ACQUIRING THE PASSIVE VOICE IN DAGAARE AND LITHUANIAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

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IMPORTANCE OF PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

- *Shifts focus from doer* to *action*

- Promotes objectivity and formal tone

- Adds variety and sophistication to writing

- Useful when the agent is unknown or irrelevant

Key Idea:

 Builds clarity and neutrality in academic language

INTRODUCTION

Passives underexplored in Dagaare and Mabia languages

Lithuanian: well-studied, morphologically rich passive system

This study: comparison of passive constructions

Aim: compare Dagaare and Lithuanian passives and discuss implications for language learning

OBJECTIVES

1 Classify Dagaare and Lithuanian within their language families

2 Analyze passive verbs, action nominal passivization, and reflexive constructions

3 Identify implications for language learning

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Shibatani (1985) prototype of passive constructions

Cross-linguistic prototype: **agent defocusing**

Question: is this universal, or language-specific?

LITERATURE REVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

- Passives in Indo-European vs. African languages
- Dagaare: passives largely neglected in literature
- Lithuanian: studied as a "conservative" Indo-European language

THE DAGAARE LANGUAGE

Niger-Congo → Gur → Mabia

2–3 million speakers (Ghana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire)
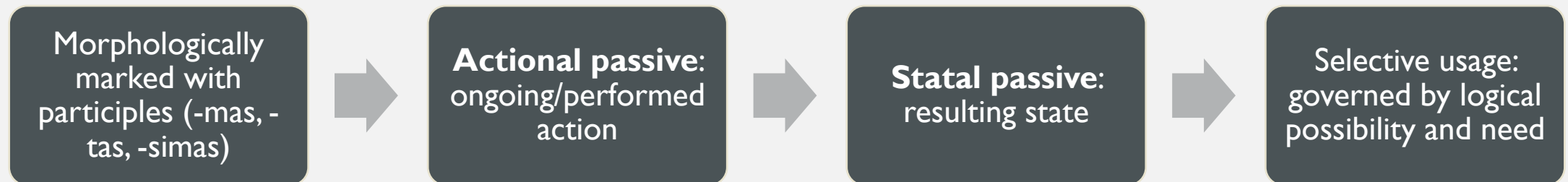
Northern dialect shows passive constructions

THE LITHUANIAN LANGUAGE

- Baltic branch of Indo-European
- ~3.6 million speakers worldwide
- Preserves archaic features of Proto-Indo-European
- Rich case and participial system

PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN LITHUANIAN

Morphologically marked with participles (-mas, -tas, -simas)

→

Actional passive: ongoing/performed action

→

Statal passive: resulting state

→

Selective usage: governed by logical possibility and need

EXAMPLES FROM LITHUANIAN

rašomas "being written"

rašytas "written"

Actional vs. statal contrasts (*statomas* vs. *pastatytas*)

Use across tenses and moods

DAGAARE EXAMPLES

wɛ̀r "cut open" → patient subject passive possible

tɔ̀ "touch" → no passive; *tɔ̀* "pound" → passive allowed

Action nominals: rare passives (subject/object of base verb)

REFLEXIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Lithuanian: reflexives can passivize (*-si-* marker)

Dagaare: reflexives cannot passivize

Why? → Agent = Patient, so no meaningful promotion possible

Supports patient promotion hypothesis over agent defocusing

KEY DIFFERENCES

Feature	Lithuanian	Dagaare
Morphology	Marked participles	No marking
Trigger	Logical necessity	Patient promotion
Reflexives	Passivizable	Not passivizable
Agent role	Defocused	Excluded

IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

- Learners must grasp **different triggers** of passivization
- Shows passives are **language-specific phenomena**
- Pedagogical insight: avoid universalist assumptions in

teaching passive voice

- Highlights role of semantics (patient change-of-state)

in African languages

BENEFITS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- Common in academic and scientific texts

- Improves reading comprehension

- Enhances grammatical awareness

- Allows flexible sentence emphasis

- Strengthens overall communication skills

Key Idea:

 Mastering the passive voice improves precision and fluency

CONCLUSION

Lithuanian: selective, morphologically marked passive

Dagaare: unmarked, driven by patient promotion

Evidence challenges Shibatani's claim of universal agent defocusing

Implication: passivization is **language-specific**, with diverse cognitive

and pedagogical effects