ISOMORPHISM, CONVERSION AND LABILITY IN MANDE VERBAL MORPHOSYNTAX:

BIG CONSEQUENCES OF SMALL CHANGES

Dmitry Idiatov

LLACAN, CNRS, Sorbonne-Paris Cité, INALCO
dmitry.idiatov@cnrs.fr
- limited bound inflectional morphology
- (predominantly) suffixing
- **rigid** S (O) V X order
- TAMP (tense, aspect, mood, polarity) tend to be expressed syncretically but can be distributed across as many as 4 sites within the clause:

\[ \text{TAMP}_0 S \text{ TAMP}_1 (O) V - \text{TAMP}_2 X \text{ TAMP}_3 \]
• **obligatory** S (except for imperatives)

• in a transitive construction: **obligatory O** (except in Bobo and Boko-Busa cluster)

• minimally, O slot is filled with a **dummy 3SG** pronoun (such as à in Greater Manding)

• typically, S and O are separated by **TAMP₁** marker

• in some languages, detransitivizing and transitivizing **verbal derivational affixes**
isomorphism or “coexpression”

- isomorphism between \( V \cong N \):
  - **conversion**: normally \( V \rightarrow N \)
    
    \[
    \begin{align*}
    \text{break}_V & > \text{break}_N \\
    \text{walk}_V & > \text{walk}_N
    \end{align*}
    \]
  
  - only rarely \( N \rightarrow V \): no “omnipredicativity”

- isomorphism between \( V_T \cong V_I \):
  - **lability**: usually P-*lability* of the decausative and passive types
    
    - *The child broke the glass* > DECAUS: *The glass broke*
      
      > PASS: *The glass was broken (by the child)*
  
  - **passive P-*lability***, as found in Mande, is said to be typologically highly unusual (cf. Letuchiy 2006, Creissels 2014)
The two types of isomorphism are **both** most prominent within **one particular subgroup**, viz. **CSWM**.

Elsewhere, the two types of isomorphism are much more constrained.
Bamana, as an example of a CSWM language where both types of isomorphism are particularly prominent

More constrained situation in the rest of Mande
- typical types of V > N conversion
- passive P-lability and what is exactly unusual about Mande languages

Both types of isomorphism are endpoints of an evolution of the same light verb construction comparable to do-periphrasis in English.
Bamana (CSWM; Dumestre 2003; Vydrine 1999)

- “verbo-nominaux”, “neutrals”: any V can be used as N, such as action nominal (while the reverse is not true)

1. \( \text{fô ká dí} \)  
   \( 3\text{SG say QUAL}^+ \text{ be.nice} \)  
   ‘It’s easy to say.’ (lit.: ‘It’s saying is easy’)

2. \( \text{tè fô bó} \)  
   \( 3\text{SG IPFV}^- \text{ say deserve} \)  
   ‘There is no need to say it.’ (lit.: ‘It does not deserve saying’)

3. \( \text{táa té bèn ñ mà} \)  
   \( \text{go IPFV}^- \text{ suit 1SG on} \)  
   ‘I am not ok with leaving.’ (lit.: ‘Going does not suit me’)

\( \text{V} \cong \text{N IN BAMANA} \)
(4) ntòri **fili** kójugu bë à táa sánfè
    toad **throw** seriously IPFV⁺ 3SG make.go up
    ‘Seriously throwing a toad will make it go up in to the air.’

(5) **fā** sògo lá dọ́n bë nà
    fill meat with day IPFV⁺ come
    ‘The day that you will fill up yourself with meat will come.’

(6) kà ́ i ̀ cè ́ i ̀ fà sīya lá, ḻ̀ jòn fà lá dọ́n
    INF REFL deny REFL father tribe at  **humiliate** father at IDCOP⁺
    ‘To deny your father’s tribe is to humiliate your father.’

- These action nominalizations do **not** have the **full behavioral potential of regular nouns**:
  - Ban on their use with nominal determiners, such as ART -^L or PL -^w
  - Restriction on their use in Identificational Construction [X dọ́n]
Very many cases of V > N conversion as entity nominalizations:

- **kúma** ‘(vi) speak’ > ‘speech, things said’
- **bàna** ‘(vi) be, fall ill; (vt) make ill’ > ‘illness’
- **dímin** ‘(vi, vt) hurt’ > ‘pain’
- **mùgu** ‘(vi, vt) sprain (leg), dislocate (a joint)’ > ‘sprain, dislocation’
- **dúmuni** ‘(vt) feed’ > ‘food; meal; eating’

Much fewer cases of N > V conversion:

- **júfà** ‘corpse of an animal not slaughtered following the rites’ (from Arabic **gífà** ‘corpse’) > ‘(vi) die, kick the bucket’
- **búla** ‘laundry blue’ (from French **bleu**) > ‘(vt) give a beating (give bruises)’
- **dátusunu** ‘Datsun (a car brand)’ > ‘(vt) give a Datsun car as a present’

(productive model: [object X] > [give X as a present])
There are also overt \([V > N]\) NMLZ markers, such as:

- NMLZ *-li / -ni* action nominalization:
  
  *kúma* ‘(vi) speak’ ≅ ‘speech, things said’, *kúma-li* ‘speech; speaking’
  
  *táa* ‘(vi) go, leave’ ≅ ‘going; departure’, *táa-li* ‘going’

  *ɲègen* ‘(vt) draw, paint’ ≅ ‘drawing, painting (object)’, *ɲègen-ni* ‘(process, act of) drawing, painting’

- INF *kà* (cf. example 6)

- A range of specific entity NMLZ *-baga, -lan, -ya*, etc.
V ≥ N in Mandé

- **V > N conversion for entity NMLZ** is common but less rampant
  - Typically, V > N conversion gives result or product NMLZ:
    - ‘die’ > ‘death’ (rather than ‘the late one’)
    - ‘give’ > ‘gift’ (rather than ‘giver; sponsor’)
    - ‘steal’ > ‘theft’ (rather than ‘thief’)
  - Especially in NWM, V > N conversion may also give instrument NMLZ
    - ‘grind’ > ‘grindstone’
    - ‘go out’ > ‘gate, exit’ (next to ‘going out’)

- **Entity NMLZ with agentive semantics through conversion** is exceptional for plain [V] conversion, but more common for [OV], [OVX] and [VX] constructions

  Tura (SM) **vé să yǐ bã** ‘catch fish from water’ > ‘bird sp. (Anastomus lamelligerus)’
• **V > N conversion for action NMLZ** is usually **restricted to certain constructions** (one rarely speaks about “verbo-nominaux” in the descriptions)
  - O of a light verb in do-periphrasis style constructions
  - Modifier in Genitive constructions \([\text{GEN } N_{\text{HEAD}}]\) (typical examples of \(N_{\text{HEAD}}\) are postpositions originating in nouns or nouns with a rather general semantics, such as ‘thing’, ‘person’, ‘place’, etc.)
  - Oblique X of a control matrix verb marked by a postposition
All languages also have **overt NMLZ markers**: one or a few for \([V > N]\) action NMLZ and a wider range for entity NMLZ

**Overt \([V > N]\) action** (and to a lesser extent also entity) NMLZ markers tend to have **different sources in WM and SEM**:

- In SEM, action NMLZ go back to \(N_{\text{HEAD}}\) in Genitive constructions \([\text{GEN } N_{\text{HEAD}}]\) (such as Tura -yè or -dêê)

- In WM, action NMLZ tend to go back to a **light V in do-periphrasis style constructions** (such as Bamana -\(li/-ni\))

- Any $V_T$ can be used as $V_I$ with a DECAUS or PASS-like meaning (while the reverse is not true) with optional oblique argument flagged by postposition $fɛ$ (basic meaning is proximity in space)

a. $Wùlu$  $yé$  $sògo$  $dùn$.
   dog.DEF  PF.POS.TR  meat.DEF  eat
   ‘The dog has eaten the meat.’

   PASS

b. $Sògo$  $dùn-na$  $(wùlu$  $fɛ)$.  c. $Sògo$  $má$  $dùn$  $(wùlu$  $fɛ)$.
   meat.DEF  eat-PF.POS.INTR  dog.DEF  by  meat.DEF  PF.NEG  eat  dog.DEF  by
   ‘The meat has been eaten (by the dog).’  ‘The meat has not been eaten (by the dog).’

- Any $V_T$ can be used as $V_I$ with a DECAUS or PASS-like meaning (while the reverse is not true)

a. Jôli béna sìmi jóona. 
   blood.DEF FUT.POS coagulate soon
   ‘The blood will coagulate soon.’

b. Fînye béna jôli sìmi jóona. 
   wind.DEF FUT.POS blood.DEF coagulate soon
   ‘The wind will coagulate the blood soon.’
Bamana (CSWM)

- Even when the meaning is PASS, the interpretation of the oblique flagged with fɛ is not necessarily agentive

(1a) màracká-ᵊ bè tàga èn dàn jόona
Soninke-PL IPFV⁺ peanut this plant early
‘The Soninke plant this variety of peanut early in the season.’

(1b) tàga èn bè dàn jόona (màracká-ᵊ fɛ)
peanut this IPFV⁺ plant early Soninke-PL PP
‘This variety of peanut is planted early in the season (by the Soninke / in the Soninke area = chez les Soninké).’
Bamana (CSWM)

- Sometimes, neither the interpretation of the argument structure nor that of the oblique flagged with $fɛ$ are clear outside of a wider context

(1) $sòlimadén-wè sègin-na só syéma fɛ$

initiated-PL return-PFV$_I^+$ home initiation.caretaker PP

‘The initiated returned home with (accompanied by) the initiation caretaker.’

‘The initiated were made to return home by the initiation caretaker.’
Bamana (CSWM)

- There are very few A-labile verbs.
Across Mande, there are very few A-labile verbs.

In most non-CSWM languages, the range of P-labile $V_T$ is significantly more limited.

Many non-CSWM languages have complex lexical semantic and TAMP types of restrictions on P-labile use of $V_T$.

Most Mande languages do not allow the use of oblique with agentive interpretation with P-labile $V_T$ when used as $V_I$ or impose strong restrictions on its use and interpretation.
In a cross-Mande perspective, Mande PASS P-lability is **not a PASS “voice”** (argument structure preserving alternation with syntactic demotion of the agent argument).

It is much more a **valency-decreasing argument-structure reinterpreting derivation**. The patient is promoted to the subject role and the agent is demoted and normally suppressed because the agent is unknown, irrelevant, not sufficiently agentive (e.g., does not control the action), or is simply non-existent.
passive P-lability, as found in Mande, is said to be **typologically highly unusual** (cf. Letuchiy 2006, Creissels 2014)

At least Letuchiy (2006) speaks about the rarity of **agentive** PASS P-lability, that is such passive P-lability whereby the agent can be, and often is, expressed:

\[ \text{The man BUILD a house} \cong \text{The house BUILD by the man} \]

However, in Mande we normally have **agentless** P-lability, which may have DECAUS and PASS interpretations
The use of DECAUS forms as agentless PASS, i.e. in contexts where some agent must be present in the situation referred to but is not, and often cannot be expressed, is typologically well attested (cf. Creissels 2014:917-918)

"Le vin blanc se boit frais" ‘White wine is (to be) drunk cold’

*"Le vin blanc est bu frais"

DECAUS P-lability is also typologically common

That is, the occasional use of DECAUS P-labile verbs as agentless PASS is not particularly unusual as such

What is unusual (and what needs to be explained) is that in a subset of Mande languages (viz. SWCM) virtually all $V_T$ are P-labile.
Both the convergence of the two types of isomorphism itself and the fact that they are most prominent in the CSWM subgroup are related phenomena.

They are both endpoints of an evolution of the same light verb construction comparable to do-periphrasis in English.

- semantically: VFOC > ANTIP > DETR || NMLZ
- formally: light V > bound suffix > stem alternation & irregular stem pairs > allomorphy resolution in favor of one the two stem forms

The relevant light verb construction and start of these changes go back to Proto-Mande.

Subgroups differ in productivity and advancement of the changes.
There are various **overt action NMLZ markers**, but none is reconstructible to Proto Mande

**V > N conversion for action NMLZ** is basically **restricted to 2 types of constructions**

- O of a light verb in do-periphrasis style constructions
- Modifier in Genitive constructions \([\text{GEN } N_{\text{HEAD}}]\) (typical examples of \(N_{\text{HEAD}}\) are postpositions originating in nouns or nouns with a rather general semantics, such as ‘thing’, ‘person’, ‘place’, etc.)

The number of **P-labile \(V_T\)** is **limited**
- NWM languages (Soninke-Bozo, Bobo, Samogo) have at least two layers of DETR morphology, an old one and a new one (cf. Creissels 2012)

- Remarkably, both layers of DETR morphology also develop action NMLZ uses.

- The new layer originates in do-periphrasis construction with the verb *tin ‘do, make’ (Creissels 2012):
  - Soninke (NWM) -ndi ANTIPASS (and related -ndi CAUS)
  - Mandinka (CSWM) –ri ANTIPASS action NMLZ (and related -ndi CAUS)
  - Bamana (CSWM) -li action NMLZ
The old layer is reconstructed by Creissels (2012) as Proto WM suffix *-i which he relates to REFL pronoun *í.

The relation to the REFL pronoun is not plausible. To the very least, this relation would involve a violation of SOVX constituent order, which is extremely rigid across the family.

It is more likely that just like the new layer, the old layer originated in a do-periphrasis construction.
Besides DETR uses mentioned by Creissels (2012), some of the markers of this old layer also have action NMLZ uses and uses that involve O arguments:

- Soninke -i DETR (ANTIPASS, DECAUS, AUTOCAUS, REFL, PASS) & marks V_T when it incorporates its O.
- Bozo languages < -i> DETR (mostly ANTIPASS) & usually the same (occasionally marginally divergent) form of the V is used as action NMLZ and the “derivation base” (Blecke 1996), also for nominal compounds with O in the case of V_T.
- Bobo < -i> DETR (ANTIPASS, and at least DECAUS and PASS) & the same form of the V is used in nominal compounds, also for nominal compounds with O in the case of V_T (e.g.: *fuga* ‘trap, catch (vt)’ > *fige* (vi): *gbègi-fige-pérénš* ‘dog leash’ (dogs-catch\DETR-rope)) (Morse 1976; LeBris & Prost 1981).
- Dzuun -i action NMLZ (Solomiac 2007).
In many languages, the DETR & NMLZ < -i> has fused with many stems resulting in **V_T-V_I stem alternations**, often synchronically opaque.

This **irregular allomorphy is resolved** in favor of one of the two stem forms, V_T or V_I.

Interestingly, **the surviving V_I allomorph inherits both V_I & V_T usages as a P-labile V_T**

Creissels & Dramé (2015:9) about Soninke: “the vast majority of P-labile verbs end with i or e, and conversely, it seems that all the verbs that end with i or e and can be used transitively are P-labile, which raises the question whether this is really P-lability, or perhaps rather vacuous detransitivization, since Soninke has a detransitivizing suffix -i.”
Interestingly, the surviving $V_I$ allomorph inherits both $V_T$ & $V_I$ usages as a P-labile $V_T$.

It is likely that in CSWM languages (unlike the typical situation in Soninke), the same (i.e. inheritance of both $V_T$ & $V_I$ usages as a P-labile $V_T$) also happened when it was $V_T$ allomorph that survived.

This virtually made all verbs P-labile $V_T$ in CSWM.

Parallel to this, the same allomorph inherited action NMLZ usage of the earlier $V_I$ allomorph.

$V \cong N \& V_T \cong V_I$
Interestingly, we also find **a few traces of the same marker < -i > in SEM**, the other major branch of Mande:

- **Gban (SM) yà ‘(vt) put down, make sit down’ vs. yè ‘(vi) sit down’**
- **Gban (SM) nò ‘(vt) give smth (to smb)’ vs. nù ‘(vi) come’**
- **Tura (SM) bë ‘(n) wound’ vs. Mano (SM) bá ‘(n) wound; (vi) get covered with wounds (about body)’**

The traces in SEM are **much less numerous** than in WM.

So far, the traces are **only rarely nouns**, suggesting that either NLMZ use of < -i > was less common in Proto SEM or rather these NMLZ are later independent cases of V > N conversion following the model of entity NMLZ.

Recall, that in SEM, action NMLZ go back to N_{HEAD} **in Genitive constructions** [GEN N_{HEAD}], while in WM to light verbs.
It is plausible that just like the new layer of DETR&NMLZ markers, the old layer <-i> originated in a do-periphrasis construction.

The possible source is the verb *ɲà ‘accomplish, do’

Soninke (NWM) ɲá ‘(vt) do; (vi) happen’, ɲá.má ‘(vt) finish, achieve, accomplish, destroy’ (vi: ɲé.mé), Souther San of Yaba (EM) ɲá ‘do’, ɲá ‘finish’, Beng (SM) ɲã ‘(vi) finish’