ALIGNMENT SYSTEMS AND PASSIVE-ANTIPASSIVE DISTRIBUTION IN NILOTIC LANGUAGES[1]

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This paper discusses the occurrence of passive and antipassive constructions in Nilotic languages in relation to the question of whether Nilotic languages developed from an ergative-absolutive to a nominative-accusative case marking system or vice versa. This is a question based on Dixon's (1994) claim that the re-interpretation of the passive can change a language from a nominative-accusative to an ergative-absolutive status (see pp. 187-192), or that the re-interpretation of the antipassive can alter a language from an ergative-absolutive to a nominative-accusative status (see pp. 193-203). To address the question, the paper uses data from Western, Southern, and Eastern Nilotic languages. The data show that Nilotic languages display mixed-alignment systems and that the distribution of passive and antipassive constructions does not provide any conclusive answer about the origin of Nilotic languages. However, based on the observation that Southern Nilotic languages have a marked-nominative alignment system, which is a hybrid between ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative systems, and that some of the languages illustrated with display residues of ergativity (in particular, the mixed S_a-S_o alignment in passive constructions in Southern Nilotic), the paper comes to the tentative conclusion that Nilotic has an ergative-absolutive origin.

1. INTRODUCTION

Several attempts have been made to determine the relationship between the notions of passive and antipassive on the one hand and, on the other hand, the development of Nilotic languages from a nominative-accusative status to an ergative-absolutive one, or the other way around (Dixon, 1994; Planck,

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1985). Dixon (1994) suggests that the re-interpretation of the passive can change a language from being nominative-accusative to being ergative-absolutive (pp. 187-192), or that the re-interpretation of the antipassive can shift the status of a language from being ergative-absolutive to being nominative-accusative (pp. 193-203). Similar suggestions can be found in Planck (1985: 273ff). For her part, illustrating with antipassive constructions, Schröder (2006) argues that the occurrence of these constructions in Western Nilotic points to an ergative origin. König (2006: 722) suggests that the Nilotic origin was nominative-accusative and ergativity is an innovation in Nilotic languages. She argues that agent-participant relationships in passive clauses could have played a role in the development of the marked nominative system in Nilotic languages.

This paper will investigate whether those languages in the Nilotic language family that feature both passive and antipassive constructions could shed more light on which direction Nilotic languages took in their development: whether it was from an ergative-absolutive status to a nominative-accusative and marked-nominative status, or the other way round. Of special interest for this investigation will be the S_a and S_o alignment in passive clauses present in those Southern and Eastern Nilotic languages that have also retained antipassive constructions. This kind of alignment suggests that the direction in Nilotic is a change from ergative-absolutive to marked-nominative and nominative-accusative through the re-interpretation of the S_o in passive constructions, coupled with the decrease and final loss of the antipassive. In this paper, Southern Nilotic will be represented by Kipsigis, Tugen, and Nandi; Eastern Nilotic by Toposa and Maasai; and Western Nilotic by Shilluk, Burun and Dinka (Bor), and Dholuo.[2]

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[2] The data from Kipsigis were elicited from Chebet Koske, an MA linguistics student at the University of Nairobi in 2000; the data for Nandi from Eunice Mayo, an MA linguistics student at the University of Nairobi in 2000; the data from Tugen were elicited in 2007 from Prisca Jerono, a PhD linguistics student at the University of Nairobi; the data from Dinka Bor were obtained from the SIL translation team during a workshop in Juba in 2005; the data from Maa were elicited from Fredrick Matapato, Edwards Kosianto and Philip Murre Mwaani from Kajiado and Meitamei Loita from Narok in 2007, while the data from Toposa were mostly elicited from James Lokuuda Kadanya from South Sudan over the last 20 years.

The paper will first define the notions of "alignment systems" and of "antipassive" vs. "passive", then present data illustrating passive and antipassive constructions in Western, Southern and Eastern Nilotic languages, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

2. CLARIFICATION OF KEY TERMINOLOGY

This section defines the notions of alignment systems and passive vs. antipassive, and related terminology.

2.1 Alignment systems

The functional relationship between the verb and its subject and object is known as case marking. The different ways of specifying this case-marking relationship are also known as alignment systems. These systems rely on the core syntactic relationships of *S, A*, and *O* or *P,* which capture grammatical relations in transitive and intransitive sentences. *A* refers to the agent/subject of the transitive sentence, *O* to the patient/object of the transitive sentence, and *S* to the single core relation of the intransitive sentence (see Dixon, 1994, p. 9; Comrie, 1989, pp. 110ff; Payne, 1994, p. 116). Alignment systems are referred as nominative-accusative on the one hand, and ergative-absolutive on the other hand. The combination *nominative-accusative* means that the subject of an intransitive and that of a transitive clause are marked for case in the same way, while the combination *ergative-absolutive* means that the subject of the intransitive clause and the object of the transitive clause are marked for case in the same way. The difference between the dichotomous *nominative-accusative* vs. *ergative-absolutive* is best defined in terms of the constituents that are marked for case in the same way, and are thus grouped together, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Schematic representation of alignment systems

NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE SYSTEM vs. ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE SYSTEM

INTRANSITIVE   S   S

TRANSITIVE   A   O   A   O
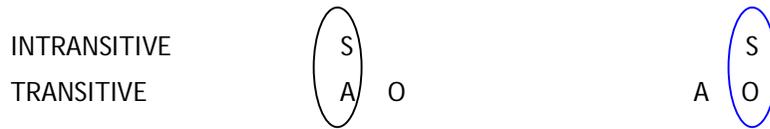
In other words, in nominative-accusative systems, *S* and *A* are case marked identically, while O is treated separately with a different case marker, whereas in ergative-absolutive systems, *S* and *O* are case-marked identically, while the *A* of the transitive sentence is marked differently (Dixon, 1994, p. 9).

An ergative language uses three strategies to signal its core syntactic relations: first, through morphological case marking, which is referred to as "morphological ergativity" (Dixon, 1994, p. 39); second, by marking ergativity on the intra-clausal level, i.e. in terms of word order;[3] third, by marking ergativity on inter-clausal level – which Dixon refers to as "syntactic ergativity". In a nominative-accusative language, the accusative is the marked form and the nominative the unmarked one, while in an ergative-absolutive language the ergative is the marked form, while the S and the *O* are the unmarked ones.

In recent years, more research in alignment typology has been done (Creissels, 2006; König, 2006; Handshuh, 2010); it has found that mixed types of alignment also exist in the world's languages. One of the mixed types that has been found (alongside the ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative alignment systems) to operate in the Nilotic languages discussed here has been called "marked-nominative", which is a hybrid between the accusative and ergative alignments. In a marked-nominative system the grouping of the three basic constituents (A, S, and O) is the same as in the nominative-accusative alignment system. However, in this latter system the *S* and *A* are the unmarked forms, while in the marked-nominative system it is the S and O

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[3] Most often morphological ergativity also are found in languages with an ergative word order; word order as the only sign of ergativity is a rare phenomenon.

forms that are unmarked, as shown in the figure below, where the circle indicates the unmarked[4] forms in the system.

Figure 2: Marked nominative alignment system

	NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE	MARKED-NOMINATIVE
INTRANSITIVE	(S	(S
TRANSITIVE	A) O	A (O
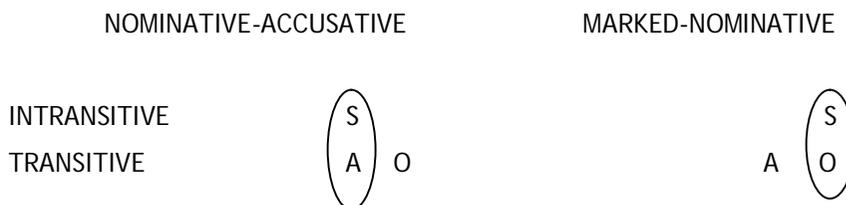
What the marked-nominative system shares with the ergative-absolutive one is that the *A* of the ergative system is also marked in the marked-nominative.

2.2 Passive and antipassive constructions

The definition of passive and antipassive in this paper is based on Dixon's (1994) "criteria by which a syntactic derivation should be recognised as passive or antipassive" (p. 146). Here is an adapted version of the criteria in question:

Regarding the passive,

(a) The agent is either omitted or demoted to an oblique PP role.
(b) The other core participant (the O NP) that was demoted to the subject possesses all properties of subjects relevant for the language.
(c) There is some formal marking of the passive (generally by a verbal affix or else by a periphrastic element in the verb phrase).
(d) The verb possesses any and all language-specific formal properties of intransitive verbs.

Regarding the antipassive,

(a) A transitive clause is changed into an intransitive clause.
(b) The antipassive construction demotes the NP object of the sentence: either the object moves into an oblique role, or it is omitted completely.

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[4] The term unmarekd refers to default usage of constructions or constituents and the term marked to the deviation of usage from the default form.

(c) The A NP of the transitive clause occurs as the S of the derived intransitive clause.

(d) There is some formal marking of the antipassive (generally by a verbal affix or else by a periphrastic element).

Thus, the antipassive describes situations where the object is syntactically omitted and becomes semantic-pragmatically indefinite, unknown, unspecified, non-referential or generic. The antipassive is called so because it has the opposite function of the passive. While the passive promotes the object to a subject position, the antipassive demotes the object into a peripheral constituent. In both cases the object is functionally changed but into two different (opposite) positions. How passive and antipassive are used differently in languages will be become clear in the following sections of the paper.

3. THE ROLE OF THE PASSIVE AND THE ANTIPASSIVE IN SHAPING ALIGNMENT SYSTEMS IN NILOTIC LANGUAGES

Nillotic languages show a very diverse pattern of alignment systems. Since the antipassive and the passive have been argued to be crucial in the development of the nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive alignment systems, their role in shaping these systems will be examined in Western, Southern and Eastern sub-groups of Nilotic. The Western Nilotic sub-group will be represented by five languages: Shilluk, Päri, Burun, Dinka Bor, and Dholuo; the Southern Nilotic by three languages: Kipsigis, Nandi, and Tugen; and the Eastern Nilotic by two languages: Maasai and Toposa.[5]

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5 The selection of the number of languages in each sub-group was guided by two considerations: the availability of data and the diversity of criteria. Regarding the former point, I was only able to collect data from the languages mentioned. Regarding the latter, the Western Nilotic languages are more diverse than those in the other two subgroups, which justifies a more detailed account, in this paper, of the latter languages. The Southern Nilotic languages are quite homogeneous: most of them, including the three illustrated with in this paper, are actually grouped into the Kalenjin cluster, which features many lexical and syntactic similarities. The Eastern Nilotic languages are more diverse again than the Southern Nilotic ones. However, data from them was difficult to find; so the present study's conclusions about the Eastern Nilotic languages remain in terms comparison quite tentative.

3.1 In Western Nilotic languages

3.1.1   In Shilluk

Shilluk has a morphological ergative-absolutive system and also employs the ergative word order OVA/SV. Typical constructions in the OVA/SV word order system in Shilluk are the following examples (taken from Miller & Gilley, 2001, pp. 36-37):

(1)   a) *byˊɛ l a-'rakk'   yι   ɲ an   dáj`ɔ*

      grain:PL PST:E-grind:T:R ERG   person female

      'The woman ground the durra'

    b) *mac á-dùŋ   áwaa*

      fire   PST:E-smoke:I   yesterday

      '*The fire smoked yesterday'.*

The ergative subject is marked with the ergative marker *yι*   in (1a) and the word order of the sentence is OVA. In the SV word order in (1b) the subject *mac* is unmarked, just as is the O *ɲ an dáj`ɔ*   in (1a).

Shilluk has antipassive constructions, but no passive ones. There are three phonological features which routinely distinguish between transitive and antipassive verb roots in Shilluk: first, the transitive verb stem is stressed, while the antipassive one is unstressed; second, the transitive verb stem is [-ATR], whereas the antipassive one is [+ATR]; third, the antipassive stem may change the final consonant of the root. So, the differences are actually reflected in clear phonological features. The following examples show a transitive (2a) and an antipassive construction (2b) (Miller & Gilley 2001, as discussed in Schröder, 2006, p. 98):

(2)   a) *wúnɔ   á-   'yɛ r   yι   jál-aní*

    rope   PST:E-twist:T   ERG   man-REF[6]

    The man twisted the rope

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[6] Hyphens are used here to segment morphemes, while colons indicate unanalysed morpheme boundaries.

b) *jál-aní   á-   'yet   kɪ   wúnɔ* [7]
man-REF   PST:E-twist:AP   OBL   rope
The man twisted some rope

The difference in the verb roots of (2a) and (2b) is evident as the transitive verb root *yɛr* in the transitive clause (2a) is [-ATR], whereas the antipassive construction (2b) has a [+ATR] marked verb root *yet*.[8] Note that the sentence with the antipassive has the SV word order as the sentence has an oblique case *kɪ wúnɔ* 'some rope' marked through the particle *ki*.

As pointed out earlier, Shilluk does not have passive constructions. This is how Miller & Gilley (2001: 52) put it:

> We conclude that from a synchronic point of view Shilluk does not have a passive, since there is no formal marker of passive voice indicated in verbal morphology. Rather, in transitive sentences in OVA order, the agent may be omitted. An antipassive form is, however, indicated in the verbal morphology. [9]

3.1.2   In Päri

Päri belongs to the Lwoo branch of Western Nilotic languages. Like Shilluk, it has an ergative-absolutive word order (OVA/SV), as illustrated by the following examples taken from Anderson (1988: 318):

(3)   a) *ùbúr   á-túuk'*
        Ubur COMP-play
        Ubur played

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7 Shilluk has three tones: low (`), high (´) and mid; this latter is not marked in this paper.

8 This is what Miller & Gilley say about (3b): "The implication of the sentence is that the man twisted some rope, but the O constituent was not completely affected by the action of the predicate" (2001: 43).

9 It is worth adding that the cross-reference system in Shilluk also works on an ergative-absolutive basis, but Shilluk does not exhibit syntactic ergativity (ibid: 56-67).

   b) *jòobìà-kèeI   ùbúrr-ì*

      buffalo COMP-shoot Ubur-ERG

      Ubur shot the buffalo

But Pari also has marked-nominative constructions that work in verb-initial clauses (König, 2006, p. 706), as the following examples from Andersen (1988: 319) show:

(4)   a) *pìr   ŋ`ɔ   ì   pʌʌr cico-´ɛ*

      Matter what LINK jump man-ERG

      Why did the man jump?

   b) *pìr   ŋ`ɔ   ì     coɔ I yí   ɲìpɔ ǹ de`-ɛ*

      Matter what LINK call   3S child-ERG

      Why did the child call her?

According to the ergative-absolutive system, which is the default word order in Päri, as shown in (4), the subject of the intransitive sentence should be unmarked, as shown in example (4a). However, post-verbal subjects are marked with the ergative marker *-ɛ* , which makes it a marked-nominative system as well. Thus, Päri is the only language in the Nilotic language family known so far to have a split system (ergative-absolutive on the one hand, and marked-nominative on the other).

3.1.3   In Burun

Burun, another language from the Lwoo branch, does not show any morphological sign of either an ergative system or a marked-nominative one. However, it has kept the ergative word order and has both antipassive and passive constructions. The following sentences (taken from Fajalla et al., 2005, pp. 9 & 29) illustrate the ergative (OVA/SV) system of the language:

(5)   a) *aŋkate lɛ p   Saman*

      door   3SG:open Saman

      Saman is opening the door

b) *Saman nι ι n -ι*
Saman 3SG:sleep-IC
Saman is sleeping

Both verbs *Iε p* ('open') and *nι ι n* ('sleep') are marked with the incompletive aspect marker *–i*. Note that while (5a) displays the OVA word order, (5b) displays the SV order. But there is an alternative marked AVO word order, identified by Fajalla et al (2005: 8):

(6) *Saman Iε b aŋkate*
Saman 3SG:open:IC door
Saman is opening the door

Notice that while the verbs in (5b) carry the incompletive marker *-i*, those that occur in the OVA or AVO word order, as in (5a) and (6), are zero-marked for the incompletive.

The following data illustrate a transitive sentence (7a) versus an antipassive one (7b) in Burun (Schröder, 2006, p. 98):

(7) a) *IaIbaar yooI gε ε I*
giraffe 3SG:chase:PRO lion
The lion is chasing the giraffe

b) *gε ε I yuuI -ir*
lion 3SG:chase:PRO-AP
The lion is chasing

In the transitive OVA construction in 7(a), the transitive root *yooI* is used, while in the antipassive construction, the SV in 7(b) has selected the antipassive root *yuuI*, combined with the antipassive suffix *-ir*.

Burun has several passive constructions depending on whether the agent is known or unknown, and whether both the agent and the patient are unknown. This can be illustrated by the following data (taken from Fajalla et al., 2005, pp. 25-26). First, when the agent is unknown, the antipassive marker *–Cir* is used, as in:

(8) *angkate lɛ p-ɩ r*

    door   open-PAS

    The door is being opened[10]

Second, when the patient or the agent is known, the passive has no morphological marker, and the construction is developed through word order, as in:

(9) *angkate lɛ p-i   Saman*

    door   open-PAS Saman

    The door is being opened by Saman

Notice that the *-i* is called passive marker by Anderson (1999: 78), but the author is not clear about the notion. I think the *-i* is used to show that the constituent in front of the verb is the subject and not the object. In this case, it behaves like a passive, and can indeed be called passive marker. Compare with the normal AVO of sentence (5a), where there is no *–i.*

    Third, when both the agent and the patient are unknown, the antipassive form of the verb is used:

(10) *Lɩ p-ɩ r*

    open-AP

    It is being opened

We can see that in this case the antipassive marker *–ir* occurs. However, it does so with the transitive (-ATR) root, while the antipassive construction usually has a (+ATR) root. So this construction needs further investigation because it seems to be an exception in the system, the use of the antipassive should trigger a verb construction with a [+ATR] root.

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[10] Note that in the antipassive construction the verb root would change from *lɛ p* to *lɩ p*, thus becoming *lɩ p-ɩ r* ('he is opening'). Part of the process of forming the antipassive in Burun is the change of the root vowels from a [+ATR] antipassive into a [-ATR] transitive (Schröder, 2006, p. 96).

3.1.4 In Dinka Bor

Dinka Bor has an AVO/SV word order in sentences with the incompletive aspect, as in (11a) and 11b). It has an alternative word order A-AUX-OV/S-AUX-V in sentences with the completive aspect, as in (11c) and (11d). In both systems, the *A* and the *S* have the same position in the sentence, which is typical of a nominative-accusative system (Schröder, 2006, p. 98).

(11) a) *Petero a-   kot   mac*
      Peter   3SG:IC-make   fire
      Peter is making fire

    b) *Petero a-   kuaɲ*
      Peter   3SG:IC-swim
      Peter is swimming

    c) *Petero a- cë   mac   koot*
      Peter   3SG-COM   fire   make
      Peter has made fire

    d) *Petero a- cë   kuaɲ*
      Peter   3SG-COM   swim
      Peter has swum

Although Dinka Bor exhibits case-marking predominantly through word order, there are some residues of inflectional case marking attested in Dinka Agar, which is a related dialect of Dinka Andersen (1991, 2002) has shown that Dinka Agar employs case marking on some nouns. Where case is marked, the postverbal noun and the oblique case are marked in the same way. Andersen (2002: 7) calls the preverbal subject *topic* and the object *absolutive*, as opposed to *oblique*, which covers the postverbal subject and a prepositional phrase. If the postverbal subject were marked, it would be a sign of a marked nominative system.[11]

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[11] The case differences are purely tonal. The basic rules are the following: If the absolutive has a low tone, the oblique receives a falling tone, and if the absolutive

The following set of data illustrates the transitive and antipassive verb roots in Dinka Bor (Schröder, 2006, p. 101):

(12) a) *Petero a-   thel weɲ*
      Peter   3SG:IC-pull   cow
      Peter is pulling the cow

    b) *Petero a-   thël*
      Peter   3SG:IC-pull:AP
      Peter is pulling

    c) *Petero a-   pot weɲ*
      Peter   3SG:IC-dust   cow
      Peter is dusting the cow

    d) *Petero a-   put*
      Peter   3SG:IC-dust:AP
      Peter is dusting

The transitive constructions in (12a) and (12c) use transitive roots, while the antipassive constructions in (12b) and (12d) use antipassive verb roots.[12]

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has a high or falling tone, the oblique tone changes to a low tone, as shown in the following examples (from Anderson 2002: 9):

Absolutive	oblique	meaning
tòŋ	*tôŋ*	chief
dít	*dìt*	bird

Andersen comments that many nouns do not distinguish between the two cases (ibid.). This means that this feature may be a difference between dialects and, at the same time, might be dying out in Dinka-Agar, because it seems to occur only with a few nouns. As stated before, the main parameter for differentiating case in Dinka Bor is word order. Whether there are some nouns that also mark case by tone, as in Dinka Agar, remains to be investigated.

[12] Dinka Bor makes a distinction between the quality of the root vowel for transitive and antipassive constructions (Schröder 2006: 96), as shown in the following words:

transitive	antipassive	meaning
thal	*thät*	cook

Dinka Bor has a passive construction that is reflected in word order change and another one additionally marked by root-vowel lengthening (Schröder 2006: 103). Consider the following examples:

(13) a) *Petero a-   pil   bël*
        Peter   3SG:IC-strip cane
        Peter is stripping the cane

      b) *bël   a-   piil   Petero*
        cane   3SG:IC-strip:PAS   Petero
        The cane is being stripped by Peter

      c) *Petero a-   pïl*
        Peter   3SG:IC-strip:AP
        Peter is stripping

The word order in the passive construction (13b) is OVA, suggesting that the constituents of the transitive AVO sentence (13a) have been switched around, with the object taking the subject position and the subject moving

thel	*thël*	pull
pil	*pïl*	strip
pot	*put*	dust
rak	*räk*	milk

The difference between transitive and antipassive roots is indicated mainly by the quality of the root vowel: in the transitive verbs, this vowel is creaky (i.e. non-breathy), while in the antipassive verbs it is its breathy variant that occurs. (This difference between breathy and creaky vowels seems to correspond to a [+ATR] and [-ATR] distinction in other Nilotic languages, as suggested by Andersen (1990), who notes that "…[-ATR] vowels and [+ATR] vowels in Päri correspond respectively to creaky and breathy vowels in Dinka. Therefore, the voice quality contrast in Dinka must be historically identical with the ATR contrast in Päri" (p. 18). The asymmetrical correspondence between */o/* and */u/* in the *pot–put* contrast above is due to the fact that no breathy vowel */ü/* exists.

into the object position. To indicate passive, the root vowel gets lengthened.[13]

3.1.5 In Dholuo

Dholuo also has an SVO nominative-accusative word order as shown in the following examples.

(14) a) *Atieno lʊ ɔ kɔ   lɛ wnɩ*
     Atieno   3SG:IC:wash   clothes
     Atieno is washing clothes

    b) *Atieno   dhɩ*
     Atieno   3SG:IC:go
     Atieno is going

But Dholuo also has both a transitive and an antipassive strtucture.

(15) a) *Atieno   kwalɔ   dhok*
     Atieno   3SG:steal:IC   cows
     Atieno is stealing cows

    b) *Atieno   kwelo*
     Atieno   3SG:steal:IC:AP
     Atieno is stealing[14]

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[13] Vowel length as a marker of the passive has also been documented for other Dinka dialects (see Andersen, 1991, p. 271 & 2002, p. 7). Vowel length also plays a crucial role in other areas of Dinka verb morphology (Andersen 1990: 26).

[14] Like Shilluk, Burun and Dinka-Bor, Dholuo (spoken in Kenya) has a way of indicating the change from transitive to antipassive: the different verb roots, the transitive and the antipassive show different harmony classes:[14]

transitive	antipassive	meaning
cam	*ciem*	eat
lʊ ɔ k	*luok*	wash
ʊ s	*us*	sell
nyɩ ɛ m	*nyiem*	buy

A transitive verb form occurs in the transitive sentence (15a), whereas in the antipassive construction of (15b), the verb is marked as antipassive by the root vowel */e/*, as no [+ATR] counterpart exists in the language for /a/. Whether the language has a passive construction or not is debatable. Some authors (e.g. Okoth, 1982) claim that Dholuo has an impersonal passive, as in (16):

(16)   *i-lʊ ɔ kɔ*

     3SG:IC:IND-wash

     [It](pas) is being washed

However, the interpretation of *i-* as an impersonal passive is controversial, as Omondi (1982) claims that it is an indefinite marker yielding an impersonal construction like *somebody washed.* Notice that the verb has the antipassive root, like that in example (14a), which would demonstrate an antipassive construction.

But, if the construction in (16) is compared with that in (17) (taken from Schröder, 2006, p. 41), a case could be made for the presence of ergative constructions in Dholuo:

(17)   *lewni   i-luoko   gi   mama*

     clothes 3SG:IC-wash ERG mama

     Mother is washing some clothes

While it has been claimed, e.g. by Omondi (1982), that the construction in (17) is a passive one, the *gi* structure in fact resembles the *yi*-structure reported for Shilluk by Miller & Gilley (2001) as an ergative marker. So, (17) could as well be an ergative construction from a comparative point of view. The [+ATR] of the antipassive root of the verb would also be proof for this.

tɛ d	*ted*	cook
kwal	*kwel*	steal
math	*meth*	drink

There is a clear difference between transitive roots, which take [-ATR] vowels, and the antipassive verb roots, which employ [+ATR] variants. The vowel /a/ does not have a [+ATR] counterpart because Dholuo has a nine-vowel system; so /a/ changes into /e/, as in *kwal - kwel.*

In conclusion, the five Western Nilotic languages show a diverse picture in terms of the relationship between the alignment systems they belong to and the occurrence of passive and antipassive constructions. Shilluk, as the predominantly morphologically ergative language of them all, seems to be the exception in that it has an ergative system only. All the others display mixed alignment systems: Päri offers a mixture of ergative and marked-nominative systems; Burun has no morphological ergative case marking but a predominant ergative word order in an otherwise nominative-accusative system; while Dinka Bor and Dholuo both present a nominative-accusative system. [15]

3.2 In Southern Nilotic languages

In Southern Nilotic languages, the alignment systems are more uniform. According to Rottland (1981), these languages all display a marked-nominative alignment system. The illustrative examples in this paper were taken from Nandi and Tugen, both of which belong to the Nandi-Marakwet group of languages.

3.2.1 The marked-nominative alignment system in Nandi

Like the other Southern Nilotic languages of the Nandi-Marakwet group, Nandi has a VAO/VOA word order, as shown in the following examples:

(18)   a) V   A   O
       Kí-mwét-èy   chéptò   ŋóròìk
       PST:3P-wash-IC girl/NOM clothes/AC
       The girl was washing the clothes

       b) V   O   A
       Kí-mwét-èy   ŋóròìk   chéptò

---

[15] It should be added, though, that according to Reh (1996: 488) Anywa, another language spoken in South Sudan, has a mixed ergative-accusative morphological case marking system and is thus a split-ergative language. For its part, Alur, a Western Nilotic language spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo, does not have passive or antipassive constructions (personal observation).

> PST:3P-wash-IC clothes/AC   girl/NOM
>
> The girl was washing the clothes

These examples show that the VAO word order is interchangeable with the VOA one.[16]

   Although Nandi shows a surface morphological accusative case marking[17], it does not have the nominative-accusative system. What actually happens is that it marks the nominative and leaves the accusative unmarked, which is typical of the marked-nominative alignment. Following König (2006: 658), marked-nominative languages can be defined based on the following criteria: a) the accusative is morphologically unmarked and functionally unmarked; and b) the accusative is the default case with the widest distributional functions. The morphological unmarkedness of the accusative is best demonstrated by the citation form, as in (19) below, which is tonally marked in the same way as the accusative form of *ŋóròìk* in (18a) and (18b). In all the three cases the tone marking is HLL.

(19)   *ŋóròìk*   'clothes'

As the citation form which has the same tone marking as the accusative form indicates that the accusative is the unmarked form and not the nominative form, the language cannot have a nominative accusative marking system, as in nominative accusative systems the nominative is the unmarked form. So the system where the nominative becomes the marked form is called a marked nominative case marking system as displayed in figure 2. This form of case marking occurs in in all the languages of the Nandi-Marakwet group. [18]

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[16] Jerono (2011: 140) suggests, for Tugen, another language belonging to the Nandi-Marakwet group, that the switch from VAO to VOA will be related to the prominence of theme and participants in discourse.

[17] The case marking in Southern Nilotic languages is displayed through the difference in tone on the nominative and accusative.

[18] König (2006: 678) confirms that Nandi is marked-nominative. See also Creider (1981: 14), who characterizes the marked-nominative system as follows: the general use of nouns occurs in the accusative and the marked use when the noun is in the subject.

Following Königs (ibid) defintion on the characteristics of marked nominative languages: In Nandi, the accusative is the most widespread form: it is used for the citation form, for the NP object, for the preverbal subject S and A, as nominal predicate, as derived object for head-marking devices, and as the S in the passive as discussed later on in the paper.

3.2.2   The antipassive and passive in Nandi

The following constructions illustrate the antipassive in Nandi:

(20)   a) *Kì-0-mwét-éy   ŋóròìk*
      PST-3-wash-IC   clothes/AC
      'She was washing clothes'

    b) *Kì-0-mwét-ìsy-éy*
      PST:3P-wash-AP-IC
      'She was washing'

    c) *Kì-mwɛ́t   ŋóròìk*
      PST:3P-wash:COM   clothes/AC
      'She washed clothes'

    d) *Kì-mwét-ìs*
      PST:3P-wash:COM-AP
      'She washed'

The above examples demonstrate that antipassive is formed through the affix *-ìsy-* in the incompletive in (20b) and the morpheme *-ìs* in the completive aspect in (20d). Nandi also has the passive prefix marker *kí-*, as shown below:

(21)   a) *Mwét-èy   chéptó   ŋóròìk*
      3P-wash-IC   girl/NOM clothes/AC
      The girl is washing the clothes

    b) *Kí-mwét-èy   ŋóròìk*

      PS:3P-wash-IC clothes/AC

      'The clothes are being washed'

Again, the S of the intransitive passive clause is marked with the accusative tonal pattern, namely the HLL on *ŋóròìk*, compare this example to *ŋóròìk* in (18a) and (18b). In a normal intransitive clause the tonal pattern for the marked nominative would be LHH, as on *ŋòróík* in the following example:

(22)   *Núr-yàt-ín   ŋòróík*

      3P:wet-STAT-PL clothes/NOM

      The clothes are wet

A discussion of why the tonal marking on the subject in passive constructions changes to the accusative marking will follow on the section of passive constructions in Eastern Nilotic languages.

3.2.3   *A combination of passive and antipassive in Tugen*

In Tugen, a most unusual combination of antipassive and passive combination is found, as the following data (from Jerono, 2011, p. 101) show:

(23) a) *Kì-ø-   óm-   ísy- éí láákw-éé*

       PST-3SG-eat –ANT-IMP child-DEF/SG

       The child was eating

     b) *Kì- kí-óm-ísy- éí*

       PST-PASS-eat-ANT-IMP

       Eating was going on

What is stressed in these two examples is the process of eating. The construction in (23a) is just antipassive, to the extent that the object was dropped. But in (23b) a passive construction was added to the antipassive one, to the extent that the subject was dropped. It is very unusual that a passive and antipassive construction occur together in one form, because typological languages exibit either a passive or an antipassive form.

    By way of conclusion, in the Southern Nilotic languages, the relationship between the word order system and the passive and antipassive is much more

uniform than it is in the Western Nilotic languages. The Southern Nilotic languages have a marked-nominative alignment system; they have passive and antipassive constructions; and they also have an atypical construction in the passive. Beyond Nandi, the antipassive in a marked nominative system is also found in all other languages of Southern Nilotic, except in Omotic (cf. Rottland, 1982, pp. 245 & 228). Rottland (1982) reconstructs the form *-i:sya* for antipassive in Proto-Kalenjin. Rottland also attest that all Kalenjin languages are marked nominative. All languages also have a passive construction with the subject marked as accusative.

3.3   In Eastern Nilotic languages

Maasai, from the Maa branch, and Toposa, from the Teso-Turkana branch, will be used to represent the Eastern Nilotic languages. The languages in the two branches of Eastern Nilotic are also marked-nominative languages, like the Southern Nilotic languages.

3.3.1   The marked-nominative system in Maasai and Toposa

Maasai follows a marked-nominative VOA/VAO word order where the nominative form is restricted functionally, because only the A in transitive clauses, vocatives and objects of the oblique *tɛ ´-* take the nominative tone, according to D. Payne (2006: 3). The accusative, however, has a wider distribution, as it occurs in all the other post-verbal NPs, genitives, and all preverbal NPs, whether subject or object (see also König, 2006, p. 669). It is typical of Maasai for the order of post-verbal NPs to be interchangeable while the clause remains grammatical.[19] Here is some illustration:

        V   A   O
(24)   a) *Ɛ´ɪ´-tɛ´-yɛ´rá   ɛ`ŋ-kɪ´tɔ`k   ɛ`n-dàà*
        3P-cook-COM F:SG-woman/NOM F:SG-food/AC
        The woman cooked food

        V   O   A
        b) *Ɛ´ɪ´-tɛ´-yɛ´rá ɛ`n-dàà          ɛ`ŋ-kɪ´tɔ`k*

---

[19] Payne (2006: 3) attributes the post-verbal order variation to topicality.

        3P-cook-IC   F:SG-food/AC   F:SG-woman/NOM

        The woman cooked food

The tonal marking of citation forms in the example is an indication that the accusative is the unmarked form in Maasai:

(25)   *Ɛ̀n-dàà*   'food'

The tone in (25) for *Ɛ̀n-dàà* 'letter' is LLL as it is for *Ɛ̀n-dàà* in example (24a) and (24b).

    Turning to Toposa, it has a predominant marked-nominative case-marking system with a verb-initial VAO/VS word order. Compare the transitive sentence (26a) with the intransitive sentence (26b):

(26) a) *È-màs-é-tè*   *ŋá-àtùk*   *ŋá-kìpì*

       3PL-drink-IC-PL F:PL-cows/NOM F:PL-water/AC

       The cows are drinking water

     b) *È-kèr-é-tè*   *ŋá-àtùk*

       3PL-run-IC-PL F:PL-cow/NOM

       The cows are running

Toposa marks the change between nominative and accusative through tonal distinctions: the word *ŋáàtùk* ('cows') in (26) displays the tone pattern HLL in the nominative, whereas its citation form would display the accusative tone pattern HHL:

(27) *Ŋáátũk*   'cows'

    That the marked-nominative system of Toposa is also functionally unmarked is described in detail in Schröder (2008), where the applied verbal arguments (created through the derivation of the benefactive, causative and instrumental) all display the accusative tone marking. The nominal predication occurs in the accusative form, while the focused S and A before the verb are marked as accusatives.

    There is evidence of ergativity in Toposa found at the sentence level. The basic word order is VAO, but there are two exceptions in which the word

order follows an ergative pattern, i.e. the constituents are grouped structurally in S and O unmarked versus A in a marked position.: first, there is the relative clause, where only the O of a VAO word order and the S of a VS one can be relativised, reflecting an ergative syntactic pivot illustrated in the following example:

(28)   *Ki-lip-u-tụ*   *ŋi-moŋin*   *lu*   *moi*
       SEQ-beg-ALL-PL M:PL-oxen/AC which   later
       a-ar-akin-i-o   *ŋu-tuŋa*   *lu-ke-syem-ok*
       3PL-kill-BEN-IMP-PAS M:PL-people/AC M:PL-DER-watching-PL
       nya-ki-damadam
       F:SG-DER-war.dance-AC
       They beg oxen which will later be killed for the people watching the dance

In the above example *ŋi-moŋin* ('oxen') is the O of a transitive clause and at the same time the head of the relative clause. In the following example, the S of a VS clause is relativised:

(29)   *Ku-put-ar-o-sị*   *nai* *ŋu-tuŋa*   *lu* *koloŋ*
       SEQ-smear-ABL-RFL-PL then M:PL-people/NOM who long.ago
        e-ya   *na-ki-do-un-et*   *ka* *ɲ i-koku*
       3PL-be F:LOC-DER-birth-ALL-INST of D:SG-child
       Then the people who were present at the birth of the child anointed themselves

In this sentence (29) the VS subject *ŋu-tuŋa* ('people') is the head of the relative clause. While (28) has a VO (relative clause) construction, (29) is a reflexive intransitive sentence that has a VS (relative clause) construction.

    If, however, the relative clause is linked to the A of a transitive sentence, the word order changes so that the subject precedes the verb. In this case the subject occurs in the accusative case marking, since it is preverbal.

(30)   *Ŋu-tuŋa*   *daanị* *lu* *e-sapan-e-te*
       M:PL-people-AC all   who 3PL-initiate-IMP-PL

> *i-toropy-e-te   ŋi-baren   kecę daanį̇*
>
> 3PL-cut-IMP-PL M:PL-cattle their all
>
> All people who have been initiated cut the HLTT [i.e. the heart/lungs/throat/tongue of their cattle] (i.e., they do not kill by cutting the throat)

In example (30), the noun *ŋu-tuŋa* ('people') is preposed and is marked as accusative. This suggests that the word order in the relative clause constructions reflects an ergative VO/VS word order (the head noun of the relative clause follows the verb), while the A occurs before the verb, that is in an AVO word order, where, however, the A has an accusative marking. (For more explanation on relative clauses in Toposa, see Schröder 2008, pp. 154-155.)[20]

Toposa also shows some signs of morphological ergativity in its pronominal agreement system. Usually the verb agrees with the S of the intransitive and the A of the transitive sentence, which is typical of nominative-accusative systems but is also found in the marked nominative systems of Toposa, as shown in (31).

(31) a) *È-pèr-í   ɲ í- kókû*

       3SG/SUB-sleep-IMP D:SG-child/NOM

       The child is sleeping

    b) *È-màs-í   ɲ í-kókù   ŋá-kílê*

      3SG/SUB-drink-IMP D:SG-child/NOM F:PL-milk/AC

      The child is drinking milk

The agreement prefix *e-* ('3SG') refers to the S of the intransitive sentence (31a) and the A of the transitive sentence (31b).

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[20] Cooreman (1994: 74) makes the interesting remark that the above displayed constraint on relativisation is typical for structural antipassive in ergative languages. For example, in Dyirbal, relativisation is only allowed on syntactically absolutive arguments on objects and subjects of intranstive clauses, and the relativisation on the A is restricted to the condition that the A is marked for absolutive. This kind of prediction is illustrated above. In Toposa the A has to be preposed to fulfil the condition of the syntactic pivot, i.e. the required pivot that only accusative marked constituents can be relativised.

However, agreement is not consistently nominative-accusative in the pronominal system. In the forms in (32) below, the subject marker agrees with the accusative of the transitive verb, and, additionally, the prefix *k-* is added:

(32) a) *K-ì-lìm-ókín-î*   *íŋèsị̈*   *íyôŋ*
      ERG-2SG/OBJ-tell-BEN-IMP he/NOM you/AC
      He will tell you

   b) *K-à-lìm-ókín-î*   *íŋèsị̈*   *áyôŋ*[21]
      ERG-1SG/OBJ-tell-BEN-IMP he/NOM me/AC
      He will tell me

   c) *K-ì-lìm-ókín-î*   *íyòŋ*   *áyôŋ*
      ERG-2SG/SUB-tell-BEN -IMP you/NOM me/AC
      You will tell me

When the object of the transitive sentence is in first person *áyôŋ* ('me accusative) in (32b), or second person *íyôŋ* ('you accusative') in (32a) (with the subject being in third person), the person prefix *-ì* in *K-ì-lìm-ókín-î* ('He will tell') refers to – *íyôŋ* ('you accusative') and in (32b) the *–à-* in *K-à-lìm-ókín-î* to *áyôŋ* ('me accusative'). In these cases the verb agrees with the O rather than with the A. Semantically, this type of agreement displays a typical inverse system[22], but morphosyntactically, it shows signs of an ergative-absolutive cross-reference system (Dixon, 1994, pp. 42–49).[23] If the subject and the object occur in first and second person, however, the person agreement prefix on the verb reverts to referring to the A. The prefix *k-* remains, though.

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[21] Other authors interpret such a system in Nilotic as inverse, as Payne (2003: 4) does for Maasai. However, syntactically, the so-called inverse shows an ergative cross-reference marking.

[22] An inverse system captures the idea that the first and second participants in some languages can change the role of subject and object (Klaiman 1992, p. 227).

[23] This phenomenon was also attested for Turkana by Dimmendaal (2010, pp. 34-35).

In other words, Toposa displays a split cross-reference system that can be summarized as follows: if the object is a pronoun in third person, the person prefix *k-* on the verb agrees with the A subject; if, however, the object is in first or second person, the prefix *k-* indicates the shift to ergative-absolutive marking; in the latter case it‿agrees with the O or shifts to an alignment of the marked nominative system. If both the subject and the object are pronouns in first and second person, the marking strategy becomes mixed in that the subject agreement prevails but the marker *k-* remains.

3.3.2   The antipassive and passive in Maasai

First, here are data that demonstrate the antipassive in Maasai:

(33)   a) *É´-tɛ´-yɛ´rá*   *ɛ`ŋ-kɪ´tɔ`k*   *ɛ`n-dàà*
         3P-COM-cook F:SG-woman/NOM F:SG--food/AC
         The woman cooked food

       b) *É´-tɛ´-yɛ´r-ɪ´ʃɛ´*   *ɛ`ŋ-kɪ´tɔ`k*
         3P-COM-cook-AP F:SG-woman/NOM
         The woman cooked

       c) *É´í-gér-ítò èn-tìtó*   *ɛ`m-pálàɪ`*
         3P-write-IC F:SG-girl/NOM F:SG-letter/AC
         The girl is writing a letter

       d) *Éí-gér-íʃ ó*   *èn-tìtó*
         3P-write-AP:IC F:SG-girl/NOM
         The girl is writing

The data above show that the antipassive marker in Maasai is **-ɪʃɔ**. Note the similarity between this marker and the antipassive marker *-isy* in Southern Nilotic. The underlying form in both cases is /s/.[24]

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[24] Dimmendaal, personal communication

The following data present the passive in Maasai, which is formed by the suffix morpheme *-ι* :

(34) a) *Ɛ́ɩ́-tɛ́-yɛ́rá-ɩ́   ɛ̀n-dàà*

       3P-COM-cook-PAS F:SG-food/AC

       The food was cooked

    b) *Ɛ́í-géró-í   ɛ̀m-pálàὶ*

      3P-write:COM-PAS F:SG-letter/AC

      The letter was written

Now, compare the accusative tone marking of LLL in *ɛ̀ndàà* ('food') and LHLL of *ɛ̀mpálàὶ* ('letter') in (34a) and (34b) with the nominative marking of LHH for nominative in *ɛ̀n-dàá* in (35a) and of LHLH for nominative in *ɛ̀m-pálàί* in (34b).

(35) a) *Ɛ́í-tíí ɛ̀n-dàá   èŋ-kímà*

     3P-be F:SG-food/NOM F:SG-fire/AC

     The food is on the fire

    b) *Ɛ́é-ndó   ɛ̀m-pálàί*

     3P-be long F:SG-letter/NOM

     The letter is long

The data in (35a) and (35b) demonstrate that in passive constructions the S is marked by the accusative case marking LHH for *ɛ̀n-dàà* in (34a) not the expected nominative marking LLH for *ɛ̀n-dàá* as shown fin (35a). Payne (2006: 10) calls this passive construction "non-promotional passive". She refers to Greenberg (1959) who demonstrated that the *-ɪ* suffix of the impersonal passive construction was historically a third-person plural subject form. In such a case, *-ι* apparently fully satisfied the subject requirement of the verb and thus the post-verbal NP could only appear in the accusative form. In the further development the function of the third person plural suffix *-ι* was reinterpreted as an impersonal passive suffix, but the accusative marking remained.

3.3.3 Passive in Toposa

Toposa does not show any evidence of antipassive. It has passive constructions in which the subject of the intransitive clause takes the accusative tone marking of the object of the transitive clause; that is, the marked nominative case marking shifts to an S_o alignment, as in Southern Nilotic. Consider this example:

(36) a) *Ì-dés-ì   ɲ é-kílè   ŋá-átûk*

  3SG-beat-IC M:SG-man/N   F:PL-cows/AC

  The man is beating the cows

  b) *Ì -dés-ít-àè   ŋá-átûk* [25]

  3PL-beat-IC-PAS   F:PL-cows/AC

  The cows are being beaten

Although the passive construction (36b) is structurally an intransitive sentence, it does not show the tone marking for nominative, which would be HLL (as in *ŋáàtùk*); rather, it bears the accusative tone marking HHF (as in *ŋáátûk*).[26] Sentence (36b) has a VS word order, where the S of the intransitive sentence is morphologically marked in the same way as the object of the corresponding transitive sentence (36a). There is no evidence from Toposa that the passive marker *–ae ~ oe* (it changes according to harmony class) has been a third person impersonal plural marker diachronically, as suggested by Payne (2006) for Maa. The construction in (36b) shows a S_o alignment.

Here is more explanation for why the passive in Southern and Eastern Nilotic languages is not marked for nominative but for accusative and what consequences this phenomenon has for alignment systems. If the passive is not marked with the marked nominative S tonal pattern, but with accusative

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[25] Note that in Toposa the personal pronoun marker *i-* is the same for the 3SG and 3PL. Toposa has a morphological impersonal passive marked by the passive suffixes *-o ~ -ae ~ -oe*.

[26] Note that the accusative tone pattern of *ŋáátûk* ('cows') is HHF only before a pause; it is HHL (*ŋáátùk*) elsewhere.

marking, the marking in the accusative for the S of the intransitive passive clause resembles ergative-absolutive systems, where the S of the intransitive clause and the O of the transitive clause are marked identically. A system that splits the S of an intransitive clause into two different ways of marking corresponds to the S_a vs. the S_o alignment that is found either in split S languages or in fluid S languages. The split occurrence of the marking is often caused by the semantics of the verb.[27] As the split marking only occurs in the passive clause, the clause shows less agent-control of the subject, and the subject is more affected than being in control.[28] Klimov (1973: 232-233) classifies this kind of languages as "active languages", and Creissels (2008: 8) as "mixed alignment" languages. Although some authors claim that split systems represent a system in its own right, they look like a hybrid of both an ergative-absolutive and a nominative-accusative system. The split system shares the marking of A in the S_a with the nominative accusative system, and the marking of S_o with the ergative-absolutive system.

The other option for the interpretation of the S_o in the passive construction is to analyse the S_o alignment of the passive clause as a non-promotional passive, which developed from an impersonal third person plural marker (suggested for Nilotic languages by Greenberg, 1959; Heine & Reh, 1984, p. 99; Heine & Claudi, 1986, p. 81; Heine & Kuteva, 2002, pp. 236-7; Payne et al., 1994, cited in Siewierska eprints.lancs.ac.uk/27267/1/3pl%2DPassive2, p. 5). The impersonal third person plural constructions marker of example for the Southern and Nilotic languages could show this kind of third person plural marker.

In conclusion, the two Eastern Nilotic languages show a more diverse picture between alignment systems and the occurrence of passive and antipassive than that shown by Southern Nilotic. Both languages have passive

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[27] In general, the parameter that causes this split is non-controlled versus controlled activity. The So refers to non-controlled activity, while the Sa reports the more controlled activity (see Dixon 1994, p. 72).

[28] Creissels (2008: 8) comments on this type of languages as follows: "In the active type, intransitive verbs with S coded like A assign a (relatively) active semantic role to S, whereas those with S coded like P assign a (relatively) passive semantic role to S."

constructions. But while Maasai also has a functioning antipassive, this was lost in Toposa. Toposa also has residues of ergativity popping up as syntactic ergativity in relative constructions and as morphological ergativity in some agreement patterns.

4. WHICH ORIGIN FOR NILOTIC LANGUAGES: ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE OR NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE?

At the beginning of this paper the question was raised as to whether the re-interpretation of the notions of *passive* and *antipassive* could shed light on the ergative-absolutive vs. nominative-accusative origin of Nilotic languages. Two proposals, pointing to different origins, have been put forward in the literature. (Planck, 1985, outlines both proposals.) The first proposal suggests that the Nilotic languages moved from an ergative system to an accusative one, while the alternative proposal suggests that they moved from an accusative to an ergative one. But before deciding which origin is more plausible than the other, let us summarize (in the table below), the various alignment systems described for the different groups of Nilotic languages and the occurrence of the passive and antipassive constructions in them.
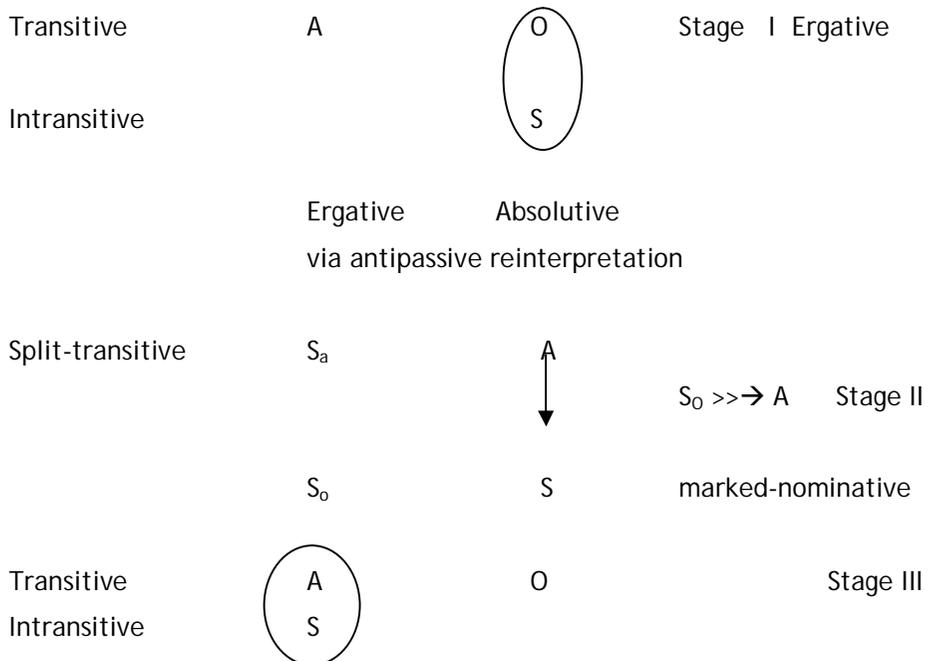
Table 1: **Overview of alignment systems and the occurrence of passive and antipassive across Nilotic languages**

	Western Nilotic					Southern Nilotic	Eastern Nilotic			
	Shilluk, Par, Burun		Dinka Bor, Dholuo			Nandi	Bari	Maasai	Teso-Turkana	
Anti- passive	vowel harmony change in root consonant change in verb root					*-isy*	*yes*	*-ɪʃ ɔ*	0	
Passive	Shilluk 0	Päri tone	Burun *-i/ir*	Dinka /Bor word order	Dholuo 0	*kí-*	*-i*		*-ae~oe*	
Case system	ergative-absolutive		nominative-accusative by word order only			marked nominative	Nom-AC	marked	nominative	
Ergative features	fully morphologically ergative		word order (Burun) passive word order (Dinka) old erg marker **-g**ɪ (Dholuo)			split-S system in passive	none	Split-S PAS	split-S system in passive inverse-system/ergative ergative pattern in relative clause syntactic pivot	

4.1   The change from the ergative to the accusative system

Figure 3 below is a schematic representation, adapted from Planck (1985: 273ff), of the suggested transition from the ergative system to the accusative one.

Figure 3: From *ergative* to *accusative*

Transitive   A $\left(\begin{array}{c} O \\ \\ S \end{array}\right)$ Stage   I Ergative

Intransitive

                  Ergative   Absolutive
                  via antipassive reinterpretation

Split-transitive S_a $\uparrow$
                                         $\downarrow$ $S_O >> \rightarrow A$ Stage II

                    S_o S   marked-nominative

Transitive $\left(\begin{array}{c} A \\ S \end{array}\right)$ O   Stage III
Intransitive

According to the schematic representation above, the change starts in the intransitive clause, where the S is identified with the O of the transitive clause. This S then starts to be grouped with the A of the transitive clause, as a result of which it comes to an intermediate stage, that is, Stage II. At this stage, the S of the intransitive clause can have either the marking of the A of the transitive clause, or the marking of the O of the transitive clause. The split S_a-S_o system displayed in passive constructions in Southern and Eastern Nilotic languages is an illustration of this stage of development. If this split indicated the development from the ergative-absolutive to the nominative-accusative system, the next step of development would be that those passive constructions would lose their accusative marking and thus change to the

nominative A marking. The final step (Stage III) is that the marking of S_o is absorbed into the marking of the A of the transitive clause.

The suggestion that the origin of Nilotic was ergative is supported by Schröder (2006) and Dimmendaal (2014). Dimmendaal sees a former genitive-instrumental marker in Eastern Sudan as the origin for the ergative marker in Nilotic that changed into a marked nominative marker, which is now found in Nilotic and Surmic (p. 14). A good example to support this line of thinking (that ergative systems changed into marked nominative ones) would be the development in Päri, a predominantly ergative language in which marked-nominative constructions have started to develop (see Andersen, 1988, p. 318). Schröder (2006) sees the existence of the antipassive and the residues of ergativity in many Nilotic languages as a sign of the ergative origin.

4.2 The change from the accusative to the ergative system

Figure 4 is a schema schematic representation illustrating the alternative proposal, namely the development from a nominative-accusative to an ergative-absolutive system (Planck 1985, pp. 279ff).

Figure 4: From *accusative* to *ergative*
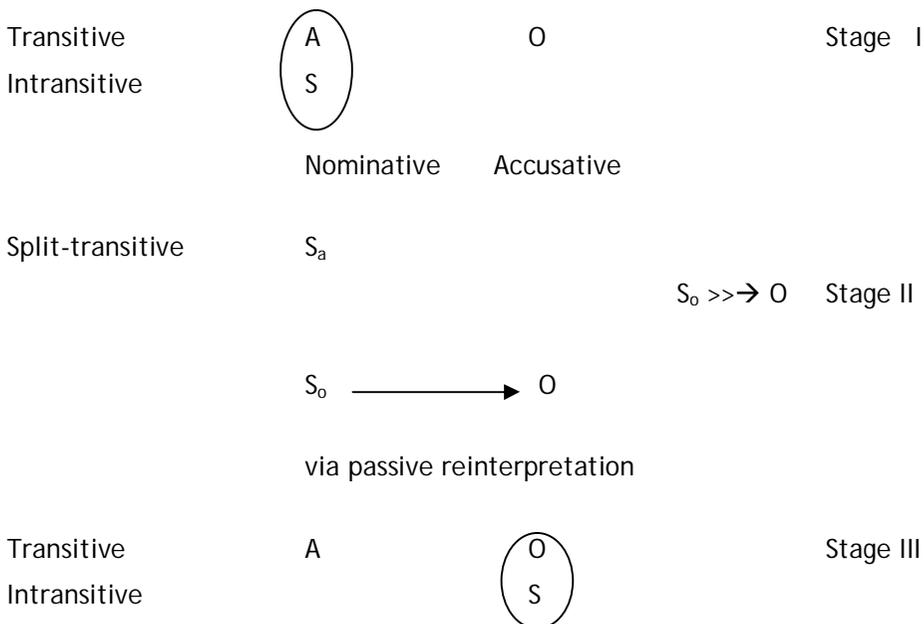
According to Figure 4, the development starts in the transitive clause, where the marking of the O is extended to the S of the intransitive clause. Typical of that development are passive constructions where the O is typically changed into the S of the intransitive clause. Then the development comes to an intermediate stage (i.e. Stage II), where the S of the intransitive clause can have S_a and S_o marking, before the S_o marking is extended into full O marking. The development from accusative to ergative via the passive (but the passive finally gets lost) was mentioned by Reh (1996, p. 361) for Anwya. However, this alternative proposal cannot be supported by the findings of this paper; they show that all Nilotic languages have kept the passive construction, with the exception of Shilluk, which has the antipassive construction only.

One more weakness about the reinterpretation of the passive for Nilotic languages lies in the fact that that view does not explain how case marking changed from accusative to marked-nominative. Dimmendaal (2014: 13-15) tries to explain this case marking change. He says that a simultaneous change of word order from OVS/SV to VSO/VS took place, after which the postverbal subjects were marked. This hypothesis seems to be supported by the postverbal marked-nominative subject in Päri. Andersen (1988: 320-323), Reh (1996: 359-357), and König (2010: 704) also hold the view that the origin of Nilotic was accusative and that the ergative-absolutive system is an innovation.

All in all, while the original question of whether the passive-antipassive distribution in Nilotic languages can shed light about the direction of the development from either an ergative-absolutive to a marked nominative-nominative-accusative system or vice versa cannot be answered conclusively, my point of view is that that Nilotic languages have an ergative origin. The strongest argument for this lies in the fact that marked nominative languages show a hybrid between ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative languages and can be tentatively analysed as constituting the intermediate stage in the development from ergative to accusative. Further, the S_a-S_o alignment in passive constructions in Southern and Eastern Nilotic can be said to display an ergative residue and can be considered as the intermediate

stage from ergative to accusative.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the distribution of antipassive and passive constructions in five Western Nilotic languages (Shilluk, Päri, Burun, Dinka Bor, Dholuo), in two Southern Nilotic languages (Nandi and Tugen), and in two Eastern Nilotic languages (Maasai and Toposa), with the ultimate aim of finding out whether that distribution could shed light on whether Nilotic languages had an ergative-absolutive origin or a nominative-accusative one. The discussion of data first showed that the languages illustrated with featured occurrences of both the passive and the antipassive, with the exception of Shilluk, which does not have the passive, and Toposa, which does not have the antipassive.

With regard to alignment systems, the paper showed that Western Nilotic languages display a very diverse alignment system: Shilluk has an ergative system, Burun has an ergative word order but without morphological ergative-absolutive case marking, while Dinka Bor and Dhuluo have a nominative-accusative system with residues of ergative constructions. For their part, Southern and Eastern Nilotic languages display a marked nominative system with a S_a-S_o alignment in passive constructions.

Regarding the question of which alignment system is at the origin of Nilotic languages, no case was established of a re-interpretation of the passive leading to an ergative-absolutive system or the re-interpretation of an antipassive leading to a nominative-accusative. However, because the marked-nominative languages (belonging to the Southern and Eastern Nilotic branches) provide evidence of an intermediate development stage between an ergative-absolutive and nominative-accusative system, this paper can conclude that both the surface feature of a hybrid stage of development of the marked-nominative system and the S_a-S_o alignment in passive constructions make an ergative-absolutive origin of Nilotic languages more plausible than a nominative-accusative one.

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APPENDIX: List of abbreviations used in this paper

1SG	first person singular
2SG	second person singulaers
3P	third person
ABL	ablative
AC	accusative
ALL	allative
AP	antipassive
AUX	auxiliary
BEN	benefactive
COM	completive
DER	derivation
DER	derivational prefix
E	evidential
ERG	ergative
F/PL	feminine plural
F/SG	feminine singular
IC	incompletive
IMP	imperfect
IND	indefinite
IND	indefinite
INF	infinitive
INST	instrumental nominaliser
LOC	locative
M/SG	masculine singular
N	nominative
NOM	nominative
OBJ	object
OBL	oblique
PAS	passive
PL	plural
PL	plural
PRO	progressive

PST	past
REF	referential determiner
RFL	reflexive
SEQ	sequential
SG	singular
SUB	subject
T	Tense

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