán dúmuni ná*  
 3S FUT.POS finish food.DEF POSTP  
 ‘He will finish the food’

b. *à béna dúmuni bán*  
 3S FUT.POS food.DEF finish  
 same meaning as (a)

Contrary to *dún* ‘eat’, whose intransitive construction can only have a passive reading (see section 2.3), *mìn* ‘drink’ can be used intransitively with the drinker in S role, and an oblique argument representing the same participant as P in the transitive construction – ex. (57).

- (57) a. *cè yé jí mìn*  
 man.DEF PF.POS water.DEF drink  
 ‘The man drank water’
- b. *cè mìn-na jí lá*  
 man.DEF drink-PF.POS water.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

#### 6.4. The reciprocal alternation

In Bambara, the use of the reciprocal pronoun *nyógon* is the productive way to express reciprocity – see section 9. However, with a limited number of verbs among those representing naturally reciprocal events, an intransitive construction with S representing a plurality of individuals implies reciprocity, and this construction alternates with a transitive construction implying a more or less marked asymmetry between the referents of the two core terms – ex. (57).

- (57) a. *wùlu ní jàkuma kèlè-la*  
 dog.DEF with cat.DEF fight-PF.POS  
 ‘The dog and the cat fought’
- b. *wùlu yé jàkuma kèlè*  
 dog.DEF PF.POS cat.DEF fight  
 ‘The dog attacked the cat’

### 7. Alternations between transitive constructions

#### 7.1. Delimitative alternation involving two transitive constructions

In section 6.1, we have examined the case of transitive constructions in which P encodes a spatial or temporal delimitation of the event alternating with intransitive constructions. It is also possible that a transitive construction in which P has a delimitative function alternates with another transitive construction in which P represents a participant. This is much less common, but *kònò ~ màkònò* ‘wait’ provides an illustration of this possibility – ex. (58).

- (58) a. *ù bé sánji kònò*  
 3P IPF.POS rain.DEF wait  
 ‘They are waiting for the rain’
- b. *ù yé kálo fila kònò*  
 3P PF.POS month two wait  
 ‘They waited two months’

## 7.2. Applicative alternation involving two transitive constructions

The verbs examined in this section have two transitive constructions with the same participant encoded as A, and two possible choices for the participant encoded as P.

In Bambara, the verbs expressing ‘put some substance in contact with a surface or within a container’ have a transitive construction in which the substance manipulated is encoded as P, and the surface or container is encoded as an oblique marked with the same postposition as in a non verbal predication expressing ‘X is on/in Y’ – ex. (59) & (60).

(59) a. *nyò*      *bé*    *dèbɛ*    *kàn*  
 millet.DEF    COP    mat.DEF    POSTP  
 ‘The millet is on the mat’

b. *mùso*      *yé*      *nyò*      *fɛnsɛn*    *dèbɛ*    *kàn*  
 woman.DEF    PF.POS    millet.DEF    spread    mat.DEF    POSTP  
 ‘The woman spread the millet on the mat’

(60) a. *jí*      *bé*    *dàga*    *lá*  
 water.DEF    COP    pot.DEF    POSTP  
 ‘The water is in the pot’

b. *mùso*      *yé*      *jí*      *ké*    *dàga*    *lá*  
 woman.DEF    PF.POS    water.DEF    put    pot.DEF    POSTP  
 ‘The woman put the water into the pot’

But with some of these verbs, another construction is possible, in which the surface or container is encoded as P, and the substance covering or filling it is encoded as an oblique marked by the postposition *lá* in free variation with *ní ... yé*, which is typical of instrumental adjuncts – ex. (61) to (63).

(61) a. *mùso*      *yé*      *tìga*      *sósò*    *bòrɛ*    *kónɔ*  
 woman.DEF    PF.POS    groundnut.DEF    cram    bag.DEF    POSTP  
 ‘The woman crammed the groundnuts into the bag’

b. *mùso*      *yé*      *bòrɛ*    *sósò*    *tìga*      *lá*      (~ *ní tìga yé*)  
 woman.DEF    PF.POS    bag.DEF    cram    groundnut.DEF    POSTP  
 ‘The woman crammed the bag with groundnuts’

(62) a. *à yé*      *bògɔ*    *bàri*    *filantɛrɛ*    *lá*  
 3S PF.POS    mud.DEF    smear    window.DEF    POSTP  
 ‘He smeared mud onto the window’

b. *à yé*      *filantɛrɛ*    *bàri*    *bògɔ*    *lá*      (~ *ní bògɔ yé*)  
 3S PF.POS    window.DEF    smear    mud.DEF    POSTP  
 ‘He smeared the window with mud’

(63) a. *à b'é túlu mù à bólo lá*  
 3S IPF.POS oil.DEF smear 3S arm.DEF POSTP  
 'She smeared oil onto her arm'

b. *à b' à bólo mù túlu lá* (~ *ní túlu yé*)  
 3S IPF.POS 3S arm.DEF smear oil.DEF POSTP  
 'She smeared her arm with oil'

Ex. (64) shows that such verbs have passive constructions corresponding to each of their transitive constructions.

(64) a. *à bólo mù-na túlu lá*  
 3S arm.DEF smear-PF.POS oil.DEF POSTP  
 'Her arm was smeared with oil'

b. *túlu mù-na à bólo lá*  
 oil.DEF smear-PF.POS 3S arm.DEF POSTP  
 'Oil was smeared onto her arm'

When this alternation is possible, the choice between the two constructions has semantic implications of the type already described for other languages in which a similar alternation has been found. For example, (61a) suggests that the groundnuts have all been put into the bag, but the bag has not necessarily been filled up, whereas (61b) suggests that the bag has been filled up, and leaves open the possibility that perhaps some of the groundnuts did not fit in it.

A similar alternation is attested with verbs that do not lend themselves to the same semantic characterization. For example, *bón* and *fili* can equally be used with the meaning 'throw' in a construction already presented in section 3.3, in which the target is encoded as an oblique marked by the postposition *mà*, which is consistent with the meaning of direction carried by *mà*. They differ in that *bón* has an alternative construction in which the target is encoded as P. Here again, in this alternative construction, the use of the postposition *lá* in free variation with *ní...yé* is consistent with the instrumental value of this postposition.

(65) a. *à yé kábakuru bón fàtòkè mà*  
 3S PF.POS stone.DEF throw madman.DEF POSTP  
 'He threw a stone to the madman'

b. *à yé fàtòkè bón kábakuru lá* (~ *ní kábakuru yé*)  
 3S PF.POS madman.DEF throw stone.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

*sàma* 'bring as a gift' shows exactly the same alternation, and therefore has a construction identical to that of *dí* 'give something to someone' alternating with a construction identical to that of *són* 'present someone with something' – see 3.2.

- (66) a. *séku yé dùlòki sàma à dógòkε mà*  
 Sékou PF.POS shirt.DEF bring as a gift 3S younger brother.DEF POSTP  
 ‘Sékou brought a shirt as a gift to his younger brother’
- b. *séku y’ à dógòkε sàma dùlòki lá*  
 Sékou PF.POS 3S younger brother.DEF bring as a gift shirt.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

*nyininka* ‘ask about something’ and *déli* ‘ask for something’ also have alternations of the same type, but in which the postposition *mà* is not involved.

- (67) a. *ń bé kó dó nyininka í lá*  
 1S IPF.POS problem.DEF some ask 2S POSTP  
 ‘I am going to ask you about some problem’
- b. *ń b’ í nyininka kó dó lá*  
 1S IPF.POS 2S ask problem.DEF some POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

- (68) a. *à yé ń déli wári lá*  
 3S PF.POS 1S ask money.DEF POSTP  
 ‘He asked me for money’
- b. *à yé wári déli ń fè/ná*  
 3S PF.POS money.DEF ask 1S POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

*sàra* ‘pay’ has the particularity to represent an event conceived as involving four participants, with constructions in which A is invariably the payer, but P can be any of the three other participants.

- (69) a. *án té wári sàra í yé í ká bàtutamoriya lá*  
 1P IPF.NEG money.DEF pay 2S POSTP 2S GEN charlatanism.DEF POSTP  
 ‘We are not going to give you money for your charlatanism’
- b. *án t’ í sàra wári lá í ká bàtutamoriya lá<sup>14</sup>*  
 1P IPF.NEG 2S pay money.DEF POSTP 2S GEN charlatanism.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)
- c. *án t’ í ká bàtutamoriya sàra wári lá*  
 1P IPF.NEG 2S GEN charlatanism.DEF pay money.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

<sup>14</sup> In this sentence as well as in sentence (c), *wári lá* can be replaced by *ní wári yé*.

### 7.3. Causative alternations involving two transitive constructions

#### 7.3.1. Causative alternation with the causee encoded as *P*, and demotion of *P* to oblique

In the alternation illustrated by ex. (70) to (73), the term *A* in one of the two constructions can be viewed as a causer added to two-participant event. The introduction of the causer in *A* role triggers the demotion of the causee to *P*, and the participant encoded as *P* in the non-causative construction is demoted to oblique. In ex. (70), sentence (c) shows that the causee can be converted into the term *S* of an intransitive construction with a passive reading.

(70) a. *ń yé sènɛ dège*  
 1S PF.POS cultivating.DEF learn  
 ‘I learned to cultivate’

b. *ń fà yé ń dège sènɛ lá*  
 1S father PF.POS 1S teach cultivating.DEF POSTP  
 ‘My father taught me to cultivate’

c. *ń dège-ra sènɛ lá*  
 1S teach-PF.POS cultivating.DEF POSTP  
 ‘I was taught to cultivate’

(71) a. *ń dénke yé túbabu-kan kàlan*  
 1S son.DEF PF.POS European-language.DEF learn  
 ‘My son has learned French’

b. *ń yé ń dénke kàlan túbabu-kan ná*  
 1S PF.POS 1S son.DEF teach European-language.DEF POSTP  
 ‘I have taught French to my son’

(72) a. *mùso yé dònɪ nyún*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS load.DEF charge  
 ‘The woman charged the load on her head’

b. *ù yé mùso nyún dònɪ lá*  
 3P PF.POS woman.DEF charge load.DEF POSTP  
 ‘They helped the woman to charge the load on her head’

In the particular case of *jigin* – ex. (73), used intransitively with the meaning ‘go/come down’, a double causative relation can be recognized: between sentences (a) and (b) in the one hand, and between sentences (b) and (c) on the other hand.

(73) a. *à jigin-na*  
 3S go/come down-PF.POS  
 ‘He/she/it went/came down’

b. *mùso yé fílen jigin*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS calabash.DEF put down  
 ‘The woman put the calabash down’

c. *ù yé mùso jigin fílen ná*  
 3P PF.POS woman.DEF put down calabash.DEF POSTP  
 ‘They helped the woman to put the calabash down’

According to Vydrine, some of the verbs having this type of causative alternation are also attested with the causative construction described in the following section. However, this possibility seems to be rather marginal.

7.3.2. *Causative alternation with the causee encoded as an oblique*

In the variant of the causative alternation illustrated by ex. (74) to (77), the argument fulfilling the P role in the non-causative construction is maintained with the same role, and the causee is demoted to oblique.

(74) a. *séku yé músa dénmuso fúru*  
 Sékou PF.POS Moussa daughter.DEF marry  
 ‘Sékou married Moussa’s daughter’

b. *músa y’ à dénmuso fúru séku mà*  
 Moussa PF.POS 3S daughter.DEF marry Sékou POSTP  
 ‘Moussa married his daughter to Sékou’

(75) a. *séku yé mùru sínga*  
 Sékou PF.POS knife.DEF borrow  
 ‘Sékou borrowed a knife’

b. *í yé mùru sínga séku mà*  
 1S PF.POS knife.DEF lend Sékou POSTP  
 ‘I lent Sékou a knife’

(76) a. *séku yé dórɔme kɛme dónɔ*  
 Sékou PF.POS 5 francs hundred borrow  
 ‘Sékou borrowed 500 Malian francs’<sup>15</sup>

b. *í yé dórɔme kɛme dónɔ séku mà*  
 1S PF.POS 5 francs hundred lend Sékou POSTP  
 ‘I lent Sékou 500 Malian francs’

<sup>15</sup> The difference between *sínga* and *dónɔ* is that *sínga* implies that the thing borrowed will itself be returned, whereas *dónɔ* (typically used for money) means that the equivalent of the thing borrowed will be returned.

- (77) a. *séku yé mángoro sà̀n*  
 Sékou PF.POS mango.DEF buy  
 ‘Sékou bought a mango’
- b. *mùsu yé mángoro sà̀n séku mà*<sup>16</sup>  
 woman.DEF PF.POS mango.DEF sell Sékou POSTP  
 ‘The woman sold a mango to Sékou’

With verbs having this alternation, the causative reading is possible only if an oblique marked by the postposition *mà* is present. In the absence of such an oblique, the participant encoded as the term A of the causative construction can only be represented by an oblique marked by the postposition *fè̀*, whose basic meaning is proximity – ex. (78).

- (78) a. *séku yé mùru sínga ní fè̀*  
 Sékou PF.POS knife.DEF borrow 1S POSTP  
 ‘Sékou borrowed a knife from me’
- b. *séku yé mángoro sà̀n mùso fè̀*  
 Sékou PF.POS mango.DEF buy woman.DEF POSTP  
 ‘Sékou bought a mango from the woman’

## 8. The reflexive construction

### 8.1. The intensifier *yè̀rè* and its use as a reflexive marker

In Bambara, the productive way to express reflexivity proper, whatever syntactic roles are implied in the reflexive relation, consists in using the intensifier marker *yè̀rè* added to pronouns. Ex. (79) illustrates the use of the intensifier marker in non-reflexive contexts, and ex. (80) illustrates its reflexive use.

- (79) a. *séku yè̀rè nà-na*  
 Sékou INTENS come-PF.POS  
 ‘Sékou came himself’
- b. *án yé séku yè̀rè wéle*  
 1P PF.POS Sékou INTENS call  
 ‘We called Sékou himself’
- c. *ń yé wári dí séku yè̀rè mà*  
 1S PF.POS money.DEF give Sékou INTENS POSTP  
 ‘I gave the money to Sékou himself’

<sup>16</sup> Note that this construction of the verb *sà̀n* is not possible for all speakers. In some varieties of Bambara, ‘sell’ can be expressed only by means of the verb *fè̀ere*, whose construction is identical to that of *dí* ‘give’. Conversely, in some varieties of Bambara, *fè̀ere* has the same duality of construction as *sà̀n*.

- (80) a. *í yé mángoro sà̀n í yè̀ɛ dè yé wá?*  
 2S PF.POS word.DEF buy 2S INTENS FOC POSTP INTER  
 ‘Did you buy the mango for yourself?’
- b. *ń yé ń yè̀ɛ sɔ̀n kúma lá*  
 1S PF.POS 1S INTENS give word.DEF POSTP  
 ‘I allowed myself to speak’
- c. *séku y’ à yè̀ɛ dén wéle*  
 Sékou PF.POS 3S INTENS child.DEF call  
 ‘Sékou called his own child’

In the third person singular, if *à yè̀ɛ* in reflexive function fulfills the P role in a transitive construction, it is interchangeable with *í yè̀ɛ* (*í* is the reflexive pronoun presented in the following section). In other syntactic roles, the replacement of *à yè̀ɛ* in reflexive function by *í yè̀ɛ* is not totally impossible, but *à yè̀ɛ* is strongly preferred.

## 8.2. The reflexive pronoun

Alongside with the reflexive use of personal pronouns combined with the intensifier marker *yè̀ɛ*, Bambara has a reflexive pronoun whose syntactic distribution is practically restricted to P role.<sup>17</sup>

The reflexive pronoun is identifiable as such from its (limited) ability to express co-reference of the term P of otherwise prototypical transitive constructions with the term A, but it has functions other than the expression of reflexivity proper. Ex. (81) illustrates the use of this pronoun to encode prototypical reflexive situations, whereas ex. (82) illustrates its use with verbs that cannot be used transitively with anything else than the reflexive pronoun in P role.

- (81) a. *séku y’ ò nórɔ̀kɔ̀ bɔ̀gɔ̀ lá*  
 Sékou PF.POS DEM soil mud.DEF POSTP  
 ‘Sékou soiled this with mud’
- b. *séku y’ í nórɔ̀kɔ̀ bɔ̀gɔ̀ lá*  
 Sékou PF.POS REFL soil mud.DEF POSTP  
 ‘Sékou soiled himself with mud’
- (82) a. *séku y’ í sínɔ̀ɛ*  
 Sékou PF.POS REFL swear  
 ‘Sékou swore an oath’
- b. \**séku y’ ò sínɔ̀ɛ*  
 Sékou PF.POS DEM swear

<sup>17</sup> The reflexive pronoun is also marginally used in the role of genitive dependent of nouns in P role – *Vydrine 1994:36-40*.

In such uses, the main evidence that *í* still remains a pronoun is that, in the perfective positive, its presence triggers the use of the predicative marker *yé*, whose use is restricted to transitive constructions. If for example *í sínɲɛ* in ex. (82) were to be analyzed globally as an intransitive verb, ‘perfective positive’ should be expressed by *-ra* suffixed to the verb, and not by *yé*. The only possible justification of the use of *yé* is that, whatever its referential status, syntactically, *í* fulfills the P role.

As shown by the following chart, the reflexive pronoun is distinct from ordinary personal pronouns in the third person singular only,<sup>18</sup> and the 3rd person singular reflexive pronoun is homonymous with the second person singular pronoun.

	personal pronoun	reflexive pronoun
1S	ń	ń
2S	í	í
3S	à	í
1P	án	án
2P	á	á
3P	ù	ù

In some varieties of Bambara, the specific form *í* of the reflexive pronoun in the third person singular is in free variation with *à*, or even totally ignored. However, this does not affect the system in the sense that, in varieties of Bambara that have no specific form for the reflexive pronoun at all, the verbs that can combine with reflexive *í* in Standard Bambara combine with personal pronouns interpreted in the same way as the reflexive pronoun in Standard Bambara. For example, *í sínɲɛ* ‘swear’, with an obligatory reflexive pronoun that cannot be substituted by anything else, becomes *à sínɲɛ*, with a dummy third person pronoun.

However, with verbs allowing a contrast between reflexive and non-reflexive pronouns, the lack of a formal distinction between reflexive and non-reflexive pronoun in the third person results in ambiguities different from those observed with speakers using *í* for the third person of the reflexive pronoun:

– for speakers using only *à* as a third person singular pronoun (reflexive or non-reflexive), *à y’á kò*, with the third person pronoun repeated in A and P roles, can be interpreted as ‘(S)he washed him/her’ or ‘(S)he washed’, whereas the only possible reading of *à y’í kò* is ‘(S)he washed you’;

– for speakers that consistently use *í* as the third person singular of the reflexive pronoun, *à y’á kò* unambiguously expresses ‘(S)he washed him/her’, whereas *à y’í kò* is ambiguous between the two readings ‘(S)he washed’ and ‘(S)he washed you’.

It is also interesting to observe that, in addition to its productive use to encode prototypical reflexive situations, the intensifier marker *yèrɛ* can often (but not always) be freely added to

<sup>18</sup> The use of reflexive *í* in the third person plural is accepted by Bambara speakers, but *ù* is more common. More generally, Manding dialects show important variations in the paradigm of the reflexive pronouns (for example, in Kita Maninka, the reflexive pronoun is *í* in all persons except in the first person singular).

the reflexive pronoun in uses that depart more or less from prototypical reflexivity (see *Vydrine 1995:45-46, Vydrine 1995:57-58*).

### 8.3. The uses of the reflexive pronoun

#### 8.3.1. General observations

In the following sections, I summarize the main points of the very detailed presentation of the uses of the Bambara reflexive pronoun given by Vydrine (*Vydrine 1995:3-114*). According to this study, 24% of all Bambara verbs can combine with the reflexive pronoun, and among them:

- about 57% have a transitive construction whose relation with the reflexive construction belongs to one of the regular types that will be briefly presented in section 8.3.2;
- about 12% are not attested in transitive construction, but have an intransitive construction in a regular relation with the reflexive construction – section 9.3.3;
- about 11% are attested only in combination with the reflexive pronoun (*reflexiva tantum*);
- about 20% have non-reflexive constructions which however cannot be related to the reflexive construction within the frame of a regular alternation.

#### 8.3.2. Regular alternations between reflexive construction and transitive construction

As illustrated by ex. (81) above, the reflexive pronoun can be used to encode prototypical reflexive situations. But in the data collected by Vydrine, this use concerns only 19% of the verbs involved in a regular alternation between reflexive and transitive constructions. This must be related to the productivity of the reflexive use of the intensifier *yèrè* – see section 9.1.

Among the types of reflexive constructions in a regular relation with a transitive construction of the same verb, the autocausative type, illustrated by ex. (83), is by far the most frequent (more than 50% of the verbs involved in a regular alternation between reflexive and transitive construction, according to Vydrine). The antipassive type (about 10%), illustrated by ex. (84), and the possessive type (about 6%), illustrated by ex. (85), are relatively important in comparison with other languages. By contrast, the decausative type (about 4%) is much less represented than in other languages in which a reflexive pronoun fulfills a similar range of functions. The other possible types are only marginally attested in Bambara, or not attested at all.

(83) a. *mùso*      *yé*      *dúmuni*      *sìgi*  
 woman.DEF    PF.POS    food.DEF    set  
 ‘The woman set the food down’

b. *mùso*      *y’*      *í*      *sìgi*  
 woman.DEF    PF.POS    REFL    set  
 ‘The woman sat down’

(84) a. *d̀̀nkilidala yé d̀̀nkili ɲánaɲana*  
 singer.DEF PF.POS song.DEF bawl  
 ‘The singer bawled the song’

b. *d̀̀nkilidala y’ í ɲánaɲana*  
 singer.DEF PF.POS REFL bawl  
 ‘The singer bawled’<sup>19</sup>

(85) a. *cè y’ à sèn npàana*  
 man.DEF PF.POS 3S leg.DEF spread  
 ‘The man spread his legs’

b. *cè y’ í npàana*  
 man.DEF PF.POS REFL spread  
 same meaning as (a)

*nyún* ‘charge’ has a reflexive construction, illustrated by sentence (86b), which can be viewed as antipassive in relation with the construction illustrated by sentence (86a). However, this verb has also a construction, illustrated by (86c), which can be analyzed as causative with respect to (86a), and with respect to this causative construction, the construction of sentence (86b) can be viewed as reflexive proper.

(86) a. *m̀̀so yé d̀̀ni nyún*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS load.DEF charge  
 ‘The woman put the load on her head’

b. *m̀̀so y’ í nyún d̀̀ni lá*  
 woman.DEF PF.POS REFL charge load.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

c. *ù yé m̀̀so nyún d̀̀ni lá*  
 3P PF.POS woman.DEF charge load.DEF POSTP  
 ‘They helped the woman to charge the load on her head’

*m̀̀n* ‘drink’ has a the reflexive construction that can be viewed as antipassive with respect to the synonymous transitive construction. However, this verb also has an intransitive construction participating in applicative alternation, and therefore illustrates at the same time the possible synonymy between reflexive and intransitive construction – ex. (87).

(87) a. *cè yé jí m̀̀n*  
 man.DEF PF.POS water.DEF drink  
 ‘The man drank water’

<sup>19</sup> In the case of this verb, an intransitive construction is possible with the same meaning as the reflexive construction: *à ɲánaɲana-na* ‘(S)he bawled’.

b. *cɛ̀ mìn-na jí lá*  
 man.DEF drink-PF.POS water.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

c. *cɛ̀ y' í mìn jí lá*  
 man.DEF PF.POS REFL drink water.DEF POSTP  
 same meaning as (a)

### 8.3.3. Regular alternations between reflexive construction and intransitive construction

In Bambara, it is not uncommon that verbs not attested in non-reflexive transitive construction have an intransitive construction and a reflexive construction in a relation of synonymy or quasi-synonymy. Ex. (88) illustrates a case of full synonymy between intransitive and reflexive construction with a verb that cannot be used transitively with anything else than the reflexive pronoun in P role.

- (88) a. *séku bàn-na*  
 Sékou refuse-PF.POS  
 ‘Sékou refused’
- b. *séku y' í bàn*  
 Sékou PF.POS REFL refuse  
 same meaning as (a)
- b. \**séku y' ò bàn*  
 Sékou PF.POS DEM refuse

When the roles assigned to the unique core term of the intransitive and reflexive constructions are not absolutely identical, the reflexive construction generally implies a higher degree of agentivity, and consequently tends to select animate arguments – ex. (89).

- (89) a. *jiri fògon-na jí kàn*  
 tree.DEF float-PF.POS water.DEF POSTP  
 ‘The tree floated on the water’
- b. *cɛ̀ y' í fògon*  
 man.DEF PF.POS REFL float  
 ‘The man floated (by doing the necessary motions)’

This regularity is consistent with the relation between intransitive and reflexive construction in the case of verbs that have a transitive construction analyzable as unmarked causative construction with respect to their intransitive construction. For example, in ex. (90), sentences (a) and (c) have the same kind of relation as (89a) and (89b), but the reflexive construction illustrated by sentence (90c) can be viewed as autocausative with respect to the transitive construction illustrated by sentence (90b), which is itself related to sentence (90a) by causative alternation.

- (90) a. *fínyε jò-ra*  
 wind.DEF stop-PF.POS  
 ‘The wind stopped’
- b. *cè yé móbili jò*  
 man.DEF PF.POS car.DEF stop  
 ‘The man stopped the car’
- c. *cè y’ í jò*  
 man.DEF PF.POS REFL stop  
 ‘The man stopped’

## 9. Reciprocity

In Bambara, reciprocity is encoded by means of the specialized reciprocal pronoun *nyógòn* (probably cognate with *nyògòn* ‘similar’, from which it differs only by tone). This pronoun can fulfill any syntactic role other than S / A. Its antecedent is most often S / A, but P can also be the antecedent of the reciprocal pronoun in oblique role – ex. (91).

- (91) a. *ù yé nyógòn yé*  
 3P PF.POS RECIPR see  
 ‘They saw each other’
- b. *ù yé tìnyε fó nyógòn yé*  
 3P PF.POS truth.DEF say RECIPR POSTP  
 ‘They told the truth to each other’

## 10. Incorporation

### 10.1. General observations

Bambara has many verbs with the morphological structure *noun + verb* or *noun + postposition + verb*. However, in most cases, the relation between these compound verbs and their elements is lexicalized and lends itself to an etymological analysis only, in the sense that the meaning and the construction of the compound verb cannot be systematically predicted by relating it to a syntactic construction in which the incorporated noun would be a term in the construction of the verb.

Morphologically, a distinction must be made between compound verbs whose tonal contour is the mere juxtaposition of the tonal contours of their elements, and compound verbs with a ‘compact’ tonal contour entirely determined by the initial tone of their first formative.

### 10.2. Compound verbs N + V with a ‘compact’ tonal contour

The compound verbs of this type are semantically transparent. The incorporated noun does not represent an argument of the verb. It carries a comparative meaning, and its incorporation does not change anything in the construction of the verb to which it incorporates – ex. (92).

- (92) a. *à yé té wúli*  
 3S PF.POS tea.DEF prepare  
 ‘He prepared tea’
- b. *à yé té súraka-wuli*  
 3S PF.POS tea.DEF Moor-prepare  
 ‘He prepared tea in Moorish style’

### 10.3. Compound verbs N (+ Post) + V with a non-compact tonal contour

With compound verbs of this type, total semantic transparency is the exception rather than the rule. However, in all cases of compound verbs of this type in which it is still possible to find an equivalence between the construction of the compound verb and a construction in which its elements are dissociated, it turns out that the incorporation can be analyzed as the result of the reanalysis (re-bracketing) of a noun phrase *genitival dependent + head noun* in P role: the head noun is reanalyzed as forming part of the verb, and the genitival dependent is reanalyzed as the noun phrase in P role:

$$[_A N1 ]_{pr} [_P N2 N3 ]_V \rightarrow [_A N1 ]_{pr} [_P N2] N3-V$$

In addition to the general characteristics distinguishing incorporated nouns from nouns in the role of head of a noun phrase, in Bambara, passive alternation provides a particularly decisive test, as illustrated by ex. (93).

- (93) a. *à béna bà kán-tige*  
 3S FUT.POS goat.DEF throat-cut  
 ‘He will cut the throat of the goat’, lit. ‘He will throat-cut the goat’
- b. *bà béna kán-tige*  
 goat.DEF FUT.POS throat-cut  
 lit. ‘The goat will be throat-cut’

This type of incorporation, which involves mainly body part nouns, has in common with the type presented in section 10.2 that it does not modify the transitivity properties of the verb to which a noun is incorporated.

The relative productivity of valency-preserving incorporation in Bambara contrasts with the total absence of valency-reducing incorporation (i.e., incorporation of nouns identified to an argument of the verb to which they incorporate).

## 11. Conclusion

This survey of Bambara argument structure was mainly devoted to a presentation of the possible valency alternations in the construction of Bambara verbs: transitivity alternations (sections 5 & 6), alternations involving two transitive constructions of the same verb (section 7), and alternations involving the reflexive construction (section 8).

The previous works on the valency properties of Bambara verbs relied on the postulate that (a) it must be possible to characterize every Bambara verb, either as a basically intransitive verb with derived transitive uses, or as a basically transitive verb with derived intransitive uses, and (b) valency changes, even in the absence of any morphological evidence, must have an orientation. However, given the apparent variety and complexity of the valency properties of Bambara verbs, one may argue that the classification of Bambara verbs according to their transitivity properties should be considered only at a second step, after all possible transitivity alternations have been identified and studied without necessarily aiming at immediately recognizing an orientation *tr.* → *intr.* or *intr.* → *tr.*, and after all possible combinations of these alternations in the valency properties of individual verbs have been established. Methodologically, a binary classification of verbal lexemes as *±transitive* on the basis of *a priori* chosen criteria may well contribute to mask some regularities in valency alternations rather than help to capture them.

In the present state of Bambara lexicography, nothing ensures that it will be possible to give a satisfying account of the valency properties of Bambara verbs (and in particular, of their transitivity properties) within a theoretical framework maintaining in one form or another the basic assumption of the transformational approach according to which the possible constructions of a given verbal lexeme must be described by positing oriented relations between them. The complex system of morphologically unmarked valency alternations characterizing Bambara verbs would probably be better captured within an alternative non-derivational approach in the spirit of Construction Grammar, according to which the argument structure of a given verb in a given construction must be analyzed as the result of an interaction between the lexical meanings of verbs and meanings inherent to constructions, even if the constructions involve no element that could be analyzed as a valency operator. This hypothesis is in particular supported by the use of the reflexive construction to increase the agentivity of the unique core argument of verbs that cannot be used in a canonical transitive construction (section 8.3.3). Within the frame of a derivational approach, this valency alternation can be treated only by re-establishing a ‘missing link’ (the unattested causative construction), whereas it lends itself to a very simple explanation within the frame of Construction Grammar, since the reflexive construction of Bambara is very clearly a particular variety of the transitive construction.

### Abbreviations

- 1P: first person plural
- 1S: first person singular
- 2P: second person plural
- 2S: second person singular
- 3P: third person plural
- 3S: third person singular

CAUS: causative  
COP: copula  
DEF: definite  
DEM: demonstrative  
FOC: focalization  
FUT: future  
GEN: genitive  
HORT: hortative  
INTENS: intensifier  
INTER: interrogative  
IPF: imperfective  
NEG: negative  
NOM: nominalization  
PF: perfective  
PL: plural  
POS: positive  
POSTP: postposition  
PTC: participle  
RECIPR: reciprocal  
REFL: reflexive

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