

# Dholuo (pseudo-)passive and the Parametrization of the EPP – Draft

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## Abstract

This article discusses a type of sentences found in the Western Nilotic language Dholuo (Kenya, Tanzania) that was argued by Cable (2012) to provide clear evidence for the existence of natural languages in which the preverbal subject position of a tensed verb can optionally be left empty (*contra* Chomsky, 1981). The structural passive treatment of these sentences assumed by Cable contrasts with the functional passive analysis found in the existing literature on Dholuo. Building upon the functional passive analysis – in which the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) is satisfied by an indefinite subject pronoun – we argue that Dholuo provides evidence for a different type of parametrization of the EPP than the one defended by Cable. Together with Lango (Western Nilotic, Uganda) and Bāsàá (Northwest Bantu, Cameroon), Dholuo belongs to the Indirect Role Marking type of languages proposed by Noonan (1992): a grammatical subject must strictly encode the thematically highest argument selected by a predicate.

Keywords: EPP; Dholuo; Pseudo-Passive; Impersonal Passive; Indefinite Subject; Topicalization

## 1 Introduction

In a recent paper on Dholuo, a rigidly SVO Nilo-Saharan language (Kenya, Tanzania), Cable (2012) argues that this language provides ‘remarkably clear evidence’ against the universality of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), that is, the requirement that every finite clause have a subject (Chomsky, 1981).<sup>1</sup> This claim is mainly based upon the type of sentences given in (1) and (2) (source and original example numbering are provided), in which an agent is expressed as an oblique by means of a *by*-phrase and a patient (in bold) can either remain in situ or be fronted.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

- (1) Ne ok one **Onyango** gi Ochieng’  
PAST NEG see.PASS Onyango by Ochieng’

<sup>1</sup>We follow Cable in referring the reader to Svenonius (2002) for a comprehensive overview of the literature on the Extended Projection Principle.

<sup>2</sup>The Dholuo data provided here appear in their original format of publication (with respect to tones, vowel height, vowel length, glosses and translations), unless explicitly stated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup>Tones are indicated in the following way:  $\acute{v}$ : High tone,  $\grave{v}$ : Low tone,  $^4\acute{v}$ : downstepped High

<sup>4</sup>Abbreviations: EXPL: expletive, FV: final vowel (Bantu), IMPERF: imperfective, INDEF: indefinite marker, lit: literally, NEG: negation, OM: object marker (Bantu), p: plural, PASS: passive, PERF: perfective, PRES: present, REL: relative markers: singular, SM: subject marker (Bantu, the number indicates nominal class)

‘Onyango was not seen by Ochieng’ [Cable’s (6)]

According to Cable, Dholuo displays optional subject raising: in the examples (1) and (2), the ‘passive subject’, *Onyango*, can either be left in post-verbal position, as in (1), or fronted to the specifier of one of the verbal functional projections, as illustrated in (2).

- (2) (Onyango) ne (Onyango) ok (Onyango) one gi Ochieng’  
 Onyango PAST Onyango NEG Onyango see.PASS by Ochieng’  
 ‘Onyango wasn’t seen by Ochieng’ [Cable’s (12)]

Dholuo’s ‘passive subjects’ thus contrast with its ‘active subjects’ in (3) and (4) in that the ‘active subject’ obligatorily moves to a preverbal position, even with unaccusative intransitive verbs.

- (3) a. Ochieng’ ne ok oneno Onyango  
 Ochieng’ PAST NEG saw Onyango  
 ‘Ochieng didn’t see Onyango.’ [Cable’s (7)]  
 b. Ne ok oneno (\*Ochieng’) Onyango (\*Ochieng’)  
 PAST NEG saw Ochieng’ Onyango Ochieng’  
 ‘Ochieng’ didn’t see Onyango.’ [Cable’s (14)]
- (4) Ot wang’ (\*ot)  
 house burn house  
 ‘The house is burning.’ [Cable’s (16b)]

Drawing a parallel with optionality of *wh*-/focus-movement in Dholuo, Cable concludes that in this language ‘the presence of an ‘EPP-feature’ (Chomsky, 2000) on a given functional head is systematically optional’.

The conclusions reached in Cable (2012) are very reasonable ones considering the data examined. In the present paper, we point to a range of facts that suggest that more research might be needed to determine the clarity of the evidence provided by Dholuo against the universality of the EPP. These facts seem to support an alternative analysis of the data illustrated in (1) and (2): the ‘indefinite subject’ (also ‘impersonal’ subject) analysis (Ochola, 1999).<sup>5</sup>

In this approach, (i) the verb is in the active voice, (ii) an indefinite subject prefix {o-} (perfect) / {i-} (imperfect) – reminiscent of Standard French *on* – is the grammatical subject, (iii) importantly, Cable’s ‘post-verbal passive subject’ is a genuine direct object and (iv) whenever the patient is preverbal, it is topicalized. Points (i), (ii) and (iii) are consistent with the analysis of Dholuo found in descriptive grammars of this language (The St Joseph’s Society, 1921; Omondi, 1982; Tucker, 1994). Point (iv) is briefly discussed in Okoth-Okombo (1997) and has been explicitly defended by Ochola (1999) in previous work on the syntax of Dholuo pseudo-passives.

If the indefinite analysis is on the right track, Dholuo provides evidence for a different type of parametrization of the classic EPP. In this language the satisfaction of EPP is semantic/thematic in nature – rather than purely syntactic as in English (Chomsky, 1982). Dholuo *strictly* requires that the EPP be satisfied by the thematically most prominent argument of a predicate. In the presence of a non-topical agent, the [present, transitional] grammar of Dholuo prefers for the grammatical subject to encode a ‘substitute-agent’ (an indefinite subject) rather than a thematically lower argument (e.g. the theme) or a semantically-void expression (i.e. an expletive).

<sup>5</sup>Cable, 672, fn. 30 indicates that this analysis was pointed out by one of the reviewers.

Table 1: Dholuo Personal pronouns (adapted from Okoth-Okombo, 1997)

	Emphatic	Non-Emphatic
First Person Singular	án	a-, -a
Second Person Singular	ín	i-, -i
Third Person Singular	én	o-, -e, -go
First Person Plural	wán	wa-, -wa
Second Person Plural	ún	u-, -u
Third Person Plural	gín	gi-, -gi

## 2 Background: Subject and object marking in Dholuo

As one of the differences between the two approaches discussed in this article lies in the treatment of the patient's relation to the verb (i.e. post-verbal subject vs in situ object), let us first introduce subject and object marking in Dholuo.

Dholuo does not seem to have subject-verb or object-verb agreement. It however has two paradigms of pronouns that Okoth-Okombo (1997) labels as 'emphatic' versus 'non-emphatic pronouns' (The St Joseph's Society, 1921; Omondi, 1982; Tucker, 1994; Okoth-Okombo, 1997; Ochola, 1999). These pronouns are presented in Table 1. Emphatic pronouns are free-standing 'strong' forms. Non-emphatic pronouns are weak, clitic-like pronouns that are either treated as proclitics or prefixes, said to correspond to subject, or enclitics/suffixes, corresponding to object. Finally, the realization of the non-emphatic pronouns varies depending on the aspect of the verb: they carry a High tone in the imperfective aspect and a Low tone in the perfective (Omondi, 1982).

Whenever the sentence contains a nominal subject (i.e. a third person), the subject prefix is optional. This is illustrated in (5).<sup>6</sup>

- (5) a. Musa .ónyámó niang'  
 Musa 3s-IMPERF-chew sugarcane  
 'Musa is chewing sugarcane.' [Omondi's IX (11a)]
- b. Musa .nyámó niang'  
 Musa IMPERF-chew sugarcane  
 'Musa is chewing sugarcane.' [Omondi's IX (8)]

As shown in (6) to (9), the subject prefix can stand on its own to express the person and number features of the subject. This is the case with speech act participants and with discourse-given third persons.

- (6) (.Án) .ányámó niang'  
 (I) 1s-IMPERF-chew sugarcane  
 '(I) I chew sugarcane.' [Omondi's IX (7b), Author: 'I am chewing sugarcane']
- (7) (Ín) ínyámó niang'  
 (You) 2s-IMPERF-chew sugarcane  
 '(You) You are chewing sugarcane.' [created by Author based on Omondi (1982)]
- (8) (Musa) .ónyámó niang'  
 (Musa) 3s-IMPERF-chew sugarcane

<sup>6</sup>The glossing provided with the examples from Omondi (1982) is ours. In the examples taken from this author, a dot before a word indicates that this word has open vowels.

‘(Musa) he chew sugarcane.’ [Omondi’s IX (11a), Author: ‘he (Musa) is chewing sugarcane.’]

- (9) (Món) .gínyámó .niang’  
 women 3p-IMPERF-chew sugarcane  
 ‘Women they chew sugarcane.’ [Omondi’s IX (11b), Author: ‘They (women) are chewing sugarcane.’]

Importantly, (10) shows that whenever the subject is expressed by means of a strong pronoun, the subject prefix is obligatory present (at least in the perfective aspect to Omondi, 1982, 103).

- (10) a. (.án) .ányámó niang’  
 I 1s-PERF-chew sugarcane  
 ‘(I) I chew sugarcane.’ [Omondi’s IX (7a)]  
 b. \*.án .nyámó niang’  
 I PERF-chew sugarcane  
 ‘I chew sugarcane.’ [Omondi’s IX (9)]

According to Omondi, object and subject pronouns show a similar behavior: when the object is discourse-given, the weak form appears on the verb. When a strong object pronoun is expressed, the object suffix is obligatorily present, as in (11).

- (11) a. Obél wúónða  
 ‘Obel deceive me.’ [Omondi’s IX (12c)]  
 b. Obél wúónða .án  
 ‘Obel deceive me me.’ [Omondi’s IX (12b)]  
 c. ?.Obél wúóndó .án  
 ‘Obel deceive me.’ [Omondi’s IX (12a)]

Ochola (1999) provides a slightly different judgment as to the co-occurrence of weak and strong object pronouns in the *postverbal* domain, as in (12). In her view, it makes the sentence ungrammatical. In contrast, an emphatic object pronoun in the *preverbal* domain as in (13) is acceptable and makes the presence of the weak pronoun compulsory.

- (12) \*Dòrínà n-ó-gó-yà<sub>i</sub> àn<sub>i</sub>  
 Dorina PAST-3s-beat-1s me  
 ‘???Dorina beat myself’ [Ochola’s (10c)]  
 (13) ân n-ò-gò-yà (gi Dòrínà)  
 I/me PAST-EXPL-beat-1s (by Dorina)  
 ‘I was beaten (by Dorina).’ [Ochola’s (12a)]

In addition to the above-cited pronouns, Dholuo has been described as displaying a set of non-emphatic indefinite/impersonal pronouns (The St Joseph’s Society, 1921; Omondi, 1982; Tucker, 1994; Ochola, 1999) that will be discussed in the next section.

### 3 The passive equivalent(s)

#### 3.1 Structural or functional passive?

Descriptive grammars of Dholuo (The St Joseph's Society, 1921; Omondi, 1982; Tucker, 1994) as well as a recent syntactic study like Ochola (1999) describe sentences like (1) and (2) as *active* sentences with an indefinite subject proclitic. These sentences constitute 'pseudo-passives' or 'passive equivalents' in that they *function* as passives – i.e. they are the closest translation to the English passive – without actually displaying passive marking. To the best of our knowledge, these studies make no mention of an actual passive/voice marking of the verb.

Both Okoth-Okombo and Cable indicate passive voice-marking of the verb in their glossing of Dholuo, suggesting that sentences like (1) and (2) are structural passive sentences. Clarifications as to their alternative analysis of the (complex) verbal morphology of this language are however missing and the appropriateness of this glossing remains unclear.

According to The St Joseph's Society (1921, 54), Dholuo expresses passive voice by means of 'the root of the transitive verb and prefixing of 'o' as an impersonal pronoun' in perfect tenses and 'when one indicates an action still going on the 'o' is dropped and an 'i' is employed with the active verb'. The examples in (14), from Tucker (1994, 433) illustrate impersonal subject prefixes (a colon indicates vowel length in Tucker's examples).

- (14) a. í-wa:co 'It is said (*on dit*) cf. í-wá:cô You say'  
b. o-wá:cî 'It has been said (*on a dit*)'

'This process may be applied to all Verbs, while the introduction of a 'sufferer' results in a quasi-passive construction called the 'Passive Equivalent'. If the 'sufferer' is denoted by a Personal Pronoun, it is attached to the verb as an Object Suffix; if it is a Noun, it may either precede or follow the Verb.' (Tucker, 1994, 433)

To Omondi (1982, 38), the type of sentences in (15) are 'agentless sentences which is the nearest Dholuo gets to the passive construction'. The verb displays a prefix 'which may be said to represent the 'indefinite' or 'general person' being a marker of an indefinite generalized subject.'

- (15) a. ítedo .réch  
'Fish is being cooked.'  
b. otédí .réch  
'Fish has been cooked.' [Omondi's II (19)]

In her paper *Is there a passive in Dholuo?*, Ochola (1999) further argues that, in the perfective aspect, the indefinite pronoun is tonally distinct from the third person singular. She proposes an expletive subject treatment of the indefinite pronoun.

- (16) (Dorina) n-ó-gò Chàlí  
(Dorina) PERF-3s-beat Chali  
'she (Dorina) beat Chali.' [adaptation of Ochola's (2a)/(2b)]  
(17) (\*Dorina) n-ò-gò Chàlí  
(\*Dorina) PERF-EXPL-beat Chali

(\*‘Dorina) Chali was beaten.’ [adaptation of Ochola’s (6), Author, lit.: (\**Dorina*) on a *frappé* Chali.]

In (16), a proclitic expressing the third person singular subject is compatible with the co-referential nominal *Dorina*. In contrast, the indefinite subject marker in (17) is incompatible with *Dorina*: the indefinite subject marker and the object *Chali* saturate the predicate and *Dorina* as no relation with it. The sentence can only be interpreted as an impersonal sentence, having a functional passive value. Clearly, if an indefinite subject marker is the grammatical subject, these sentences do not constitute counter evidence to the universality of the EPP.

The pseudo-passive approach of Dholuo is consistent with what has been observed in other Southern Luo languages like Lango (Noonan, 1977; Noonan and Bavin Woock, 1978; Noonan, 1992) and Acholi (Ocaya, 1988, 2004), as they are described as lacking passive morphology.<sup>7</sup> Instead, to express the passive voice – roughly, an event in which the highest thematic role available is not topical or less topical than another participant – they resort to various *active-based* strategies. By way of illustration, Lango displays a so-called ‘passive analog’, in which the subject remains preverbal, agrees with the active verb and the object is fronted. According to Noonan and Bavin Woock (1978) and Noonan (1992), resumption is optional with a human third person objects (18), obligatory with first and second person pronouns (19) and complement of prepositions (20), and illicit with non human third person objects (21).

- (18) lóca dákó    <sup>1</sup>bínó nènnò  
man woman will see  
‘The man will be seen by the woman.’ [Noonan & Bavin Woock’s (16’)]
- (19) yín dákô òmìyí            dyèl  
you woman 3s-give-PERF-2s goat  
‘You were given a goat by the woman.’ [Noonan’s 8.5.2 (5)]
- (20) án rwòt òmìyò            dyàŋ bòtá  
I king 3s-give-PERF cow to-1s  
‘I was given a cow by the king.’ [Noonan’s 8.5.2 (2)]
- (21) àpwô àtín ònènnò  
hare child 3s-see-PERF  
‘The hare was seen by the child.’ [Noonan’s 8.5.2 (8)]

Interestingly, Tucker (436, fn. 8) notes that in Dholuo, ‘a sentence of the type ‘Our goat has been eaten by a hyena’ is normally expressed: *díénd-wá óndíek oca:mo* literally: Our goat a hyena has eaten’ which is reminiscent of what is observed in Lango, as well as in the Bantu languages Mbuun (Bostoen and Mundeke, 2011), spoken in Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bàsàá, spoken in Cameroon.

In summary, in the indefinite analysis, the glossing of the verb *one* in (1) and (2) suggested by Omondi, Tucker and Ochola’s respective studies is ‘INDEF-see’ rather than ‘see-PASS’. Dholuo would thus add to the growing list of languages with a ‘zero-

<sup>7</sup>Ocaya (2004, 286) on Acholi’s verbs:

‘And very significant is the absence of the passive voice in the language. There is only the active voice. Thus, Ocaya ocayo buk-ki (Ocaya wrote this book) is the active voice. To say ‘This book is written by Ocaya’, one might say something that translates back to English literally as ‘This book Ocaya is the one who wrote it’: Ocaya aye ocayo buk-ki’. Consequently, any relation in Acholi, to be worthwhile, has to be active’.

coded passive’ discussed by Cobbinah and Lüpke (2009).

### 3.2 On oblique-agents

The ‘indefinite analysis’ is acknowledged by Cable, who provides the example, glossing and translation in (22) to illustrate it.

- (22) Ne ok o- (o-) ne Onyango.  
 PAST NEG INDEF- (PERF-) see Onyango.  
 ‘People did not see Onyango’. [Cable’s (52)]

In his view, the major problem with this approach is the possibility of a *by*-phrase, which would ‘require the indefinite subject to somehow co-refer with the complement of the *by* phrase’, as illustrated by the translation he provides in (23).

- (23) Ne ok o<sub>1</sub>-ne Onyango gi Otieno<sub>1</sub>  
 PAST NEG INDEF-see Onyango by Otieno  
 \*‘People<sub>1</sub> did not see Onyango by Otieno<sub>1</sub>.’ [Author: actual translation ‘Onyango was not seen by Otieno.’] [Cable’s (54)]

The fact is that this type of impersonal passive with the expression of an oblique-agent is attested in other languages and is not at all uncommon (just like impersonal transitives). It is found in a number of Bantu languages, the family neighboring Dholuo. Impersonal passives with optional expression of an oblique-agent are found, for instance, in Bemba, spoken in Zambia (Kula and Marten, 2010) (see also Kawasha (2007) who reports the same type of pseudo-passive for Luvala (Angola, Zambia), KiKaonde (Zambia, DRC), Luchazi (Angola, Zambia) and Kimbundu Angola)).

- (24) a. bá-álí-ly-a ífy-ákulya (ku mu-mbúlu)  
 SM2-PAST-eat-FV 7-food by 3-wild.dog  
 ‘The food was eaten by the wild dog.’ [Kula & Marten’s (4a)]  
 b. ify-ákulya bá-álí-shitish-a (ku mu-mbúlu)  
 7-food SM2-PAST-sell-FV by 3-wild.dog  
 ‘The food was sold by the wild dog.’ [Kula & Marten’s (6a)]

Bemba is a typical head-marking Bantu language and its verbal morphology is quite transparent. What we see in (24) is an active verb with a subject marker in class 2 (that usually expresses a human 3rd person plural), a somewhat ‘agentive’ default agreement (compared to common locative expletives found in Bantu). The oblique-agent belongs to the class 3 (usually non-human, singular). Just like in Dholuo, the patient can either be left postverbally (24)a or fronted (24)b. Fronting of the patient does not make it a subject, as shown by the mismatch in class features between the patient (class 7) and the indefinite subject marker (class 2). For animate patients, object marking is required in case of fronting, leaving no ambiguity as to the grammatical relation of the patient with the verb. This is shown in (25).

- (25) a. umw-ââna bá-álí-mu-ít-a ku mu-mbúlu  
 1-child SM2-PAST-OM1-call-FV by 3-wild.dog  
 ‘This child was called by the wild dog.’ [Kula & Marten’s (5a)]  
 b. \*umw-ââna bá-álí-ít-a ku mu-mbúlu  
 1-child SM2-PAST-call-FV by 3-wild.dog  
 ‘This child was called by the wild dog.’ [Kula & Marten’s (5b)]

In sum, the possibility of expressing an oblique agent cannot be considered fatal for the ‘indefinite subject’ analysis. How linguistic theories make sense of how the interpretation of impersonal-pseudo-passives is achieved is a separate issue that indeed deserves its share of attention in future research.

Tucker (436, fn. 8) mentions that although the prepositions *gi/ko'd* normally introduce an instrument, the young generation, ‘perhaps under the influence of Swahili and/or English’, sometimes introduce an agent. This is the case in the example (26).

- (26)    *tát-wá-nó íruŋo-ŋga gí yáwúót ló` ká*  
           ‘Our roof is normally carried by the young men from the other side (of the river). [Tucker’s fn. 8]

This point suggests that the Dholuo passive-equivalent might have originally been dedicated to unidentified or irrelevant agents (hence the use of an indefinite pronoun) in a (not so long ago) former stage of the language. This is consistent with Okoth-Okombo’s view that Dholuo ‘passives’ are agentless. This is also consistent with the following observation found in the St. Joseph Society’s grammar, which shows that in the presence of an identified agent, the basic SVO order used to be favored (over all the alternative orders we have mentioned here and despite the agent’s lesser topicality):

‘In the passive the subject of the sentence stands for the object of the action described by the verb, e.g., *The house was built – Ot noger*.<sup>8</sup> *The barrel was fetched – Pipa noom*. When, however, the doer of the action described by the verb follows in English, the active voice must be used in Nilotic, e.g., *The house was built by Peter – Petrus nogero ot*. *The barrel was fetched by a servant – Jatich noomo pipa*.

As stated by Siewierska (2010), in Dholuo, the possibility of expressing an oblique agent seems to be dependent on the age of the speaker. With the possibility of the demotion of an agent from subject to oblique, we might be witnessing a transitional stage in the Dholuo grammar: a reanalysis from impersonal-pseudo-passive to structural-passive. Evidence in favor of a synchronic structural passive analysis is however missing from Okoth-Okombo and Cable’s studies.

### 3.3 On patients

In the ‘indefinite analysis’ approach, the phrase *Onyango* in (1) and (2) repeated below for convenience, is a run-of-the-mill direct object, be it pre or post-verbal.

- (1)    *Ne ok one Onyango gi Ochieng’*  
           PAST NEG see.PASS Onyango by Ochieng’  
           ‘Onyango was not seen by Ochieng’ [Cable’s (6)]
- (2)    *(Onyango) ne (Onyango) ok (Onyango) one gi Ochieng’*  
           Onyango PAST Onyango NEG Onyango see.PASS by Ochieng’  
           ‘Onyango wasn’t seen by Ochieng’ [Cable’s (12)]

What the examples in (27) and (28) show is that the patient of a transitive predicate is consistently realized as a suffix/enclitic.

<sup>8</sup>It is unclear whether the The St Joseph’s Society’s label ‘subject of the sentence’ is the topic (siding with the indefinite analysis) or the subject of the verb (siding with the passive analysis).



- (27) (Dòrínà) n-ó-gò-yè/yì/yà  
Dorina PAST-3s-beat-3s/2s/1s  
'She (Dorina) beat him/her/it/you/me.' [Adapted from Ochola's (8b)]
- (28) n-ò-gò-yè/yì/yà  
PAST-EXPL-beat-3s/2s/1s  
'She/he/it/you/I was/were beaten.' [Ochola's (9a), Author, lit.: *On m't'/l'a frappé*]

The positional criterion suggests that the patient in (28) is an *object* rather than a subject.

In addition, we have seen in Section 2 that the presence of a strong pronoun is illicit without the additional presence of a weak pronoun on the verb. Whenever the patient is expressed by a strong pronoun, an *enclitic* appears on the verb. This is shown in (29).

- (29) a. ân n-ò-gò-yà (gi Dòrínà)  
I/me PAST-EXPL-beat-1s (by Dorina)  
'I was beaten (by Dorina).' [Ochola's (12a), Author, lit.: *Moi on m'a frappé par Dorina/Moi Dorina m'a frappé*]
- b. \*ân n-ò-gò (gi Dòrínà)  
I/me PAST-EXPL-beat (by Dorina)  
'I was beaten (by Dorina).' [Ochola's (12b), Author, lit.: *\*Moi on a frappé/\*Moi Dorina a frappé*]

The configuration in (29) is similar to the case in (2) in which a nominal patient is fronted. Obligatory object marking on the verb here simply makes it visible that the patient is 'foregrounded' (topicalized) rather than promoted to grammatical subject (Keenan and Dryer, 2007).

## 4 Indirect Role Marking Languages

### 4.1 Parametrizing the EPP

Let us briefly summarize the fragment of grammar that so far emerges from the examined Dholuo data. Dholuo is a rigid SV(O) language, with a strong preference for the grammatical subject to encode the highest thematic role available. Impersonal pseudo-passives as the one found in Dholuo seem to be a way for the grammar to 'have its cake and eat it too': the lesser topical agent is demoted while the grammatical subject still encodes the highest thematic role selected by the verb (here an agent) by means of a placeholder, agent-like indefinite pronoun. As shown in (30), object-fronting is meant to satisfy a topic-first requirement. The fact that it is generally optional might be a consequence of the introduction in Dholuo of the demotion of an agent to oblique, which ultimately constitutes a process by which an in situ object is indirectly foregrounded.

- (30) Ochieng' (\*Onyango) ne (\*Onyango) ok (\*Onyango) oneno (Onyango).  
Ochieng' Onyango past Onyango neg Onyango saw Onyango  
'Ochieng didn't see Onyango.' [Cable's (15)]

We have already mentioned the similarity between Dholuo, Lango and Bàsàá in their use of pseudo-passive strategies. The three languages happen to be similar in their general lack of expletive pronouns, as well as in the way they express meteorological predicates, as illustrated in (31) to (33). In our view this is no mere coincidence:

semantically empty expletives cannot satisfy the strong need for the subject position to be filled by the highest semantic role.

- (31) koth chwe  
rain falls  
'It is raining.' [Cable's (i) fn. 24]
- (32) kòt òcwèè  
rain 3s-precipitate-PERF  
'It rained.' Lango from [Noonan's 8.13 (2)]
- (33) nǒp à-ń'ńó.  
1-rain SM1-PRES-rain  
Lit: 'The rain rains.' (= 'It is raining') Bàsàá

Bàsàá and Lango are more restrictive than Dholuo in that, from what we know so far, they resort to object-foregrounding pseudo-passives to express the lesser topical status of the highest thematic role available, while keeping it as the grammatical subject. A language is 'a work in progress'. The data from Tucker and Cable indicate that the grammar of Dholuo is shifting from a default agent/subject matching associated with the foregrounding of [+ topic] patient, to a (more complex type of) default agent/subject matching associated with the demotion of a [– topic] agent and the optional foregrounding of a [+ topic] patient.

In conclusion, the type of parametrization of the EPP evidenced from languages like Dholuo, Lango and Bàsàá is one where the item occupying the specifier of one of the functional verbal projections is semantically-filled and encodes the highest thematic role selected by the verb.

## 4.2 Topicalization to an A-position

Before closing this paper, we wish to point an important contribution from Cable's study: the fact that the position in which a fronted object is located in Dholuo is an A-position, not an A'-position.<sup>9</sup> Obviation of Principle C violations, illustrated in (34), and tolerance of 'weak crossover', illustrated in (35) are considered characteristic of movement to an A-position.

- (34) a. Ne ok other [japuonj **Otieno**<sub>1</sub>] gi en<sub>2</sub>/<sub>\*1</sub>.  
PAST NEG like.PASS [teacher Otieno] by him  
'Otieno<sub>1</sub>'s teacher is not liked by him<sub>2</sub>/<sub>\*1</sub>.'  
b. [Japuonj **Otieno**<sub>1</sub>] ne ([Japuonj **Otieno**<sub>1</sub>]) ok ([Japuonj **Otieno**<sub>1</sub>])  
[teacher Otieno] PAST ([teacher Otieno]) NEG ([teacher Otieno])  
oher gi en<sub>1</sub>/<sub>2</sub>.  
like.PASS by him  
'Otieno<sub>1</sub>'s teacher is not liked by him<sub>1</sub>/<sub>2</sub>. [Cable's (25)]
- (35) a. Oka [wuoi ka wuoi]<sub>1</sub> gi guoge<sub>2</sub>/<sub>\*1</sub>  
bite.PASS every.boy by dog.his  
'Every boy<sub>1</sub> was bitten by his<sub>2</sub>/<sub>\*1</sub> dog.'

<sup>9</sup>This position is reminiscent of the German Spec,CP except that it is located in the inflectional domain, hence the possibility for the fronted patient to later develop into a grammatical subject [anonym. reference]. Cable argues that there are several positions to which the fronted patient can move. This is however dependent on a number of assumptions concerning the location of tense particles/adverbs in Dholuo (Cable, 2012, 657, fn. 10) that extend the scope of the present paper.

- b. [Wuoi ka wuoi]<sub>1</sub> oka gi guoge<sub>1/2</sub>  
 every.boy bite.PASS by dog.his  
 Every boy<sub>1</sub> was bitten by his<sub>1/2</sub> dog. [Cable's (29)]

This conclusion goes in the same direction as previous accounts of pseudo-passive object-topicalization according to which (i) the object is fronted to a position *within* the clause, (ii) the fronted object is still treated as a core argument of the verb, despite possible resumption (Noonan and Bavin Woock, 1978; Woolford, 1991; Ochola, 1999; Bostoen and Mundeke, 2011). In this sense, this type of fronting should be distinguished from the (similar in surface, contrastive) A'-fronting/left-dislocation found in a number of languages in which the EPP is not as restrictive as in Dholuo (Among others French De Cat, 2007).<sup>10</sup>

A recurring characteristic of the type of 'NP-fronting' found in Dholuo, Lango, Mbuun or Bàsàà is that it can target non-referential expressions like wh-pronouns and non-specific indefinites. This is briefly illustrated with examples from Mbuun and Bàsàà in (36) and (37) respectively.

- (36) a. ɔ-káár nké ká-wó-kon?  
 1-woman what SM1-PAST-plant  
 'What did the woman plant?' [Bostoen & Mundeke's (27c)]  
 b. ñké ɔ-káár ká-wó-kon?  
 what 1-woman SM1-PAST-plant  
 'What was planted by the woman?' [Bostoen & Mundeke's (27e)]
- (37) hí'ɣí ñ-tómbá nɕèé ì ñnól jɔ.  
 each 3-sheep 9-lion SM9 PST1-kill 3-it  
 Lit: 'Each sheep, the lion killed it.' / 'Each sheep was killed by the lion.'

In connection to Dholuo, object topicalization is discussed by (Okoth-Okombo, 1997, 111), although not explicitly connected to a functional passive meaning. The position of the theme depends on it being assigned the 'Topic function'.

- (38) a. Inego kwach  
 kill-PASS-IMPERF leopard  
 'A leopard is being killed.' [Okoth-Okombo's 3.1.5.3 (78)]  
 b. Kwach inego  
 leopard kill-PASS-IMPERF  
 'A leopard is being killed.' [Okoth-Okombo's 3.1.5.3 (79)]

Although truth-conditionally equivalent, the examples in (38) are described as having distinct appropriateness conditions. Whereas (38)a is appropriate as an answer to a question about 'what is taking place', as in (39)a. The sentence in (38)b preferably answers a question related to 'what is happening to the *leopard*', as in (39)b.

- (39) a. Ango ma timore ka?  
 what REL happen-IMPERF here  
 'What is happening here?' [Okoth-Okombo's 3.1.5.3 (80)]  
 b. Itimo kwach nade?  
 do-PASS-IMPERF leopard how  
 'What is being done to the leopard?' [Okoth-Okombo's 3.1.5.3 (81)]

<sup>10</sup>A'-(contrastive)-object-left-dislocation is also found in Bàsàà and Mbuun (Bostoen and Mundeke, 2011).

Ochola, who proposes a syntactic analysis in which the fronted-NP is adjoined to IP, also treats this type of NP-fronting as a topicalization operation.

From the perspective of the indefinite-subject approach, the example from Cable given in (35) and repeated below shows that ‘topicalization’ of non-referential expressions is also licit in Dholuo.

- (35) a. Oka [wuoi ka wuoi]<sub>1</sub> gi guoge<sub>2/\*1</sub>  
 bite.PASS every.boy by dog.his  
 ‘Every boy<sub>1</sub> was bitten by his<sub>2/\*1</sub> dog.  
 b. [Wuoi ka wuoi]<sub>1</sub> oka gi guoge<sub>1/2</sub>  
 every.boy bite.PASS by dog.his  
 Every boy<sub>1</sub> was bitten by his<sub>1/2</sub> dog. [Cable’s (29)]

In sum, Dholuo seems to belong to a type of languages in which the grammatical subject must match the thematically highest argument available. A ‘side-effect’ of this strong requirement seems to be a clearer structural split between subjecthood and topicality: a phrase with greater topicality than the preferred grammatical subject has to occupy a clause-initial, topic-like, A-position *within the inflectional domain* – instead of combining subject demotion and object promotion, as in English.

## 5 Conclusion

This article discussed a type of sentences found in the Nilotic language Dholuo (Kenya, Tanzania) that was argued by Cable (2012) to provide clear evidence for the existence of natural languages in which the specifier positions of preverbal functional projections (i.e. the ‘subject’ position) are optionally filled, *contra* Chomsky’s (1981) Extended Projection Principle. Additional data from the existing literature on Dholuo were considered and it was argued that under the indefinite subject analysis (The St Joseph’s Society, 1921; Omondi, 1982; Tucker, 1994; Ochola, 1999) – which so far stands unchallenged – Dholuo (i) does not falsify the requirement that clauses have a subject and (ii) speaks in favor of a different type of parametrization of the EPP than the one defended by Cable.

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