On the syntax of the analytic passive in Kenyah

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1 Introduction

Many languages of Central Borneo have analytic passives, with agents optionally between the passive marker and the verb (PASS-Ag-V) or immediately following the verb (PASS-V-Ag) (see e.g. Clayre 1996, 2014, Soriente 2010, 2013, Smith, Erlewine & Sommerlot 2024, Sommerlot to appear). The *ən* passive in Lebo' Vo' Kenyah allows for both agent positions:

(1) **Three Kenyah *ən* passives: agentless, preverbal agent, and postverbal agent**

    kayu bioʔ inɨ ən (Kule) nəvəŋ (Kule) .
    tree big DEM PASS Kule cut.down Kule
    'The big tree was cut down (by Kule).'

Today we offer a detailed description of these *ən* passives in Lebo' Vo' Kenyah (hereafter: Kenyah).

▶ The three varieties of *ən* passives exhibit <u>strikingly different profiles of subject choice</u>. In particular, the agent-ful *ən* passives can be long-distance and involve non-case-driven (Ā) movement.

2 Kenyah basics

Kenyah has no case marking[2] and dominant SVO word order. Some intransitive subjects — especially, it seems, of unaccusatives — can be postverbal; see (3). Subjects are **bold** here.

(2) <u>SVO:</u>

    Kule nəkaw alot (inɨ) .
    Kule steal boat DEM
    'Kule stole (that) boat'

(3) <u>VS:</u>

    laɓoʔ **kayu inɨ** .
    fall.down tree DEM
    'The tree fell down.'

(4) <u>*VSO:</u>

    * nəkaw **Kule** alot (inɨ) .
      steal Kule boat DEM

(5) <u>*VOS:</u>

    * nəkaw alot **Kule** .
      steal boat Kule
    (but ok as '*pro* stole Kule's boat')

Subjects may precede or follow preverbal auxiliaries (e.g. NEG, TAM). With pronominal subjects, AuxSVO is often preferred. Otherwise, SAuxVO is most common.

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[2] With one exception, in Appendix A.

(6) {**Kule**} ɲeʔ {**Kule**} nəkaw alot nɨ   .
     Kule   NEG Kule   steal boat DEM
     'Kule didn't steal that boat'

Against this background, we observe that the *ən* construction consistently involves "promotion" of a non-agent to subject position.

(7) **ən promotes an argument to become the subject:**

   a. **kayu bioʔ inɨ** ɲeʔ ən (irɨ) nəvəŋ taop ray   .
      tree big DEM NEG PASS 3pl cut.down yesterday
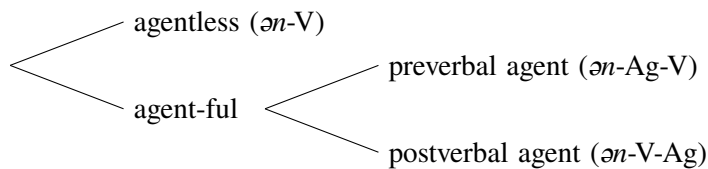   'The big tree was not cut down (by them).'

   b. kayu bioʔ inɨ_i, ɲeʔ **nɨ_i** ən nəvəŋ   !
      tree big DEM   NEG DEM PASS cut.down
      'This tree, don't cut it down!' (passive imperative; literally: this tree, it isn't cut down)

ən also makes the agent (canonical subject) optional, and consistently involves the overt morphology *ən*. This satisfies (most of) the criteria for "canonical passives" (see e.g. Siewierska 2013, Zúñiga & Kittilä 2019, Legate 2021), so we refer to the *ən* construction as a "passive." (Where agents are present, we will see reason below to think of these as "non-canonical passives" in these terms.)

3 Passive agents

As noted above, there are three types of *ən* passives, which we think of as follows:

(8) **Varieties of ən passives:**

         ┌── agentless (*ən*-V)
         │   ┌── preverbal agent (*ən*-Ag-V)
         └── agent-ful ─────────┤
                                └── postverbal agent (*ən*-V-Ag)

The implicit agents of agentless passives may be interpreted as existential/indefinite (∃) or as 'you' (addressee) in what we call *passive imperatives*.

Imperatives are expressed using agentless *ən* passives.[3] Their subjects may be postverbal (9b). Imperatives are incompatible with the perfective-like auxiliary *ləpah* (10) or past time reference.

(9) **Passive imperatives:**

a. kayu bioʔ ən nəvəŋ !
   tree big PASS cut.down
   'Cut the big tree!'

b. ən nəvəŋ kayu bioʔ !
   PASS cut.down tree big
   'Cut the big tree!'

(10) kayu bioʔ *ləpah* ən nəvəŋ (!)
     tree big ASP PASS cut.down
     'The big tree has already been cut.' / *'Cut the big tree (already)!'

There is a difference in interpretational range between preverbal and postverbal passive agents: non-volitional initiators cannot be postverbal.[4]

(11) **Non-volitional initiator cannot be postverbal passive "agent":**

a. baloy (kasah) nuɓaŋ kayu nɨ . (<N-tuɓaŋ)
   wind heavy N-fall.over tree DEM
   'The (heavy) wind made the tree fall over.'

b. kayu inɨ ən {*baloy (kasah)*} nuɓaŋ {**baloy (kasah)*} .
   tree DEM PASS wind heavy N-fall.over wind heavy
   'The tree was made to fall over by the (heavy) wind.'

But otherwise, there is no difference between preverbal and postverbal agents in simple examples.

4 Passive subject choice

As we have seen, in simple examples with monotransitive verbs, all three *ən* passives behave equivalently, promoting the one undergoer argument to subject:

(12) **Same undergoer subject with agentless, preverbal agent, and postverbal agent passives:**

kayu bioʔ inɨ ən (Kule) nəvəŋ (Kule) .
tree big DEM PASS Kule cut.down Kule
'The big tree was cut down (by Kule).' =(1)

► However, when we turn to more complex predicates, the different passive types diverge in their range of subject choice.

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[3] See also examples of analytic passive morphosyntax used in imperatives in Kayan (Smith, Erlewine & Sommerlot 2024) and Beaye (Land Dayak) (Sommerlot to appear), two other Central Bornean type languages.

[4] There is also a subtle difference in pronominal form between these two positions; see Appendix A. In addition, at some points in time, the preverbal position has been preferred for pronominal agents and conjoined NPs, but these seem to be preferences rather than categorical restrictions.

(13) **Goal–theme ditransitive with *naʔ* 'give':**

Kule naʔ [akeʔ]_goal [boop]_theme .
Kule give 1sg book

'Kule gave me a book.'

(14) **Ditransitive theme passive requires an agent:**

a. boop inɨ ən *Kule* naʔ akeʔ ___theme taop ray .
book DEM PASS Kule give 1sg yesterday

'The book was given to me by Kule yesterday.' preverbal

b. * boop inɨ ən naʔ akeʔ ___theme taop ray .
book DEM PASS give 1sg yesterday

Intended: 'The book was given to me [by someone] yesterday.' agentless (∃)

c. boop inɨ ən naʔ akeʔ ___theme !
book DEM PASS give 1sg

'Give me the book!' (*declarative) agentless (you!)

(15) **Ditransitive goal cannot be passivized:**

* akeʔ ən (Kule) naʔ ___goal boop .
1sg PASS Kule give book

Intended: 'I was given a book (by Kule).'

(16) **Summary: Passives from *naʔ* 'give' ditransitive**

	goal	theme	
preverbal agent	*	ok	
postverbal agent	—	—	(no data yet)
agentless (∃)	*	*	
agentless (imperative)	*	ok	

► There is a covert (second-person) agent pronoun in imperatives.

(17) **Causative with *ʃok* 'ask':**

inaʔ ʃok [akeʔ]_causee nəvəŋ [kayu nɨ]_object
mom ask 1sg cut.down tree DEM

'Mom asked me to cut the tree.'

(18) **Causee can be passivized, agentless or with preverbal agent:**

akeʔ ən (inaʔ) ʃok ___causee nəvəŋ (*inaʔ) kayu bioʔ (*inaʔ) .
1sg PASS mom ask cut.down tree big

'I was asked (by mom) to cut the big tree'

(19) **Embedded object passive requires preverbal agent:**

    a.   kayu bioʔ (ləpah) ən *inaʔ* ʃok akeʔ nəvəŋ   ___obj
            tree big ASP PASS mom ask 1sg cut.down

            ≈ 'The big tree was (already) asked by mom for me to cut.'   preverbal

    b. * kayu bioʔ ləpah ən ʃok akeʔ nəvəŋ   ___obj
            tree big ASP PASS ask 1sg cut.down

            ≈ 'The big tree was already asked [by someone] for me to cut.'   agentless (∃)

    c.   kayu bioʔ ən ʃok akeʔ nəvəŋ   ___obj !
            tree big PASS ask 1sg cut.down

            'Ask me to cut the big tree!' (*declarative)   agentless (you!)

(20) **Summary: Passives from *ʃok* 'ask' causative**

	causee	object
preverbal agent	ok	ok
postverbal agent	*	—
agentless (∃)	ok	*
agentless (imperative)	[ok]	ok

  ► The three types of *ən* passives differ in their possible subjects:

    – Agentless (∃) and postverbal agent passives are more restricted than preverbal agent passives... a trend that will continue below.

    – Imperative passives, although superficially agentless, pattern with preverbal agent passives.

5 Long-distance passives

  ► *ən* passives can also target <u>the argument of an embedded clause</u> for subject promotion. We'll call these *long-distance passives*.

All data here will use the clause embedding verb *ŋioʔ* 'think':

(21) pulis ŋioʔ [Kule nəkaw yap nɨ] .
      police think Kule steal chicken DEM

      'The police think that Kule stole the chicken.'

(22) **Passive of embedded subject:**

    a.   Kule ən *pulis* ŋioʔ [___ nəkaw yap   nɨ   ] .
        Kule PASS police think   steal   chicken DEM
        ≈ 'Kule$_x$ is thought, by the police, that he$_x$ stole the chicken.'   preverbal

    b.   Kule ən ŋioʔ *pulis* [___ nəkaw yap   nɨ   ] .
        Kule PASS think police   steal   chicken DEM
        ≈ 'Kule$_x$ is thought, by the police, that he$_x$ stole the chicken.'   postverbal

    c. * Kule ən ŋioʔ [___ nəkaw yap   nɨ   ] .
        Kule PASS think   steal   chicken DEM
        Intended: ≈ 'Kule$_x$ is thought that he$_x$ stole the chicken.'   agentless

(23) **Passive of embedded object:**

    a.   yap   nɨ   ən *pulis* ŋioʔ [Kule nekau ___] .
        chicken DEM PASS police think   Kule steal
        ≈ 'The chicken$_x$ is thought, by the police, that Kule stole it$_x$.'   preverbal

    b. * yap   nɨ   ən ŋioʔ *pulis* [Kule nekau ___] .
        chicken DEM PASS think police   Kule steal
        Intended: ≈ 'The chicken$_x$ is thought, by the police, that Kule stole it$_x$.'   postverbal

    c. * yap   nɨ   ən ŋioʔ [Kule nekau ___] .
        chicken DEM PASS think   Kule steal
        Intended: ≈ 'The chicken$_x$ was thought that Kule stole it$_x$.'   agentless

(24) **Summary: Long-distance passives with *ŋioʔ* 'think'**

	subject	object
preverbal agent	ok	ok
postverbal agent	ok	*
agentless	*	*

► There is again a <u>three-way difference</u> in the range of subject choice, with postverbal agent and agentless passives more restricted than preverbal agent passives.

(Something important we do not know yet: Are all of these embedded clauses fully finite? Are some nonfinite/reduced? Here, we will assume the embedded clauses of *ŋioʔ* 'think' are all finite.)

6 Proposal

We account for the three types of passives in terms of differences in case licensing and subject movement (probe specification).

6.1 Agentless passives

► Agentless passives are similar to familiar, canonical passives in other languages.

(25) **Burzio's Generalization:**   (Burzio 1986: p. 178)

"All and only the verbs that can assign θ-role to the subject [agent] can assign (accusative) Case to an object."

Because no agent is projected in agentless passives (setting aside the imperatives), no accusative is assigned. The theme/undergoer which then lacks case licensing must become the subject.

6.2 Agent-ful passives

Let us suppose that the preverbal and postverbal passive agents are projected as agent/initiator arguments.

► In accordance with Burzio's Generalization, agent-ful passives assign accusative case.

(Here, we take inspiration from Chen 2023 on the Mandarin *bèi* passives with and without agents.)

This leads to two consequences:

1. We predict subject promotion in agent-ful passives is not case-driven. It is Ā-movement.
   (See Patrianto & Chen 2023 for a similar claim regarding Javanese non-active voices.)
2. Case assignment facilitates long-distance passivization (Rackowski & Richards 2005).

1. Subject promotion in agent-ful passives is Ā-movement:

(26) **Condition C baselines:**

    a. $y\dot{i}_{i/*j}$ makan [asu *Kule*$_j$] .
       3sg feed[5]   dog Kule
       'He/she$_{i/*j}$ feeds Kule$_j$'s dog.'

    b. [asu *Kule*$_j$] ŋasay $y\dot{i}_{i/j}$.
       dog Kule bite   3sg
       'Kule$_j$'s dog bites him/her$_{i/j}$.'

(27) **Local passive reconstructs for Cond. C:**

    a. [asu *Kule*$_j$] ən $y\dot{i}_{i/*j}$ makan __.
       dog Kule PASS 3sg feed
       'Kule$_j$'s dog was fed by him/her$_{i/*j}$.'

    b. [asu *Kule*$_j$] ən   makan $y\dot{i}_{i/*j}$ __.
       dog Kule PASS 3sg feed
       'Kule$_j$'s dog was fed by him/her$_{i/*j}$.'

► It is not possible to c-command a coreferential name, forcing disjoint interpretation in (26a) (Condition C). Passive subjects in (27) behave *as if* they are in their gap positions for Condition C purposes; this is a hallmark of so-called Ā-movement.

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[5] Don't worry: 'eat' is *kuman*.

(28) **Long-distance passive reconstructs for Condition C:**

    a. [asu *Kule*$_j$] ən y$i_{i/*j}$ ŋioʔ [___ saket] .
       dog Kule   PASS 3sg think   sick
       ≈ 'Kule$_j$'s dog$_x$ is thought, by him/her$_{i/*j}$, that x is sick.'

    b. [asu *Kule*$_j$] ən pulis ŋioʔ [y$i_{i/*j}$ makan ___] .
       dog Kule   PASS police think 3sg feed
       ≈ 'Kule$_j$'s dog$_x$ is thought, by the police, that he/she$_{i/*j}$ fed x.'

2. Case assignment facilitates long-distance passivization

Recall that agentless passives cannot promote an embedded clause argument, as in (22c). Note that there are no closer, competing candidates for promotion to subject here.

(22c) * Kule ən ŋioʔ [___ nəkaw yap nɨ] .
       Kule PASS think   steal chicken DEM
       Intended: ≈ 'Kule$_x$ is thought that he$_x$ stole the chicken.'

  ▶ Agent-ful passives, but not agentless passives, license accusative case. Although embedded clauses do not need case licensing, a case-assigning probe can interact with the embedded clause. When it does, it "unlocks" it for further extraction (Rackowski & Richards 2005, Van Urk & Richards 2015, Halpert 2019). Without such unlocking, the contents of embedded clauses are inaccessible.

6.3 Preverbal vs postverbal agent passives

  ▶ In addition, preverbal and postverbal agent passives differ in their subject probe specifications:

    – Preverbal agent passives Ā-attract any nominal.[6]
    – Postverbal agent passives Ā-attract the closest nominal (see Branan & Erlewine 2024).

(29) **Summary of passivization strategies:**

	subject movement	accusative	
agentless	A (case-driven)	no	
preverbal agent	Ā (any DP)	yes	⇒ embedded clause unlocked
postverbal agent	Ā (closest DP)	yes	

Here we leave various details open for future work:

- the precise positions of preverbal vs postverbal agents;
- the mechanism(s) that relate(s) agent position and differences in probing, in (29);
- the inability of passivizing ditransitive goals (16);
- the unavailability of postverbal agent passives with the *fok* causative (20)

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[6] We assume that even when the subject position is filled via Ā-movement, it is restricted to hosting a nominal (cf Patrianto & Chen 2023 on PP pivots in Javanese).

7 Conclusion

Today we presented a description of the *ən* passive in (Lebo' Vo') Kenyah, informed by the theoretical literature on movement types.

▶ The differences between agentless and agent-ful *ən* passives <u>can be fruitfully understood in relation to Burzio's Generalization</u> (see also Chen 2023):

  – Agent-ful passives have no agent demotion (they are "non-canonical passives"; see Legate 2021) and therefore also license accusative case. Therefore:

  – Agent-ful passives trigger Ā-movement;

  – agent-ful passives can be long-distance (promote embedded clause arguments).

• <u>Passive imperatives formally behave as preverbal agent passives</u>, supporting an analysis with a covert second-person pronoun.

• The behavior of postverbal agent passives constitutes evidence for the idea that <u>Ā-movement can be limited to targeting the closest nominal</u> (Branan & Erlewine 2024).

As further evidence for the non-canonical nature of agent-ful passives, we note that embedded passivization can *feed* higher passivization. As predicted by our account, this is not possible if the higher passive is agentless (30c).

(30) **Long-distance passive fed by embedded passive:**

a. yap   nɨ   ən   *pulis*   ŋioʔ [___   ən   (Kule) nekau ___] .
    chicken DEM PASS police   think   PASS Kule   steal
    ≈ 'The chicken$_x$ is thought, by the police, that it$_x$ was stolen (by Kule).'

b. $^?$ yap   nɨ   ən   ŋioʔ   *pulis*   [___   ən   Kule nekau ___] .
    chicken DEM PASS think police   PASS Kule steal
    ≈ 'The chicken$_x$ is thought, by the police, that it$_x$ was stolen by Kule.'

c. * yap   nɨ   ən   ŋioʔ [___   ən   Kule nekau ___] .
    chicken DEM PASS think   PASS Kule steal
    Intended: ≈ 'The chicken$_x$ is thought, that it$_x$ was stolen by Kule.'

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Appendix A: Third-singular *yɨ* vs *nɨ*

There are two forms for the third-singular pronoun, for animate/human referents: *yɨ* and *nɨ*. Third-singular animate subjects (and objects) must be *yɨ*, not *nɨ* (31a), but both are possible for possessors (31b).

(31) a. inu   tasap {$^{?}$**yɨ/*nɨ**}   ləpah {**yɨ/*nɨ**} mana ?
             which dish   3sg/3sg.GEN ASP   heat
             'Which dish did he/she heat?'   subject

        b. inaʔ ʃok Kule makan [asu {**yɨ/nɨ**}   ] .
             mom ask Kule feed   dog 3sg/3sg.GEN
             'Mom asks Kule to feed his/her dog.'   possessor

Note however that there is also a use of *nɨ* as a reduced form of the demonstrative *inɨ*, either as a post-nominal demonstrative or as a stand-alone pro-form for an inanimate referent. So we concentrate on human/animate referents here.[7]

Against this background, it is interesting to note that preverbal passive agents can be *nɨ*, but postverbal passive agents cannot:

(32) kayu bioʔ inɨ   ən   {**yɨ/nɨ**}   nəvəŋ   {**yɨ/*nɨ**} .
       tree big   DEM PASS 3sg/3sg.GEN cut.down
       'The big tree was cut down by him/her.'   passive agent

Appendix B: Island sensitivity

▶ Preverbal agent passives can generally target embedded clause arguments in an unrestricted manner (24), but are subject to relative clause island effects.

(33) **From a subject-pivot relative clause:**

        a. pulis ləpah nakəp laki [$_{RC}$ yaʔ ___$_{rel}$ nəkaw alot nɨ   ] .
             police ASP   catch   man   REL   steal   boat DEM
             'The police caught the man that stole the boat.'   baseline

        b. * alot itu   ən   pulis nakəp laki [$_{RC}$ yaʔ ___$_{rel}$ nəkaw ___$_{pass}$] .
             boat DEM police ASP   catch   man   REL   steal
             Intended: ≈ 'This boat$_x$ is: caught by the police, the man that stole it$_x$.' LD obj passive

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(34) **From an object-pivot relative clause:**

    a.   akeʔ bəli boop [RC yaʔ Aping ɲurat ___rel] .
          1sg buy book   REL Aping write
          'I bought the book that Aping wrote.'   baseline

    b. * laki itu ən pulis jupaʔ alot [RC yaʔ ___/yɨ_pass nəkaw ___rel] .
          man DEM PASS police find boat   REL   steal
          Intended: $\approx$ 'This man$_x$ is: found by police, the boat that he$_x$ stole.'   LD subj passive

(35) **Aside: *wh*-in-situ is not island sensitive**

    a.   ikoʔ bəli boop [RC yaʔ *aeʔ* ɲurat ___rel] ?
          2sg buy book   REL who write
          'Who$_x$ did you buy the book that he/she$_x$ wrote?'

          (no declarative use: *'You bought the book that someone wrote.')

    b. * *aeʔ* yaʔ ikoʔ bəli boop [RC yaʔ ___/yɨ_cleft ɲurat ___rel] ?
          who REL 2sg buy book   REL   write
          Intended: 'Who$_x$ did you buy the book that he/she$_x$ wrote?'