

## What diachronic typology can tell us about language universals and variation

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### 1. Stop worrying and love diversity! Universals, variation, and explanation in a diachronic perspective

Functional approaches account for language universals and patterns of cross-linguistic variation by deriving them from more general aspects of language use. The most important factors that are responsible for universals and variation include:

- (i) *frequency* (often declined as 'world frequency', but possibly to be conceived of in terms of 'speech frequency', Haspelmath 2008: 45);
- (ii) *economy* ("what is predictable receives less coding than what is not", Haiman 1983: 807);
- (iii) *iconicity* (linguistic distance reflects conceptual distance; Haiman 1983: 782);
- (iv) *computational efficiency* (preferences in performance data are mirrored in constraints in grammar and variation patterns, Hawkins 2004);
- (v) *system pressure* (defined as "the tendency of grammatical coding to target entire classes of items", Haspelmath 2014: 197);
- (vi) *harmony* (Croft 2003: 62ff.; also prominent in Optimality Theory; see for instance Aissen's 2003 OT treatment of Differential Object Marking).

Glossing over the different weights that scholars assign to (i)-(vi), these factors may either conspire towards the same results or be in competition with one another (Du Bois 1985; Mac Whinney et al. 2014). Competition is held to be responsible for both principled cross-linguistic variation and universal tendencies (i.e., frequency of language types; Croft 2003: 64).

The competing motivations model has been variously criticized. On the one hand, as argued for instance by Maslova (2000: 308) among many others, "there seem to be no criteria that would allow for an empirical distinction between genuine distributional universals and accidental statistical tendencies". This means that the skewing of linguistic traits may be historically determined rather than produced by functional pressures on speakers (see also Daniel 2010: 61): rare features, for instance, are more likely to be found in languages spoken in mountainous areas than in languages spoken in the plains (Nichols 1992). This suggests that linguistic (and, more generally, cultural) features spread more easily in the latter kind of environment, for obvious reasons.

On the other hand, a more far-ranging criticism has been levelled against the nature itself of such explanations. More or less implicitly, the factors in (i)-(vi) are generally operationalized at the synchronic level: whenever a given grammatical pattern or construction conforms to what is predicted by a given universal motivated in terms of one of the factors in (i) to (vi), it can be considered as "explained", irrespective of its individual history (Haspelmath 2008: 43; Moravcsik 2010: 68; Cristofaro 2014). Thus, for instance, stating that English has the order Preposition + Noun because this order is harmonic with the head-dependent order of constituents in other phrase types amounts to explaining why English prepositional phrases are the way they are. This is a weak kind of explanation, however, and this weakness is not without consequences. Linguistic typology is often blamed for the coarse-grained nature of its explanations, especially when contrasted with the fine-grained explanations of language-particular facts carried out by exponents of the opposite camp of linguistic thinking. The criticism is not entirely without merit: explanations based on (i)-(vi) may fail to target the full complexity of language-specific and construction-specific facts, operating only at a rather low degree of granularity.

The diachronic turn in linguistic typology, to be intended as the renewed interest in (and awareness of) the history of language-specific and construction-specific facts within the more general picture of typological diversity, has the potential to represent a significant advance in current typological practice. Diachronic typology acknowledges that factors (i)-(vi) are inherently diachronic, i.e. they need time to show their effects. Universal tendencies are thus the by-product of many individual instances of change that eventually lead to the same results across languages, due to the sameness of the human cognitive endowment when we are confronted with the same communicative problems. Variation, too, is principled and not random, as the range of possible strategies to deal with specific communicative problems is limited: as Evans & Levinson (2009: 444) put it in their much-debated paper, universal tendencies are “recurrent solutions across time and space [that] result from myriad interactions between communicative, cognitive, and processing constraints which reshape existing structures through use”. The combination of language-specific diachronic investigations with the contributions of linguistic phylogeny, human genetics, and the study of cultural diversification is thus paving new avenues for research on linguistic diversity and is “transforming the theoretical terrain” (Evans & Levinson 2009: 444). Programmatically, Evans & Levinson (2009) evoke what they call an “evolutionary approach” as a “new synthesis” subsuming the functional factors in (i)-(vi), the mathematical modeling of diversification of linguistic traits and the major achievements of historical linguistics, especially those that have to do with ‘grammaticalization’, i.e. the principled emergence of new grammatical structures out of older lexical or grammatical structures (see Heine & Kuteva 2002). These components all contribute to a better understanding of variation and universals by putting them in the right perspective: far from being determined by *a priori* constraints having psychological reality (i.e. belonging to a mental grammar) or by functional pressures, universals and variation can be described as the result of recurrent historical processes taking place over and over again in the development of individual languages and constructions.

By showing concerns for the individual, often idiosyncratic histories of grammatical patterns and constructions, diachronic typology is able to account for the complexity of linguistic facts by means of strong (or, at least, less weak) explanations and to fill the gap in terms of granularity of the analysis that separates typological analyses from formal analyses. Dealing at the same time with the search for broad functional factors that are responsible for general tendencies and with the idiosyncrasies leading to divergent language-specific facts, diachronic typology addresses the same array of language-specific and construction-specific phenomena that are taken into account by exponents of the formal camp, and provides non-simplistic explanations for them. This does not mean that the differences between the two camps are minimized all at once, as will be discussed below, but at least the two (families of) approaches may fight with the same weapons and engage in more productive debates.

In this paper, I will try to substantiate the above claims by means of a case study, namely the cross-linguistic variation (and the universal tendencies) displayed by antipassive constructions. The point of departure of the analysis will be the survey article by Polinsky (forthcoming), in which the main universal tendencies concerning this construction type proposed by the functional and formal literature are discussed in detail along with the most influential formal approaches to this construction type.

## 2. A case study: the antipassive

### 2.1. Definitional issues: lumping and splitting approaches

Lumping approaches to the antipassive and antipassivization provide definitions of this construction type such as (1) (Polinsky forthcoming, p. 4 of the manuscript):

- (1) ANTIPASSIVE: a clause with a transitive predicate whose logical object is **demoted to a non-core argument or non-argument** (subject > object > non-core argument > non-argument)

The definition in (1) crucially differs from splitting definitions of the antipassive; cf., for instance, the working definition provided by the editors of a forthcoming collection of articles on antipassives stemming from a SLE workshop in 2016, provided in (2):

- (2) An antipassive construction can be defined as an intransitive construction meeting the following conditions: (i) the same verb with the same lexical meaning can be found in a transitive construction implying the same number of participants and the same participant roles; (ii) the participant encoded as A in the transitive construction is encoded as the unique core argument in the antipassive construction; (iii) in the antipassive construction, the participant encoded as P in the transitive construction is either **encoded as an oblique, or left unexpressed**. (Janic, Witzlack-Makarevich, Creissels 2016).

The main difference between (1) and (2), i.e. between lumping and splitting approaches, is in the two bold-face formulations (“demoted to non-core argument or non-argument” vs. “encoded as an oblique or left unexpressed”). Unlike (1), (2) explicitly excludes constructions involving the syntactic or morphological incorporation of an object from the range of phenomena falling under the rubric of antipassivization, because they make the logical object a non-argument, but do not encode it as an oblique strictly speaking (nor leave it unexpressed). The two construction types explicitly admitted by the definition in (1) and excluded by the one in (2), namely Noun Incorporation (NI) and Pseudo-Noun Incorporation (PNI), are exemplified in (3) and (4) respectively:

- (3) Chukchi (Northern Chukotka-Camchatka; Kulikov 2010: 382)

- a. *atləy-e*      *təkečək*      *utkuč-ək*      *pela-Ø-nen*  
 father-ERG    bait-ABS      trap-LOC      leave-AOR-3SG.SBJ/3SG.OBJ (active)  
 “The father left the bait at the trap.”
- b. *atləy-en*      *utkuč-ək*      *təkeč’-pela-Ø-g’e*  
 father-ERG    trap-LOC      bait-leave-AOR-3SG (object incorporation)  
 “The father left bait at the trap.”

- (4) Niuean (Oceanic; Massam 2001: 157)<sup>1</sup>

- a. *Takafaga*    *tūmau nī*    *e*    *ia*    *e*    *tau*    *ika.*  
 hunt          always EMPH ERG    he    ABS    PL    fish  
 “He is always fishing fish.” (Transitive clause)
- b. *Takafaga*    *ika*    *tūmau nī*    *a*    *ia.*  
 hunt          fish    always EMPH ABS    he  
 “He is always fishing.” (PNI)

Lumping and splitting approaches are found across both camps of linguistic thinking. Examples of lumping approaches are Baker (1988) and Croft (2012: 334), while examples of splitting approaches are Marantz (1984) and Muro (2009), among many others. The main motivations for splitting approaches are the presence of languages (e.g. Soninke, see Creissels & Dramé 2015) in which NI coexists with antipassive constructions, and the fact that not all NI constructions have object-demoting effects (these types of NI constructions are called ‘valence-neutral’ by Muro 2009: 25). The main motivation for lumping approaches is the fact that the contexts in which PNI, NI and antipassives are found (unspecified object, generic object, and less-affected participant) are often the same across languages.

A diachronic-typological approach does not need to adhere exclusively to either of these alternative views, as both approaches seem to disregard the specific histories of the various constructions. There are antipassive constructions that can be traced back to constructions involving the incorporation of generic indefinite elements filling the object position (e.g. “person”, “thing”, but also “world”, “nature”, “matter” see Sansò 2017: 182ff.). In Mojave, for instance, the indefinite element *ʔič*, “something”, can be used as a marker

<sup>1</sup> In Niuean transitive clauses, word order is VPrtSOX. The verb may be followed by adverbial particles (*tūmau* and *nī* in (4a)), and the ergative case system marks proper nouns/pronouns and common nouns differently (proper noun/pronoun ergative: *e*; proper noun/pronoun absolutive: *a*; common noun ergative: *he*; common noun absolutive: *e*). In PNI, the order is VOPrtSX, as in (4b) (Massam 2001: 155-157).

of unspecified objects as in (5a). With some verbs, and in particular with the verb *ama:-* “eat”, *ʔič* can appear after the subject prefix as in (5b), a fact that is suggestive of an ongoing process of incorporation:

(5) Mojave (Yuman; Munro 1974: 259-260)

- a. *ʔič*                    *m-anyi:-k*  
 something        2-hunt-TNS  
 “You hunted.”
- b. *m-ič-ama:-m*  
 2-INDF.OBJ-eat-IND  
 “You ate.”

In Xavánte, the antipassive derives from the incorporation of the noun *roP-*, glossed “thing, world, nature” by Machado Estevam (2011: 349), a noun that “existe encore aujourd’hui sous la même forme pour désigner un lieu de façon vague”. In (6a), for instance, the speaker overtly expresses the object of her suffering, whereas in (6b) the object of the verb ‘suffer’ is left unexpressed, and *roP-* is prefixed to the verb. The antipassive construction exemplified in (6b) belongs to a whole family of Xavánte incorporating constructions instantiating all the four types of NI described by Mithun (1984), cf. Machado Estevam (2011: 376ff.):

(6) Xavánte (Ge-Kaingang; Machado Estevam 2011: 347)

- a. *ĩ-mro*                    *parimhã,*            *ĩhöʔa nori*        *na*        *hã*        *ĩpěʔězé*            *wa*        *nasi*  
 1SG-get.married        SUB                    priest COLL        INS        EMPH    homesickness    EGOPH DUR  
*sépata*  
 suffer  
 “Once married, I was longing for the sisters.” [“Une fois mariée, j’avais la nostalgie des soeurs.”]
- b. *tane*    *ñerě*    *wa*    *tô*    *ãma*    *rob-zépata*    *nasi*  
 so        CONC    EGOPH    FCT    PVB    ANTIP-suffer    DUR  
 “Despite this, I suffered.” [“Malgré cela j’en souffrais.”]

Similarly, in the antipassive construction in Teribe the object argument is suppressed, and the verb (in the perfective form) is followed by the so-called mass pronoun *llě*, a reduced form of *llěbo*, “thing” (glossed MASS in (7a); Quesada 2000: 145). *Llěbo* can also appear as an object, but in this case it appears preverbally, as in (7b). Word order in transitive clauses in Teribe is SOV. The postverbal position of the so-called mass pronoun is thus indicative of its grammaticalization as an antipassive marker in a position closer to the verb phrase:

(7) Teribe (Talamanca; Quesada 2000: 145)

- a. *tawa*                    *yo-no*                    *llě*  
 1PL.EXCL                eat-PRF                MASS  
 “We ate.”
- b. *tawa*                    *llěbo*    *yo-no*  
 1PL.EXCL                things    eat-PRF  
 “We ate things.”

For examples (5)-(7) a lumping analysis is preferable, as it captures the diachronic connection between incorporation proper and the antipassive, while for other antipassive constructions of different origin a comparison with NI may be pointless.

## 2.2. Syncretism patterns and two different syntactic analyses of the antipassive

“I have not observed languages which have a non-syncretic antipassive marker. In principle, such a language could exist; however, the patterns in (18) are common enough to justify the prediction that given antipassive marker **will also serve as a general detransitivizing/aspectual affix**” (Polinsky forthcoming, p. 7, my emphasis).

The above statement is motivated by the observation that in many languages that mark the antipassive verbally, the affix indexes other categories as well (either one or more among anticausative, reflexive/reciprocal, middle or one or more among inchoative, inceptive, habitual, iterative, durative).

In Chamorro, for instance, the AP construction can be used not only when there is an indefinite/generic object, as in (8a), but also to imply that the event described is iterative or habitual, as in (8b):

(8) Chamorro (Austronesian; Cooreman 1994: 54, 57)

- a. *mangonne'* (*guihan*) *i* *peskadot*  
ANTIP.catch (fish) the fisherman  
“The fisherman caught a fish/fish/something.”
- b. *mang-galuti* *gue'* *ni* *ga'lago*  
ANTIP-hit ABS.3SG OBL dog  
“He pounded on/repeatedly hit the dog.”

In formal approaches to the antipassive, these syncretism patterns have fostered two main syntactic analyses of the antipassive, revolving around the two following ideas (Polinsky forthcoming, p. 11):

- (9) a. accusative/absolute case is absorbed in the vP;  
b. the antipassive does allow object licensing, but the structural locus of that licensing differs from the transitive

In the first kind of analysis, a nominal element is base-generated inside the VP and then undergoes head movement, absorbing the accusative/absolute case. As a result, the verb cannot assign case to its object. There are several possible morphological realizations for this type of incorporated object (the antipassive morpheme, an incorporated internal argument as in NI/PNI, or an implicit argument as in so-called cases of Agent-preserving lability). This analysis accounts pretty well for the commonalities between NI/PNI and antipassive, and is “particularly appealing for antipassives whose marker is syncretic with reflexive or middle morphology, as reflexive and middle morphemes saturate the internal argument position of a two-place predicate” (Polinsky forthcoming, p. 12).

In the second kind of analysis, the transitive object is licensed outside the vP, while the antipassive object is licensed within it, as either a PP or an accusative. Some of the analyses amenable to (9b) draw a parallel between the conditions for antipassive constructions and those for accusative constructions in split-ergative languages, which happen to be the same or very similar across languages (cf. Spreng 2010),<sup>2</sup> and postulate the existence of an antipassive functional head that is aspectually specified as [-telic] and that licenses either inherent case or accusative case on the internal object. Spreng (2012), for instance, argues that the presence of the antipassive morpheme in the split-ergative language Inuktitut is determined by the meaning of the construction: antipassive morphology, for instance, is obligatory with punctual telic verbs, which have perfective viewpoint by default, to convey imperfective viewpoint.

In the functional camp, there are two possible ways to deal with patterns of syncretism (or polysemy):

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<sup>2</sup> The best-known triggers for accusative and antipassive configurations in split-ergative languages are tense/aspect, the semantics of the internal argument (e.g. non-specific objects), certain person feature constellations of the arguments, negation and more generally unactualized/counterfactual states of affairs (cf. Spreng 2010).

- (i) by resorting to some general semantic/functional “core” that encompasses the whole semantics of a grammatical item/construction. Cases in point are the notion of “relative elaboration of events” as invoked, for instance, by Kemmer (1993) in her analysis of middle voice phenomena or by Janic (2013, 2016) to account for the reflexive/reciprocal/antipassive syncretism, or the notion of “(un)actualized state of affairs” invoked to account for the distribution of “(ir)realis” markers across languages (cf. Elliott 2000; see Bybee et al. 1994: 239; Bybee 1998; Cristofaro 2012, Mauri & Sansò 2012; Mauri & Sansò 2016 for alternative views on the existence of a grammatical category of “reality status”):

“It will be argued [...] that there is a semantic property crucial to the nature of the middle that has not been previously observed, one which, in fact, subsumes the notion of ‘subject-affectedness’. This general property, which I term **relative elaboration of events** is the parameter along which the reflexive and the middle can be situated as semantic categories intermediate in transitivity between one-participant and two-participant events, and which in addition differentiates reflexive and middle from one another.” (Kemmer 1993: 3, emphasis in the original)

“Pour l’expliquer, nous prendrons en compte la notion d’élaboration relative de l’événement, celle-ci empruntée à Kemmer (1993). Partagée par les constructions réfléchi et antipassive, cette propriété sémantique peut être traitée comme **le possible facteur qui aurait pu déboucher sur l’extension du réfléchi vers l’emploi antipassif.**” (Janic 2013: 256, my emphasis)

“A REALIS proposition prototypically asserts that an event or state is an actualised or certain fact of reality; [...] an IRREALIS proposition prototypically implies an event belongs to the realm of the imagined or hypothetical, and as such it constitutes a potential or possible event but it is not an observable fact of reality.” (Elliott 2000: 66-67)

The idea behind this approach is that these notions are somehow conceptually relevant to the speaker (and thus possibly universal, given that various languages have constructions/markers encoding them), being part of his/her mental representation. In other words, the speaker categorizes extra-linguistic situations based on general notions such as “unrealized state of affairs” or “low elaboration of the event”, and adopts a given construction/marker to express new situations by virtue of its encoding one of these notions. Antipassive situations, i.e. situations in which the verbal action has no end-point or in which the end-point is irrelevant enough to be omitted, can be categorized by means of middle/reflexive/reciprocal markers because they share with middle/reflexive/reciprocal situations precisely this feature of low(er) elaboration of the event with respect to the transitive encoding of the same event. The syncretism with other aspectual categories can be motivated along similar lines, e.g. in terms of unboundedness of the event.

- (ii) By considering the diachrony of constructions. Language change happens in (and is driven by) local contexts: it is not the abstract semantic core of a given construction/marker that is extended from one real-world situation to another (leading to semantic expansion, e.g. of a reflexive marker to cover also antipassive situations). Rather, there are specific contexts in which given constructions/markers are reinterpreted, coming to serve new functions.

The syncretism of the antipassive with reflexive, middle or reciprocal is better explained by adopting the latter approach, i.e. by considering the possible contexts in which a reflexively/reciprocally marked verb can be reinterpreted as referring to a situation with no overtly specified endpoint. It has been shown that the (local) reinterpretation path is from reciprocal to antipassive, along the following path (cf. Bostoen et al. 2015; Creissels & Nouguier-Voisin 2008; Sansò 2017):

- (10) A & P hit each other > A & P cooperate in hitting events > A & P hit (non-reciprocal; antipassive, plural subject) > A hits (antipassive; singular subject)

Cross-linguistic data appear to confirm the reality of the path in (10):

- a) on the one hand, there are languages in which there is an antipassive/reciprocal polysemous marker which is NOT used to encode reflexive events: in Tirmaga (Surmic), for instance, the reciprocal-anti-passive morpheme is *-inen-*, while the reflexive marker has the form *éna* for singular selves and *eygó* for plural selves (Bryant 1999: 60; Sansò 2017: 194);<sup>3</sup>
- b) on the other hand, there are languages that appear to be halfway on the grammaticalization path in (10). In Hup, for instance, there is a reciprocal marker that also implies co-participation (cf. (11a)). Such a marker is generally admitted only when there is a plural agent, while being blocked for singular agents (cf. (11b)), as is expected for reciprocal markers. With a few verbs in which the reciprocal meaning is lexicalized (e.g. fight), however, singular agents are admitted: in these cases, the implication of cooperating agents is no longer there, and the construction simply maintains an object-demoting function, as in (11c).

(11) Hup (Nadahup; Epps 2005: 405-407)

- a. *yaʔambõʔ=dəh*                      *ʔũh-g'áç-áy*  
dog=PL                                      RECP-bite-DYNM  
"The dogs are biting each other/are fighting."
- b. *\*yúp=ʔĩh*                      *ʔũh-nóm'-ýy*  
that=M                                      RECP-poke-DYNM  
"That man is poking (someone)."
- c. *yúp=ʔĩh*                      *ʔũh-máçh-áy*  
that=M                                      RECP-hit-DYNM  
"That man is fighting (with someone)."

A diachronic-typological approach thus provides more reliable explanations than an analysis of syncretism patterns in terms of shared semantic features, and is able to tell us which patterns of syncretism need explanation and which are simply accidental/epiphenomenal. The resulting explanation is also less falsifiable by new patterns, as it is always possible to explain them in a language-specific way.

### 2.3. Semantic properties of the antipassive

According to Polinsky (forthcoming, p. 8), none of the "interpretive" proprieties of the antipassive (e.g. aspectual meanings, associations with atelicity, etc.) is essential to its definition. This is true, given the amount of cross-linguistic variation of antipassive constructions. Polinsky (ibidem) further suggests the following implicational universal:

- (12) If an antipassive construction can have a perfective (telic) interpretation, it must also have an imperfective (non-telic) interpretation.

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<sup>3</sup> There are also languages in which there is a reflexive/antipassive polysemous marker, to the exclusion of reciprocal situations. To account for these cases, however, two scenarios can be hypothesized:

- (i) either an originally polysemous reflexive/reciprocal marker has developed an antipassive interpretation, but a new reciprocal marker has emerged in the meantime, replacing the original marker in reciprocal situations and leaving us with an epiphenomenal synchronic polysemy between reflexive (only) and antipassive (many Australian languages appear to corroborate this scenario, see Sansò 2017: 196-197);
- (ii) or there has been a syntactic calque from a language with a reflexive/reciprocal/antipassive polysemous marker (e.g. Russian), in which the target language has simply extended its own (monosemous) reflexive marker to antipassive situations (as in a number of languages in intensive contact with Russian; see Sansò 2017: 195).

This universal can be explained straightforwardly within a diachronic-typological approach. The known sources of antipassives are constructions that are typically used in imperfective/atelic contexts. One of the possible sources of antipassives are agent nominalizations in predicative function (cf. Sansò 2017: 180-182). In Huastec, antipassives are formed by suffixing the morphemes *-Vm-* or *-Vl-* to the CV(:)C root and adding the incomplete, completive or perfect suffixes (*-∅*, *-a:ɣ*, and *-a:maθ* respectively). When the completive and perfect suffixes are added, the vowel of the antipassive morpheme is deleted: *ɣah-om* dig-ANTIP, *ɣah-m-a:ɣ* or *ɣah-l-a:ɣ* dig-ANTIP-COMPL, *ɣah-m-a:maθ* dig-ANTIP-PF. The demoted object can be expressed by means of an oblique phrase headed by *k'al* ‘with’ (cf. (13a)). The same morphemes are used to form agent nominals from transitive verbs, as in (13b).

(13) Huastec (Mayan; Edmonson 1988: 163-164)

- |    |                                       |                     |        |                 |                  |     |      |
|----|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------|-----------------|------------------|-----|------|
| a. | ʔa                                    | Sa:ntos             | haʔiɣ  | ɣah-l-a:ɣ       | k'al             | ʔan | mo:m |
|    | the                                   | Santos              | he.who | dig-ANTIP-COMPL | with             | the | well |
|    | “It was Santos who was well-digging.” |                     |        |                 |                  |     |      |
| b. | haha:ʔ                                | k <sup>w</sup> ahat | ti     | ɣah-om          |                  |     |      |
|    | he                                    | PROG                | SUB    | dig-ANTIP       |                  |     |      |
|    | ‘He is digging.’                      |                     |        |                 |                  |     |      |
| c. | ʔahat-n-om                            | “singer”            | <      | ʔahat-n-aʔ-     | “sing”           |     |      |
|    | bi:n-k-om                             | “gift giver”        | <      | bi:n-k-aʔ-      | “give as a gift” |     |      |
|    | ɣah-om                                | “digger”            | <      | ɣah-            | “dig”            |     |      |
|    | nu:h-ul                               | “seller”            | <      | nuh-            | “sell”           |     |      |

Non-verbal predications such as those in which the predicate is an agent noun (with or without a copula) are generally atemporal (and thus inherently atelic), as their function is to encode identity (*he is my father*) or group membership (*he is a teacher*; cf. Curnow 2000, Hengeveld 1992: 75ff., among others). It is therefore expected that the bridgehead from “agent noun” to “antipassive” are atemporal/atelic contexts. Once grammaticalized as an antipassive, the construction may extend to telic contexts as well.

Another common source of antipassive constructions are constructions formed by a verb meaning ‘do’ and an action nominalization (Sansò 2017: 189-193; Creissels 2014; see also Jacques 2014). The antipassive suffix of Soninke exemplified in (14) ends in *-ndi/-ndí*:

(14) Soninke (Mande, Western Mande; Creissels 2014: p. 9 of the manuscript)

- |    |  |            |           |      |
|----|--|------------|-----------|------|
| a. | sámáqqè-n  | dà         | léminè-n  | qíñí |
|    | snake-DET  | TR         | child-DET | bite |
|    | “The snake bit the child.” (transitive construction) |            |           |      |
| b. | sámáqqè-n  | qíñí-ndí   |           |      |
|    | snake-DET  | bite-ANTIP |           |      |
|    | “The snake bit (someone).”                           |            |           |      |

Creissels (2014: 17ff.) traces back this suffix, which happens to be partially homophonous with the causative suffix *-ndí*, to a Proto-West-Mande form *\*tin* “do”, grammaticalized in two different constructions in Soninke: a causative periphrasis and an antipassive periphrasis. Semantically, these processes of grammaticalization are similar to well-known diachronic pathways involving verbs meaning ‘do’ or ‘make’ (cf. French *faire acheter* “make (someone) buy” vs. *faire des achats* “do (some) shopping”). This hypothesis, according to Creissels (2014: 18), would account for the otherwise unexplained formal similarity between the antipassive and the causative markers in Soninke.

Constructions in which a verb meaning ‘do’ is accompanied by an action nominalization are generally used to encode habitual predications, a typical case of atelic predication. A search of the string *do + the + V-ing* on the BNC provides the following results: in the overwhelming majority of cases (33 out of 37; 89.2%), the

predication is in the present tense and denotes a habitual, iterative or durative (and thus atelic) action. Thus, the implication *telic* > *atelic* might be diachronic in nature:

(15) source > antipassive (atelic) [> antipassive (telic)]

Another semantic restriction that appears to characterize various antipassive constructions across languages has to do with person constellations: in Polinsky's words (forthcoming, p. 9, emphasis in the original), "while in some languages, the antipassive is impossible with highly individuated (first or second person) objects [...], some languages *require* the antipassive construction specifically with these roles". A case in point is Ixcatec, where the AP construction is more or less systematically used when a 1<sup>st</sup> person object is involved in the verbal action, as in (16):

(16) Ixcatec (Popolocan; Adamou 2014: 383)

$\phi i^2 k a^2 h u^2 - m i^2 \quad d i^2 - n i^2 s j o^2 - r i^2$   
bring-ANTIP Dionisio-HON  
"Mr. Dionisio brought (us)."

This somewhat contradictory behavior may be simply a manifestation of the tendency for argument-defocusing strategies to be used when the speaker wants to avoid mentioning speech act participants, mainly for pragmatic reasons. Similar cases involving impersonal subject pronouns of the *man* type used as equivalents of 1<sup>st</sup> person plural subject pronouns are well-known (see Giacalone Ramat & Sansò 2007).

#### 2.4. Lexical restrictions of the antipassive

There are two facts that have fostered lexicalist approaches to the antipassive, i.e. approaches that "postulate a lexical rule that affects clausal argument structure, demoting the object/theme to an oblique nominal" (Polinsky forthcoming, p. 10). First, in many languages with an antipassive, the antipassive is lexically determined, i.e. not all verbs can form an antipassive, and there are verbs that are incompatible with the antipassive construction. Eton is a case in point, allowing the antipassive with a handful of verbs:

(17) Eton (Bantoid; Van de Velde 2008: 129)

- a.  $n u \eta$  'drink'  
 $n u \eta - n i$  'be in a relationship of exchanging drinks with somebody'
- b.  $d i$  'eat'  
 $d i - n i$  'be in a relationship of exchanging food with somebody'
- c.  $l a y$  'tell'  
 $l a \grave{a} - n i$  'chat, talk'
- d.  $d u g \grave{a}$  'deceive'  
 $d u g - n i$  'deceive each other, be deceitful'

Second, antipassives may undergo operations such as causativization and other syntactic operations that take a word (and not a syntactic structure) as input. In Halkomelem, for instance, the antipassive feeds causativization, as in (18):

(18) Halkomelem (Central Salish; Farrell 1992: 81)

|           |            |  |           |               |           |                        |               |
|-----------|------------|--|-----------|---------------|-----------|------------------------|---------------|
| <i>ni</i> | <i>cən</i> | <i>q<sup>w</sup>əl-ám-stax<sup>w</sup></i> | <i>ʔa</i> | <i>sténiʔ</i> | <i>ʔə</i> | <i>k<sup>w</sup>θə</i> | <i>səplil</i> |
| AUX       | 1.SBJ      | bake-INTR-CAUS                             | DET       | woman         | OBL       | DET                    | bread         |

'I had the woman bake the bread.'

According to Farrell (1992: 81), “if the output of the antipassive rule were a syntactic structure [...] the causative rule, which manipulates argument structures, should not be able to follow it”. The best way to deal with this fact is thus to conceive of antipassivization as a lexical rule, i.e. as a rule that takes a word with its argument structure as input and yields a word with a modified argument structure as output.

In a diachronic-typological perspective, the lexical idiosyncrasies of antipassive constructions can be explained in an alternative fashion, although somewhat speculatively in the absence of clear diachronic data. As discussed above, for instance, the diachronic path reciprocal > antipassive is likely to have its onset stage with a few verbs only, typically verbs with a lexicalized reciprocal meaning, as in Hup (recall example (11)). In Eton, the verbs in which the reciprocal suffix *-ni* yields an antipassive meaning include verbs like ‘tell’, ‘drink’ and ‘eat’, that indicate sociable activities *par excellence*. Another possible source of lexical restrictions in a diachronic perspective are those cases in which the antipassive marker derives from a generic noun. In these cases, the original semantics of the generic noun (e.g. ‘person’ vs. ‘thing’) may persist in the resulting construction, leading to antipassives that are limited to verbs that subcategorize human or non-human objects. A case in point is Koasati, exemplified in (19), where the antipassive-like prefix *a:ti-/a:-/at-/a-* (cf. (19a)) is said to derive from the independent noun *a:ti* “person” (exemplified in its full form in (19b); Kimball 1985: 136) and is limited to verbs that subcategorize human objects (Sansò 2017: 184-185):

(19) Koasati (Muskogean; Kimball 1985: 136-137, 153)

- a. *im-aláhkka-k*                      *íkso-t*                      *ibisna:t-o:si-Ŵhco-k*  
 3POSS-relatives-SBJ    not.exist-CONN                      3PRO.alone-DIM-HAB-SS  
*at-pahókfa-t*                                      *á:ta-Ŵhco-toho-k*  
 INDF.OBJ.HUM-join-CONN                      dwell[SG]-HAB-RL-IV.PST  
 “He had no relatives, and being entirely by himself, used to join up with people to live.”
- b. *á:ti*    *hí:ca-li-:kitta-p*                                      *sobbáyl-o:si-t*                      *hí:ca-li-t*  
 person see-1.SS-II.PST.PTCP-NEW.TOP    remember-DIM-CONN    see-1.SS-PST  
 “I saw and remembered everything about that person that I used to see.”

## 2.5. Oblique marking vs. omission of the object and their possible explanation

Finally, a diachronic-typological approach is also able to provide hints as to the reason why in some antipassive constructions the object is marked as an oblique, while other antipassives do not allow the overt expression of the object.

The overt expression of the object is systematically blocked in all the antipassive constructions derived from the incorporation of a generic/indefinite item in the sample used in Sansò (2017). This might depend on the fact that the sources of these antipassives had already an overtly expressed object, albeit a generic one.

As for the oblique marking of the object, recall that two recurrent sources of antipassives are agent nominalizations and action nominalizations. In these two kinds of nominalizations, the patient argument may be encoded as a possessor, and possessors are generally marked as obliques across languages (e.g. by means of a genitive/instrumental case or through a prepositional phrase). The oblique marking of objects in antipassive constructions might thus represent a case of persistence of the syntactic features of the source construction. In Huastec, for instance, the object is encoded as an oblique in the antipassive construction, as in (13a), and the oblique phrase is the same through which possessors are encoded in this language, as shown by (20):

(20) Huastec (Edmonson 1988: 529)

- niši*    *t'oknal*    *ʔin*                      *k'a:l*                      *ʔan*    *ǰ'ika:č*  
 that    basket    ERG.CLIT                      property                      the    girl  
 “That basket is the girl’s.”

### 3. Conclusions

The only significant universal concerning antipassive constructions in a diachronic-typological approach has the form of a universal historical generalization (cf. Moravcsik 2010: 69):

- (21) **Source:** in most languages, antipassives have historically arisen from one of the following sources:
- a. Agent nominalizations
  - b. Action nominalizations
  - c. Generic elements in object position
  - d. Reciprocal constructions

**Process:** in many of these historical processes, some features of the source constructions may be preserved (e.g. in terms of coding properties of arguments or aspectual restrictions/preferences); antipassive constructions deriving from different sources may also end up being quite undifferentiated from one another in terms of function and distribution.

There is an underlying universal functional generalization underlying the universal historical generalization in (21):

- (22) In all languages, the expression of a transitive action without specifying the object is discourse-relevant (i.e., is a recurrent communicative problem). Languages adapt more basic lexical items (e.g. nominalizations) or constructions (the reciprocal or the generic object construction) to encode such a discourse-relevant function (i.e., to solve this communicative problem). In the process, some of the properties of the adapted strategy may change as the result of reinterpretation, but they need not, as the discourse goal is achieved (and the communicative problem is solved) even in the absence of syntactic change. Fully-fledged antipassives are syntactically more prominent in ergative languages because they allow the expression of the agent as the single argument of an intransitive construction, a position which, unlike the ergatively-marked agent argument in two-argument clauses, is accessible to various syntactic operations.

More generally, in a diachronic-typological perspective, the very same idea that there are antipassive “triggers” (Spreng 2010) can be reversed: tense/aspect, person feature constellations, irrealis contexts etc. do not trigger antipassive constructions. On the contrary, as discussed above, antipassive constructions can be shown to derive from constructions that are overwhelmingly associated with a given tense/aspect (e.g. copular constructions with an agent nominalization; constructions of the type ‘do the V-ing’, etc.). Moreover, as argument-demoting constructions, antipassives can become conventionalized whenever the speaker wants to avoid mention of a speech-act participant in object position (for pragmatic reasons). Most of the diversity characterizing antipassives across languages thus can find a diachronically sound explanation under such an approach.

### Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 = 1st, 2nd, 3rd person; II, IV = verbal classes; ABS = absolutive; ANTIP = antipassive; AOR = aorist; AUX = auxiliary; CAUS = causative; CLIT = clitic; COMPL = completive aspect; CONC = concessive; CONN = connective suffix; DET = determiner; DIM = diminutive; DUR = durative; DYNM = dynamic; EGOPH = egophoric; EMPH = emphatic particle; ERG = ergative; EXCL = exclusive; FCT = factual; HAB = habitual; HUM = human; IND = indicative; INDF = indefinite; INS = instrumental; INTR = intransitivizer; LOC = locative; M = masculine; MASS = mass pronoun; NEW.TOP = new topic; OBJ = object; OBL = oblique; PL = plural; POSS = possessive; PRF = perfect; PRO = pronoun; PST = past; PTCP = participle; PVB = preverb; RECP = reciprocal; RL = realis; SBJ = subject; SG = singular; SS = same subject switch reference marker; SUB = subordinator; TNS = tense marker.

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