PASSIVES IN MODERN STANDARD AND TUNISIAN ARABIC

Zouhair MAALEJ

Abstract

The paper proposes a descriptive contrastive study of the passive in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Tunisian Arabic (TA). It purports to show that MSA's *mabni: li-lma hu:l* (literally, predicated of the unknown) or apophonic passive (AP) and TA's passive forms differ morphologically (infixation vs. prefixation), syntactically (initial vs. initial/non-initial passive verb, agent-defocusing/deletion vs. agent-deletion), and pragmatically (cued processing vs. uncued processing). The paper draws mainly on McCarthy's prosodic morphology (1981), Jaeggli's θ-role Absorption Theory (1986), and the Functional Sentence Perspective school (Chafe, 1970 ; Enkvist, 1979 ; Halliday, 1994).

Key words: θ-role absorption, case, infixation, prefixation, prosodic morphology, presupposition, pragmatics, syntax.

Le présent article offre une étude descriptive et contrastive du passif vocalique de l'arabe standard et l'arabe tunisien. Il s'agit de démontrer que le passif vocalique de l'arabe standard diffère de l'arabe tunisien tant au plan morphologique (infixation vs. prefixation) et syntaxique (défocalisation ou effacement de l'actant vs. effacement de l'actant) qu'au niveau pragmatique, et ce malgré la relation de diglossie qui relie les deux variétés.

INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes a contrastive study of the passive in MSA and TA. It purports to show that MSA's AP and TA's passive forms differ morphologically (infixation vs. prefixation), syntactically (initial vs. initial/non-initial passive verb), and pragmatically

(agent-defocusing/deletion vs. agent-deletion, cued processing vs. uncued processing). To do so, it seeks to ground their respective passive constructions in a morphosyntactic-cum-pragmatic framework, drawing mainly on McCarthy's prosodic morphology (1981), Jaeggli' -role Absorption Theory (1986), and the Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) as represented by Chafe (1970), Enkvist (1979), and Halliday (1994).

The paper follows a descriptive method, therefore showing very little argumentation. As to data collection, it has evolved in two different directions. The data relating to MSA draws on early and modern grammarians, since MSA has no native speakers of its own to check data with. However, the data about TA comes from native speakers of TA (such as relatives, private acquaintances), whose utterances are cross-checked with those of colleagues. The author himself as a native speaker of TA is also the source of some data. The other source of data is two full-size books, namely *Kl :m l-li:l* or *Night's Talk* (1997) and *Famil a* or *Family* (1997), originally two oral plays written in TA for dramatic performance by Tawfik Jebali and Al-Fadhel Al-Jaibi respectively.

The paper is divided into four major sections. The first offers a brief survey of the linguistic situation in Tunisia. In the second, morphological features of the passives in MSA and TA are contrasted. In the third, syntactic features relating to word order, agentivity, and transitivity are considered. The last section exploits the findings of the first and second sections, and builds pragmatic distinctions between the passives in MSA and TA.

1. THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN TUNISIA

Throughout its history, Tunisia has been witness to competing languages (Garmadi, 1983:1 ; Maamouri, 1983 : 11). In colonial times, the linguistic situation was described as "a 'minor' bilingual structure: two related languages in contact with a completely unrelated third language" (Maamouri, 1983: 13). The two related languages in question are MSA and TA, and the third language is French, the first two entertaining a diglossic or High to Low relation and the third forming a bilingual structure.

However, in the post-colonial era, as Garmadi (1983: 7) rightly pointed out, the linguistic situation is so complex that it could be referred to as "poly-glossic" (Lawson & Sachdev, 1997: 191), with classical Arabic (CA) or literary Arabic (LA) as "some sort of 'sacred' fiction" that stands for the religious, cultural and

literary heritage (Maamouri, 1983: 15) ; MSA as the language of education, the media, and official dealings ; TA as the spoken medium, but showing regional varieties (Jammoussi,1988 : 82) ; educated Arabic (EA) as a hybrid variety taking both from all the other varieties and from French and Italian ; Berber, a minority language spoken in the southern part of Tunisia, and still heard in the capital (Maamouri, 1983: 14) ; and French, which is at least partly the language of education at all the educational levels, though official claims to the contrary may be heard.

Although it is unequal to French for obvious historical reasons, English should be added to the picture as competing with French (Battenburg, 1996-1997) as the language of technology and business. In relation to MSA and TA, the situation is very much closer to the one described by Holes (1995b: 39) for other parts of the Arab world, where "the behaviour of most Arabic speakers, educated or not, is rather one of constant style shifting along a cline at opposite ends of which are 'pure' MSA and the 'pure' regional dialect, more accurately conceived of as idealised constructs than real entities."

Since this study is restricted to MSA and TA, very little will be said of the other varieties. MSA is defined as "the uniform variety of Arabic which is used all over the Arabic speaking world as the usual medium of written communication ... on occasions accompanied by some degree of formality and solemnity..." (Bahloul, 1994: 1-2).[1] MSA is considered as "the modern descendent of Classical Arabic, unchanged in the essentials of its syntax, but very much changed and still changing, in its vocabulary and phraseology" (Holes, 1995b: 4). It has been rightly pointed that MSA is "in constant interaction with all spoken dialects in the Arab world" (Bahloul, 1994: 2). Within the same perspective, Holes (1995b: 39) mentions "the interpenetration of MSA and the dialects." This is the feature that was claimed to constitute the diglossic bond between MSA and the rest of spoken varieties in the Arab world (Ferguson, 1972). Diglossia is defined as involving two distinct but related varieties (a high and a low variety) of the same language used in the linguistic community for clear-cut sociolinguistic functions, with the low being used in conversation (Ferguson, 1972: 234 ; Holmes, 1992: 32). It is, however, beyond

---

[1] Bahloul calls this variety Standard Arabic (SA), and uses it interchangeably with MSA and Modern Literary Arabic (MLA). However, equating MSA with MLA is assuming a spoken dimension for MLA equal to that of MSA, which we know is restricted to Koranic sermons and prayers.

the scope of the present talk to take a position on this particular issue.

Compared to MSA, TA is syntactically an SVO-dominated variety (Maamouri, 1983: 17). More importantly, its morphological system is more reduced. Both its noun inflection and verb endings consist of *suku:n* or implosion, making the three case distinctions morphologically undistinguished. Moreover, its pronoun system is restricted to seven personal pronouns, undifferentiated for dual, gender and case[2] almost like the English pronoun system. As has been made clear (Garmadi, 1983 : 6 ; Maamouri, 1983 : 16 ; Jammoussi, 1988 : 82), TA is more than a language variety entertaining a diglossic link with MSA since it itself includes a wide variety of clearly differenciated versions. This precisely makes it counterfactual to speak of TA as the dialect of all Tunisians.[3] However, the tendency is real to think that the one spoken in the greater Tunis area is, in Holes's words (1995b: 40), "a kind of local 'dialect standard'."

2. MORPHOLOGICAL DISTINCTIONS

Morphological processes can be concatenative or non-concatenative. Concatenative morphology is concerned with processes of word formation whereby morphemes are "attached one after the other." Nonconcatenative morphology, however, involves factors other than affixation in word building (Katamba, 1993: 165).

2. 1. *Infixation and MSA*

Whatever their grammatical persuasion, early Arab grammarians agreed that the AP in MSA is "a verb built for the object whose agent has not been named."[4] The verb system of MSA has been shown to exhibit features of nonconcatenative morphology (McCarthy, 1981 ; Keenan, 1985 ; Spencer, 1991 ; Katamba, 1993 ; Bahloul, 1994 ; Holes, 1995b, to name only a few), where alterations to the verb stem or root determine various morphological derivations by superimposing pattern templates to the root. One of the most relevant of these morphological operations is infixation.

---

[2] Gender is only present in third person singular between *huwa* (he) and *hijja* (she). However, the second person which is differentiated in MSA for *anta* (you-masculine) and *anti* (you-feminine), adopts in TA the feminine *anti* as unmarked for both males and females.

[3] Garmadi (1983: 6) argues that "[t]he Tunisian dialect [here, TA] is, as we all know it, the language of all the Tunisians" (my translation). It is, however, hard to agree with this statement since not all varieties in the country are intelligible to all, at least lexically.

[4] My translation (Al- astaraba:di, 128).

The verb is assumed to consist of a discontinuous root tier (consonantism) being penetrated by a prosodic tier or template showing a skeletal sequence of consonants and vowels, and a melody tier (vocalism) marking the phonological melody a particular verb pattern takes (McCarthy, 1981: 399). Accordingly, the passive in MSA for the triliteral verb *kl* (to eat) is as follows:

Root tier	k l
	a a a
Prosodic tier	CVCVCV
Melody tier	u i

Thus, the stem vocalism of the passive is **u-i**, which is infixed into the verb stem *kl,* yielding ***ukila*** (was eaten). Note that, as McCarthy (1981: 405) pointed out, "[o]ne result of the prosodic theory is that all this manipulation can be accomplished without recourse to transformational formalism." Indeed, passivisation in MSA is essentially an operation affecting the verb. In Chomsky's words (1986: 120), the passive[5] in Arabic is a lexical operation bringing changes to the verb, and does not consist, as for English, in major transformations in the syntactic structure of the sentence.

2. 2. *Prefixation and TA*

It has been demonstrated that the AP is becoming nearly extinct from most dialects of Arabic.[6] Accordingly, the passive in TA with triliteral verbs is made by prefixing the verb in the perfective with **t-** as in:

> (1)   *-wa:b **t** -ktib* (the letter written-*pass* [7]: The letter was written)

---

[5] MSA has another passive form reminiscent of the English adjectival passive, which is a passive participle (*ism maf u:l*) basically occurring in nominal sentences, and formed on the *maf u:l* pattern as in *al- a:mi atu maftu: atun abwa:buha:* (the university open-*pass* doors its: The university's doors are open). Note that this particular kind of passive construction expresses a state or event and not a process (e.g. *maftu: atun* as a result of *fata a*).

[6] For a survey of this topic, see Catherine Taine-Cheikh (1983).

[7] In this paper, *nom* stands for nominative; *acc* for accusative; *gen* for genitive; *act* for active; *pass* for passive; *obj* for objective, *interro* for interrogative, *neg* for negative.

Note that the prefix for the passive in TA is **t-**. But the same prefix is shared by the so-called pseudo-passive as in *l-k :s t-kissar* (the glass broke) in TA. Brahim (1996: 43) reported, however, that **in-** is in complementary distribution with **t-** as a regular prefix in the passive formation of some regional varieties. Thus, while people of the north and coastal areas might say *ma-ji-t- rab* (it is undrinkable), those of Zarzis (south of Tunisia) will say *ma-ji-t- rab* or *ma-ji-n- rab* (it is undrinkable). This form too is reminiscent of MSA's reflexive form in **in-**, formed on the *infa ala* pattern for the reflexive in CA and MSA as ***in**-kasara l-   su* (the glass broke). However, no apophonic form similar to what Holes (1995a: 74) discovered in Omani Arabic survives in the variety of TA under study.

In the imperfective, on the other hand, the **t-** is found between the root and the tense/gender prefix marker as in the following:

(2) Imperfective passive
- *am ma-   :   na* (meat *neg* eat-*pass raw*: Meat is not eaten raw)

Note that the alterations of the root that take place in the perfective and imperfective in TA are preserved by the passivisation process. Thus, the passive in TA does not have a stem vocalism similar to MSA, but only consist in prefixing **t-** to the verbal stem in both the perfective and the imperfective. Therefore, it is more like a concatenative process.

However, apart from this type of passive, TA offers another form more often used in the interrogative form both in the perfective and the imperfective:

(3a) Perfective
t   i dabbust l-ma / dabbust l-ma t   i?
(Come upstairs-*interro* bottle the   water / bottle the water Come upstairs-*interro:* Did the bottle of water come upstairs ?)

(3b) Imperfective
*   i s-ri:r mi-   bb :* (enter-*interro* the bed from the window: Does the bed come   through the door)

As is clear in the English equivalents, (3a) and (3b) sound like metaphorical utterances, where we know that *bottle* and *bed* are incapable to *come upstairs* and *come through the door*. In case they are rendered into English, (3a) and (3b) give respectively:

> (3a') Has the bottle of water been brought upstairs ?

> (3b') Can the bed be brought in through the window ?

Note that opting for this form in requests in TA is a strategy of avoidance of the vocative with *you* as in   *i dabbust l-ma?* (did you bring the bottle of water upstairs?), which is seen as a rather rude direct request.

Like MSA, TA offers a passive construction built on the *maf u:l* pattern like in the following TA proverb:

> (4)   *w-zajtik fil-ku:z* (bread your bake-*pass* and oil your in the ewer: (literally) your bread is baked and your oil is in your ewer)

This form is related to the prefixed form with **-t,** where *t-xbiz* and   are two sides of the same coin, where the one presupposes the other:

> (5)   *ibzik t- biz* (bread your bake-*pass*: your bread is baked)

3. SYNTACTIC DISTINCTIONS

In generative linguistics, the passive is a syntactic transformation involving two major steps: an obligatory "NP-preposing" and a more optional "AGENT-postposing" (Chomsky, 1972: 41). Reactions against this account were quick to show that such a transformational view cannot account for what is known as "unpassives" or adjectival passives, which do not have an active counterpart (Siegel, 1973 ; Hust, 1977 ; Chomsky, 1986). Another weakness of the transformational account has to do with its applicability to a restricted set of families of languages. A case in point is Arabic as a representative of the Semitic family (McCarthy, 1981 ; Spencer, 1991 ; Katamba, 1993 ; Bahloul, 1994 ; Holes, 1995b).

   The relative failure of the transformational account led, with Chomsky's *Lectures on Government and Binding* (1981), to the revision of the transformational view of the passive construction. Hence, the passive is now regarded as a case of NP-movement within the Move-∞ module of Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1986 ; Ouhalla, 1994: 79). This account seems to be more defensible and readily applicable to languages other than the members of the Indo-European family. Thus, nontransformational accounts agree that the passive is "associated with the subjectivation of constituents which may fulfil the function of direct objects" (Siewierska, 1988: 243). In GB terms, -assignment is withheld to allow the object to occupy the empty slot reserved for the subject, and case is not assigned to the object to allow it to take a case marking similar to the subject's. In the same line of thought, Jaeggli (1986: 587) argues that "a passive verb involves the 'absorption' of the external -role of the verb and that it is prevented from assigning objective case." Specifically, Jaeggli considers the passive in non-Semitic languages as a case of θ-role absorption by the -en suffix of an external argument in an [NP,S] position which is not assigned a θ-role, paying specific attention to morphosyntactic features. This type of analysis is complementary to McCarthy's prosodic morphology, and seems quite attractive for a treatment of the passive in MSA, if modifications are brought to it.

   Both MSA and TA have what Keenan (1985: 251) calls "strict morphological passives" as against "periphrastic passives," and both use "basic passives" and "non-basic passives" (impersonal ones, using "they"). Since in MSA the passive is not a copular construction, it is not a syntactic passive but a lexico-phonological passive governed by verb morphophonology (Chomsky, 1986: 120). The occurrence of a passive verb triggers the absorption of the objective NP into [NP,S] position as a *naa?ib faa3il* (literally, a substitute for the subject), without having to move it. Notice that in MSA the AP does not result in thematising the nonagent[8] as is the case in many Indo-European languages. Since verb morphophonology, by virtue of occupying initial position in MSA, absorbs its external argument, the accusative case is not assigned to the external argument of the verb, namely, its direct object. Instead, the external argument is assigned a -role and case coincident with

---

[8]   It should be made clear that when the nonagent occurs in a complement clause to the complementiser *inna*, it is thematised as in the following example: *alimtu anna l- awla:da qutilu fi a:di i qit a:rin* (I was informed that the children were killed in a train accident). Note that though the nonagent is thematised, it receives acc case-marking.

that of the internal argument of the verb, thus making it acquire all the diacritic features of the nominative candidate in whose place it is now standing, namely, nominative case, unaccusative θ-role, gender agreement with the verb, etc.

It should be noted that MSA passivises both self-transitive verbs and transitive verbs passing through a preposition. In the latter case, what follows the verb is not an **O** (nom) but something occupying *nom*-position while being marked for the genitive case as in the following example:

(6) *ru iba fi l-bi a: ati* (covet-*pass* in the merchandise-*gen*: The merchandise was coveted)

However, it can be demonstrated that the overt genitive case is only masking a covert accusative case as can be shown through co-ordination:

(7) *ru iba fi l-bi a: ati* wa *: ibatah :* (covet-*pass* in the merchandise-*gen* and owner-acc its: The merchandise and its owner were coveted)

Clearly, if *l-bi a: ati* and *a: ibatah :* were of different case marking, it would not have been possible to conjoin them. It should be noted that, independently of the case used, Arabic considers the NP occupying the postverbal slot as a nominative case (*fi ma alli raf in*). In the rest of this section, MSA and TA are to be contrasted on three levels: agent taking, word order constraints, and transitivity.

3. 1. *Agentivity*

There is unanimous agreement among early and modern grammarians that the *mabni: li-lma hu:l* occasions the syntactic erasure of the subject-actor and its substitution by the object-affected noun, which not only occupies its position but also assumes all the diacritic features a subject usually takes (Sibawajh, 1985 : 42 ; Al- astaraba:di, 1996 : 128 ; Al-hama a:ni, 265; Al- :ri, 1996: 74 ; an-na:diri, 1995 : 503 ; ibn ja i: , Frajzyngier, 1982 : 279, to name only a few). However, in the Koran it is not infrequent to find the traditional AP with agent in a *min* (from) phrase as in:

(8) *wa qa:lu law l : nuzzila alajhi jatun min rabbihi*[9]
(They say: "Why is not/A sign sent down/To him from his Lord?")

The mention of the agent in a PP is pragmatically-motivated: the origin of the Koran having been disputed by disbelievers, the mention of the agent reinforces the idea that it is God who is at the origin of the Koran.

The motivations for deleting the [NP,S] are both lexical (conciseness) and semantic such as, the obvious nature of the agent, ignorance of who is the agent, fear for oneself of mentioning his/her name, or fear that something might happen to his/her by mentioning his/her name (an-na:diri, 1995: 503). The following examples illustrate this:

(9a) *tah :wana t-tilmi: u fa- uqiba*. (The pupil was lazy, so he was punished)[10]

(9b) *uliqa l- insa:nu a i:fan*. (Man was created weak)[11]

(9c) *qutila m l jaqillu an alfaj az irijjin fi - ahri l-ma: i*. (No less than two thousand Algerians were killed last month.)

The agent in (9a) is not mentioned because refraining from mentioning it is lexically economical whereas in (9b) there is no use in stating that it is God the agent of creation. However, in (9c) the agent may be actually unknown to, feared or protected by, the speaker.

In MSA, however, this disinclination to use passive forms with agent started to be abandoned, and passives do occur with agent demotion, using prepositional phrases such as *min Tarafi* or *min qibali*[12] (from), especially in journalese:

(10) *... ma mu atun fala i:nijjatun mad umatun min arafi surijja wa i:ra:n*. (... a group of Palestinians backed by Syria and Iran)

---

[9] Surat al- an a:m (or Cattle), translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, p. 298.
[10] Taken from an-na:diri (1995: 503).
[11] From the Koran (Sura IV, *n-nis :* or The Women).
[12] Retso (1993: 25-26) mentioned from ma&ny different sources other prepositional agents such as *minhu, lahu, ala: jadi, min :nibi*, etc.

Holes (1995b: 260) rightly explains that the occurrence of such a passive is "a straightforward syntactic transfer from European languages." As a confirmation of this claim, the existence of patterns of bilingualism (e.g. Arabic/French in former French colonies and Arabic/English in English ex-colonies) in the Arab world makes the possibility of such a transfer of syntactic features highly possible especially among educated people.

In TA, on the other hand, agentive forms are unacceptable[13] because of lack of PPs such as *min ɣarafi* or *min qibali*:

(11a) *wildi t-samma fi-susa.* (My son was appointed in Susa.)

(11b) * *wildi t-samma fi-susa min ɣand l-wza:ra.* (My son was appointed in Susa on the part of the ministry.)

TA being a variety for everyday communication, speakers seem, for practical reasons, to prefer to leave agents unmentioned, and in case they want to mention them recourse is had to the active voice.

3. 2. *Word order*

Although MSA is a VSO language, yet it does not disallow nonverbal elements to occupy initial position in discourse:

(12a) *ḍaraba Zajdun ɣamran.* (hit Zaid-*nom* Omar-*acc*: Zaid hit Omar)

(12b) *ḍaraba ɣamran Zajdun.* (hit Omar-*acc* Zaid-*nom*: Omar was hit by Zaid)

(12c) *Zajdun ḍaraba ɣamran.* (Zaid-*nom* hit Omar-*acc*: It is Zaid that hit Omar)

(12d) *ɣamrun ḍarabahu Zajdun.* (Omar-*nom* hit him-*acc* Zaid-*nom*: It was Omar that was hit by Zaid)

---

[13] Dr Hassan Abdeljawwad (private communication), of the University of Yarmuk, Jordan, kindly drew my attention to the existence of forms in some Arabic dialects as in *l-ḥabl tgaṭṭaɣa mini r-ri:ḥ* (the wind caused the rope to break). In TA, the same form exists with *bi* (by) as in *l-ḥabal tqaṭṭaɣ a bir-ri:ḥ*. However, it is still my belief that this is a causative pattern rather than a passive form.

(12a) is an unmarked Arabic verbal sentence, where the VP is theme and the NP is rheme ; (12b) is also a verbal sentence except that the accusative element occupies a rightmost position compared to its unmarked position after the nominative element ; (12c) is a nominal sentence presenting the nominative element as theme and the verb is in the rheme ; and in (12d) the accusative occupies rightmost position as a theme and the rest constitutes the theme.

However, in spite of these combinatorial possibilities the passive in MSA only occurs unmarkedly as a VP NP sequence[14], where VP is the theme and the objective NP promoted to subject position as rheme in Halliday's terminology:

> (13a)   *uriba   amrun*. (hit-*pass* Omar-*nom*: Omar was hit)

> (13b) * *amrun   uriba*. (Omar-*nom* hit-*pass*: Omar was hit)

It should be noted that (13b) is not accepted as a canonical form unless it is used to express a contrastive stress, as in the following exchange:

> (14a)   *uriba   amrun*. (hit-*pass* Omar-*nom*: Omar was hit)

> (14b) *hal qulta   uriba Zajdun?* (Question word said (you) hit-*pass* Zajdun-*nom*: Did you say Zaid was hit?)

> (14c) *l :.   amrun   uriba*. (No Omar-*nom* hit-*pass*: No, Omar was hit)

It should also be noted that in a nominal sentence a noun in the nominative case followed by an AP form is not necessarily affected by the process as in the following example:

> (15) *al-f :risu qutila   aw :duhu* (the horseman-*nom* killed-*pass* horse-*nom* his: The horseman's horse was killed)

---

[14] There is a sense in which MSA resorts systematically to SVO order. For instance,the complementiser *inna* requires a S V sequence (nominal sentences), yielding sentences such as *inna l- ittifa:qa qad um ija bajna ma lisi l- amni wa l- ira:qi* (The agreement between the Security Council and Iraq was signed indeed). an-na:diri (1995: 569) explains that *inna* emphasises the attribution of the predicate to the subject.

Al-f :risu is in the *nom* case because it is the theme of the sentence, and it is related to *aw :duhu* by the resumptive pronoun *hu,* which signals a relation of annexation between them (*aw :du l-f :risi:* the horseman's horse) as is clear through the equivalent in English.

In contrast to MSA, TA allows the interchangeability of VP and NP, accepting a VP NP sequence and an NP VP sequence as in:

(16a) *wildi t-samma fi-susa.* (son-my appointed-*pass* in Susa: My son was appointed in Susa)

(16b) *t-samma fi-susa wildi.* (appointed-*pass* in Susa son-my: My son was appointed in Susa)

Of course, the two structures are not stylistic variants but are pragmatically motivated as will be shown in section **4** below.

3. 3. *Transitivity*

MSA allows both two-place and three-place verbs to passivise as in:

(17a) *wa l : ta sibanna l-la i:na qutilu: fii sabi:li l-l :hi amw :tan.*[15] (and do not deem those dead who have been slain on God's path)

(17b) *zuwwi a Zajdun ibnata a i:.* (Zaid was married to my brother's daughter).

Furthermore, MSA admits, like English, two passives with ditransitive verbs, one with the Od and one with the Oi as in:

(18a) *zuwwi a Zajdun ibnata a i:.* (Zaid was wedded to my brother's daughter).

(18b) *zuwwi at ibnatu a i: li-zajdin.* (My brother's daughter was wedded to Zaid).

In TA, however, monotransitive verbs passivise freely but ditransitive verbs only passivise with the inanimate Od:

---

[15] Taken from Wright (1955: 49).

(19a) *i - ahrijja t*   (the salary poured-*pass*: The salary was drafted)

(19b) *i - ahrijja t*   *-li.* (the salary poured-*pass* to me:The salary was drafted to   me)

(19c) * *t*   *i - ahrijja* (poured-*pass* I the salary: I was drafted the salary)

When the animate Oi is focused upon, recourse is had to another impersonal form reminiscent of the active, but which is semantically passive, where both Od and Oi are mentioned but the agent is mystified through an impersonal "they" (Keenan, 1985: 247):

(20) *i - ahrijja s abbu-h :-li.* (the salary poured they it to me: They drafted the salary to me)

Myhill (1997: 807) calls this "vague *they,*" because it is ambiguous between two readings: either the people of the ministry or the people of the bank.

4. PRAGMATIC DISTINCTIONS

A morphosyntactic analysis of the passive in MSA and TA does not explain, however, the choice of the passive as a mode of expression. This points to the fact that "[t]he notion of **voice** is fundamentally **pragmatic**" (Givon, 1990: 566).[16] Since every speech event takes place in a social context, the passive offers speakers a way of "information packaging" which allows prominence to fall on participants affected by the process rather than on actors (Foley & Van Valin, 1985). Thus, the passive enables speakers to place actor and affected participant in the structure of information in New and Old slots respectively (Halliday, 1994). In this respect, the passive construction is, like topicalization, a case of foregrounding, which "draw[s] our attention to" an element prominently placed (Keenan, 1985: 243), namely, the affected participant. Owing to the possibilities in packaging information and structuring it in terms of New/Old available for MSA and TA, it is claimed that processing

---

[16] Author's own boldface type.

their corresponding passives involves at least quantitative differences.

4. 1. *Agent-defocusing*

A correlate of the morphosyntactic or -phonological changes to the verb in MSA and TA, is the pragmatic function of "agent defocusing" (Shibatani, 1985 : 830 ; Myhill, 1997). Agent defocusing in MSA occurs in two ways : (i) defocusing the agent to the "full extent," by deleting it, or (ii) defocusing it to some degree, i.e. by allowing it to show up in a PP in a rhematic position as in:

> (21) *qutila m l jaqillu an alfaj az irijjin fi - ahri l-ma: i.* (No less than two thousand Algerians were killed last month.)

> (22) *is-tuqbila safi:ru iiraan min t arafi ra I:s d-dawlati.*
> (Iran's ambassador was received by the president of the state)

One piece of evidence for the reality of defocusing or demotion is case shift from *nom* to *gen*. Brahim's (1996) major thesis is that the strategy behind choosing the passive has to do with the speaker's intention to hide/mystify logicosemantic agents.

Nevertheless, agent-defocusing, contrary to common beliefs, should not be understood to be a form of downgrading the agent by relegating it to end position in discourse.[17] Actually, one of the motivations for using the passive construction in many languages (e.g. Arabic, French, English, etc.) is to assign "*new* to an agent noun root" (Chafe, 1970: 221). The following example is repeated for convenience to illustrate this point:

> (23) *wa qa:lu law l : nuzzila alajhi y :tun min rabbihi*[18] (They say: "Why is not/A sign sent down/To him from his Lord ?")

---

[17] Givon (1990: 567) argues that in the prototype passive "the patient-related, stative-resultative aspects of the events are now in focus, i.e. are more salient," however, "the unimportant agent is more likely to be non-referring and unindividuated." This claim contradicts Chafe and Halliday's analyses, but it is beyond the scope of the present paper to mount a case for or against this.
[18] Surat Al- an a:m (or Cattle), translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 298.

The agent *min rabbihi* is presented as demoted, but in that particular position it receives even more prominence than if it were in initial position. Communication-wise, it is presented as *new* or late news in the rheme. Psychological evidence for this may be sought in work on memory and information retrieval (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981: 88).

TA, on the other hand, adopts the "full extent" defocusing strategy, in that no agent shows up as in *t-qatlit* (she was killed), or by using what Myhill (1997: 807) calls "vague *they*" as in *qatl-u-ha* (they killed her), where *they* does not have an anaphor, and could mean either one or many killers. Owing to lack of overt case-marking, TA is more analytical, thus requiring more effort in processing. To show this, let us consider the following examples:

(24a) *s rift i - ahrijja.* (spent (I)-*act* the salary: I spent my salary)

(24b) *i - ahrijja wajja.* (the salary little: The salary is small)

(24c) *i - ahrijja t-s abbit.* (the salary poured-*pass*: The salary was drafted)

All the occurrences of *i - ahrijja* are invariant phonologically and morphologically. However, while the one in (26a) is in the accusative case, the ones in (26b) and (26c) are in the nominative case. But even though both are in the nominative case, they differ radically: in (26b) *i - ahrijja* is [NP,S], whereas in (26c) it is an NP subject substitute, which, for convenience, will be represented as [NP,SS]. It can be argued that *i - ahrijja* is a VP-internal complement in (26c) where it is Patient affected by the spending. The argument structure of *s abb* (pour) specifies that *i - ahrijja* could only realise a patient semantically.

4. 2. *Presupposition*

Another point that deserves mentioning has to do with the pragmatic notion of presupposition. MSA presupposes the process and asserts the participant as in :

(25) *qutila l- undijju* (killed-*pass* the soldier-*nom* : The soldier was murdered)

Communication-wise, the previous utterance could be an answer to the question, *m : : ada a?* (What happened?). What is presupposed, therefore, is, in Enkvist's words (1979 : 137), "information that the speaker believes that the recipients of the message already have." Thus, the killing is presented as theme and *old* information. What is asserted, however, is *l- undijju*, which counts as *new* information. In MSA, then, the AP coincides at the textual level with the OLD Theme of the message, whereas the affected participant occurs as NEW within the Rheme.

In TA, the situation is a bit different. The syntactic interchangeability between the elements of the sentence discussed earlier may yield two possible pragmatic scenarios. It seems that the unmarked construction in TA is the Subject-Predicate order, where S is presupposed (note the use of the definite determiner *d-*) and Predicate is asserted as in :

(26) i*d-dabbusa t- irbit* (the bottle drunk-*pass* : The bottle was drunk)

Moreover, Predicate-Subject is also possible as in :

(27) *t- irbit   id-dabbusa* (drunk-*pass* the bottle : The bottle was drunk)

Bubenik (1979 : 297) claims that sentences like these are cases of "predicate-subject-inversion." Accordingly, *t- irbit* in (29) is the Theme of the message but a NEW one, and could be an answer to the question : *i -s a:r/ i -θamma* ? (What happened ?).

4. 3. *Processing*

Communication-wise, the use of a passive construction is very much dependent on knowledge sharedness, recoverability, and deliberate agent defocusing for various reasons and purposes. In MSA, by virtue of the fact that the AP morphology occupying initial position in discourse, the hearer/reader is guided by this early occurrence to a passive processing. This entails on the part of the hearer the expectation that the agent will be defocused. Therefore, this creates a certain preparedness to the effect that the non-agent will have to be expected and considered semantically affected by

the process and informationally new, thus minimising energy loss in the processing act.

TA, however, may be said to require more processing energy in the form of backtracking. The two syntactic orderings offered by TA are responsible for such a situation. Processing is minimised if the speaker begins like in MSA with the passive verb as in :

(28) *t- irbit id-dabbusa* (drunk-*pass* the bottle : The bottle was drunk)

Note that even this type may pose problems of processing as it might be confused with similar but nonpassive constructions such as *tqallqu lul :d* (the kids were bored), where the verb *tkallku* starts with a letter similar to the passive prefix, but which is part of the verb. Ambiguity is resolved via recourse to the semantic valence of the verb. If, however, the speaker begins with an NP, processing will be comparatively maximised as in :

(29) *id-dabbusa t- irbit* (the bottle drunk-*pass* : The bottle was drunk)

In this case, the hearer needs to backtrack to give *d-dabbusa* an affected/patient status that would prevent an inanimate object from being considered as an actor. The distinction between "syntactic valence" and "semantic valence" (Moon, 1988 : 63) can be exploited to make the leap to a passive reading, where syntactic valence reduction should be reconstructed in terms of semantic valence. As such, the passive in TA may require more processing than in MSA.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study of the passive in MSA and TA, I adopted a nontransformationalist stand both because a transformational one explains mainly the syntactic mechanisms involved in passivisation, thus abstracting use from form and ignoring languages other than the Indo-European ones which are not based on transformations, movement and syntactic reorderings. However, by combining McCarthy (1981) and Jaeggli's (1986) respective views, I aimed at providing a more comprehensive framework for the passives under

study, paying due attention to their morphophonological and syntactic features, which I supplemented with a pragmatic trea.

It is my hope that I have succeeded in shedding some light on the passive similarities and differences in MSA and TA. Morphologically, the two varieties stand poles apart from each other, with MSA using infixation to derive the passive, and TA prefixation. This difference is a practical one since, TA being the medium of speech in everyday communication, prefixation is easier to apply than infixation. Syntactically, the major difference between the passive of these two varieties lies in both word order and agentivity. As to word order, the preferred unmarked construction in MSA is the AP in initial position, with the possibility of a marked one in non-initial position. With regard to agentivity, however, MSA is a case of short/long passive, whereas TA is a case of short passive, i.e. agent deletion. This leads to the pragmatics of the passive in MSA and TA in the light of these morphosyntactic differences. The passive in MSA allows both agent full defocusing and deletion, with the verb-initial constructions enhancing processing while postnominal-verb constructions depend more on anaphoric and/or cataphoric tracking in discourse. TA, however, is more difficult to process, as no predictability similar to that afforded by MSA is available.

The results of this inquiry into the differences between the passive in MSA and TA, suggest that, in spite of obvious lexical similarities, MSA and TA seem to be evolving in two distinct directions, with TA breaking loose from MSA in many respects such as the morphophonological and syntactic levels. Further research into the pragmatics of both varieties might reveal major departures. The following table sums up the contrasts arrived at in this paper :

ITEMS	MSA	TA
Morphology	Infixation	Prefixation
Syntax	- monotransitive and ditransitive verbs passivised - unmarked word order : VP NP - with or without agent	- only monotransitive verbs passivised - unmarked word order: NP VP - agentless
Pragmatic	agent defocusing or deletion	agent deletion

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Al- ans a:ri, Jama:l-iddi:n (1996). *ar u qat ri n-nada: wa ballu: : (Explication of Dewdrops and Watering extreme Thirst). Beirut : Dar l-kutub al- ilmijja.

Al- astaraba:di, Arra i (1996). *ar u r- ala l-k :fijati (Explication of l-k :fijati by r-) (vol. 4). Benghazi : Gar Younes University (Second edition).

Al-hama a:ni, Baha -iddi:n (n.d.). *arHu ibn- aqi:l (Explication of ibn- aqi:l). Beirut : Al-maktaba l- adi: a & Da:r ibn-zajdun (vol. 1).

Al-shorafat, Odeh (1991). "Case Assignment in Arabic and the GB Case Theory." *Linguistica Communicatio*, **3** : 2, 21-27.

an-na:diri, Muhammad as ad (1995). *Na wu l-lu ati l-arabijjati* (The Grammar of the Arabic Language). Beirut : Al-maktaba l- as rijja.

ibnu ja i: , muwaffak d-di:n (n.d.). *ar u l-mufa (Detailed explication). Beirut : a:lam l-kutub.

Bahloul, Maher (1994). *The Syntax and Semantics of Taxis, Aspect, Tense and Modality in Standard Arabic*. Ithaca : DMLL Publications.

Battenburg, John D. (1996). "English in the Maghreb." *English Today*, **48** : 12, 3-14.

_____ (1997). "English versus French: Language Rivalry in Tunisia." *World Englishes*, **16** : 2, 281-290.

Beaugrande, de R. & W. Dressler (1981). *Introduction to Text Linguistics*. London/New York : Longman.

Brahim, Ahmed (1996). *L'occultif. Hypothèse pour un traîtement trans-linguistique du "passif " et des structures apparentées*. Etudes Linguistiques 2 : Association Tunisienne de Linguistique.

Bubenik, Vit (1979). "Thematization and Passivization in Arabic." *Lingua* **49**, 295-313.

Chomsky, Noam (1972). *Studies on Semantics in Generative Grammar*, The Hague/Paris : Mouton.

_____(1986). *Lectures on Government and Binding. The Pisa Lectures* (4th edition). Dordrecht/Riverton : Foris Publications.

Comrie, Bernard (1977). "In Defense of Spontaneous Demotion : The Impersonal Passive." In : Peter Cole & Jerrold M. Sadock (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics. Grammatical Relations* (vol. 8). New York/London : Academic Press, 47-58.

Coetzee, John M. (1980). "The Rhetoric of the Passive in English." *Linguistics* **18**, 199-121.

Di Sciullo, Anne-Marie & Edwin Williams (1988). *On the Definition of Word*. Cambridge/London : The MIT.

Enkvist, Nils Eric (1979). "Marked Focus: Functions and Constraints." In : S. Greenbaum, G.Leech & J. Svartvik (eds.), *Studies in English Linguistics for Randolph Quirk*. London and New York : Longman, 134-152.

Foley, William A. & Robert D. Van Valin, Jr (1985). "Information Packaging in the Clause." In : T. Shopen (ed.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Structure (Clause Structure, I)*. Cambridge: C.U.P., 282-364.

Ferguson, C.A. (1972). "Diglossia." In : Pier Paolo Giglioli (ed.), *Language and Social Context*. London : Penguin Books, 232-251.

Frajzyngier, Zygmunt (1982). "Indefinite Agent, Passive and Impersonal Passive : A Functional Study." *Lingua* **58**, 267-290.

Garmadi, Salah (1983). "La situation linguistique actuelle en Tunisie: problèmes et perspectives." In : R.M. Payne (ed.), *Language in Tunisia*. Tunis : Bourguiba Institute of Modern Languages, 1-10.

Givon, Talmy (1990). "Voice and De-transitivization." *Syntax : A Functional Typological Introduction* (vol. II). Amsterdam : John Benjamins, 563-644.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Second edition). London : Edward Arnold.

Holes, C. (1995a). "Passive Verbs in Omani Arabic." Cambridge : Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of AIDA, 69-74.

_____ (1995b). *Modern Arabic. Structures, Functions and Varieties*. London/New York : Longman.

Holmes, Janet (1992). *Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London/New York : Longman.

Hurst, Joel R. (1977). "The Syntax of the Unpassive Construction in English." *Linguistic Analysis*, **3** : 1, 31-63.

Jaeggli, Osvaldo A. (1986). "Passive." *Linguistic Inquiry*, **17**: 4, 587-622.

Jammoussi, Souad (1988). "Code-Switching and Triggering in Educated Speech in Tunisia." *Revue Tunisienne des Langues Vivantes* **3**, 81-100.

Katamba, Francis (1993). *Morphology*. Basingstoke/London : Macmillan Press Ltd.

Keenan, Edward L. (1985). "Passive in the World's Languages." In : T. Shopen (ed.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description. Clause Structure* (vol. 1). Cambridge : C.U.P., 243-281.

Lawson, Sarah & Itesh Sachdev (1995). "Linguistic Differentiation in Tunisia: Status and Solidarity Dimensions." In : H. Ajroud (ed.), *The Canon : Differences and Values* (English Studies Series). Tunis : Faculté des Lettres de la Manouba, 175-192.

Maamouri, Mohamed (1983). "The Linguistic Situation in Independent Tunisia." In : R.M. Payne (ed.), *Language in Tunisia*. Tunis : Bourguiba Institute of Modern Languages, 11-21.

McCarthy, John J. (1981). "A Prosodic Theory of Nonconcatenative Morphology." *Linguistic Inquiry*, **12** : 3, 373-418.

Moon, Kyung Hwan (1988). "Syntactic Valence Reduction and Passivization." *Linguistic Analysis*, **18** : 2, 61-119.

Myhill, John (1985). "Pragmatic and Categorial Correlates of VS Word Order." *Lingua* **66**, 177-200.

_____ (1997). "Toward a Functional Typology of Agent Defocusing." *Linguistics* **35**, 799-844.

Ouhalla, Jamal (1994). *Introducing Transformational Grammar. From Rules to Principles and Parameters*. London/New York : Edward Arnold.

Owens, Jonathan (1984). "Structure, Class and Dependency. Modern Linguistic Theory and the Arabic Linguistic Tradition. *Lingua* **64**, 25-62.

Resto, Jan (1983). *The Finite Passive Voice in Modern Arabic Dialects*. Goteborg : Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Romaine, Suzanne (1994). *Language in Society. An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford : O.U.P.

Shibatani, Masayosha (1985). "Passives and Related Constructions: A Prototype Analysis." *Language*, **61** : 4, 821-848.

Sibawajh, Abu Bi r. *Kit :bu Sibawajh* (The Book of Sibawajh). Beirut: Dar Al- i:l.

Siegel, Dorothy (1973). "Nonsources of Unpassives." In : J. Kimball (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics* (vol. 2). New York/San Fransisco/London : Seminar Press.

Siewierska, Anna (1988). "The Passive in Slavic." In : M. Shibatani (ed.), *Passive and Voice*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia : John Benjamins Publishing Co., 243-289.

Spencer, Andrew (1991). *Morphological Theory. An Introduction to Word Structure in Generative Grammar*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Stalnaker, Robert C. (1977). "Pragmatic Presuppositions." In : A. Rogers, B. Wall & J. P. Murphy (eds.), *Proceedings of the Texas Conference on Performatives, Presuppositions and Implicatures*. Virginia : Center for Applied Linguistics, 135-147.

Wright, W. (1955). *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Two volumes translated from the German of Caspari). Cambridge : The Syndics of the C.U.P.

SAMPLE FROM TA CORPUS (passive verbs are in boldface type)

1. aqhim **it a:sbu** n-na:s ha: uma. (p19)
2. z :jid l- adi: ha: i uma ma a:di **titqrab**. (p.116)
3. l-qanun   **aq** ala n-n :s lkul. (p. 119)
4. **w-ti ri** r-ruza: wi - rubu <u>w-jitfarraq</u> l- alu. (p. 121)
5. al : l- a   am ma **jitba:** k :n bil- a:ra ba nma l-kla:s it **jitba: u** ka:n biz-zu:z (p. 121)[19]
6. Malka: hija z-zahra l- a:lja   w- a   ar minni

Malka: l-mawt   ma sub   tfarraq,   l- za:jiz   tqawrin   wis-
          .   (p. 25)[20]
7. Bahja: bajt z-zahra ma **tit alli** qbal larb i:n (p. 25)
8. Al-mufatti :   iddusi mta: ha jqu:l illi mar itha m uma
  amma aj ma ji bit illi **ma tidd w :** ˜ ˜ ˜ . (p. 43)
9. Babbouna: farksilha   wa:ji ha w-qulha ki:f tar a   tilqa l-b b **mballi** wid-da:r **mbidla** (p. 53)
10. Al-mufatti : s :hil huwwa l-malaff   . **all** (p. 63)
11. Al-mufatti : … i wtik   . -lu   fi   uruf
  a:m   a (p. 68)

---

[19] Examples 1-5 are taken from Taoufik Jbali's *kl m l-li:l* (*Night's Talk*).
[20] Examples from 6 onward are taken from Al-Fadel Al-Jaiebi's *Familja* (*Family*)

12. ma ni ri: nharwil ni ri kul sba: m a s-sitta w-nisf qbal ma **tit abba** bil-buzgilli:f (p. 82)

13. a im a t m a:h i na mil nwalli i fi ru :na z :da (p. 83)

KEYS OF TRANSLITERATION AND PHONOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION
 : alveolar stop (glottal)
 : voiceless interdental fricative
 : voiced palato-alveolar fricative
 : voiceless paharyngeal fricative
 : voiceless uvular fricative
 : voiced interdental fricative
 : voiceless palato-alveolar fricative
  : voiceless pharyngalized alveolar fricative
  : voiced pharyngalized inter-dental fricative
  : voiceless pharyngalized alveolar stop
 : voiced pharyngeal fricative
 : voiced uvular fricative
q: voiceless uvular stop
 : palatal glide
 : mid-low front vowel

Vowel length is symbolized by adding :
Emphasized consonants are doubled.

Département de Langue et Littérature Anglaises
Faculté des Lettres, Manouba
Université de Tunis I