



1982

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### Recommended Citation

Gunn, Judy (1982) "The use of Buglere passives illustrated from a narrative text," *Work Papers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota Session*: Vol. 26 , Article 4.

DOI: 10.31356/silwp.vol26.04

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THE USE OF BUGLERE PASSIVES  
ILLUSTRATED FROM A NARRATIVE TEXT

Judy Gunn

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Abbreviations

COM	completed (past) tense
NC	non-completed (present) tense
FUT	future
NEG	negative
PASS	passive
POSS	possessive
UN	unspecified

0. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe the forms and functions of the passive construction in Buglere discourse.<sup>1</sup> There seem to be two basic types of passive in Buglere.<sup>2</sup>

- 1) -le passive form -- in which the suffix -le (-re) is added to the verb stem. (This same suffix is also used to adjectivize a noun.)
- 2) -a passive form (inverted passive) -- in which the suffix -a/-e is added to the verb stem, and the auxiliary verb changes from its unmarked position in the clause (preceding the object and main verb) to be placed following the main verb, accompanied by a fronting of the direct object to subject position. The auxiliary is attached to the passive form of the main verb.

The two forms occur with both transitive and intransitive verbs and show the essential features of non-agentive/impersonal passive constructions. This can readily be seen in the English glosses of the following sentences

(for an example of an impersonal passive formed from an intransitive verb, see 18b):

Examples

- (1a) ACTIVE Begi č̣i hig-u hia-ge.  
 Begi water leave-COM fire-on  
*'Begi left the water on the fire.'*
- (1b) PASSIVE Č̣i hig-le hia-ge  
 water leave-PASS fire-on  
*'The water was left on the fire.'*
- (2a) ACTIVE Kwiạ ho č̣a do-e una-ske.  
 people go(COM) I carry-NC city-to  
*'The people carried me to the city.'*
- (2b) PASSIVE Č̣a do-a-ho una-ske.  
 I carry-PASS-went city-to  
*'I was carried to the city.'*

Since there are two distinct passive forms, and each one has distinctive traits of form and function, the following questions are relevant:

- 1) What factors influence the speaker's choice of when to employ either form in his discourse?
- 2) What are the distinct functions of the two forms?
- 3) In what ways do they function the same?
- 4) How are they distributed in a narrative discourse?

One text will serve as a basis for this paper with further examples drawn from the general corpus of Buglere texts.<sup>3</sup> The basic text was narrated by a middle-aged Buglere man (Romelio Cibala) in which he describes an accident he had with an axe that left him with a permanent limp.

1. -le Passive

1.1 Form

There is a derivational suffix, -le (-re)<sup>4</sup> in Buglere which attaches to a noun, to an adjective or to a transitive or intransitive verb root.

When the suffix attaches to an active verb, the resultant form is a non-agentive passive. It is used to set the stage for the main event which immediately follows it in the sense that the following action assumes the result of the completed action described by the -le verb, but says nothing about when that action occurred, or who did it, because that previous event is not part of the main narrative line.

### Examples

- (3a) Muina bla li-u.  
 woman bananas cook-COM

*'The woman cooked the bananas.'*

- (3b) Ča čk-u gude; bla li-re,  
 I arrive-COM home bananas cook-le  
 ča bla gut-u ulita.  
 I bananas eat-COM total

*'I arrived home; bananas were cooked, I ate all the bananas.'*  
*(On arriving home, I ate all the cooked bananas.)*

- (4) Koi gu-le gba-boke, ča koi  
 chicken kill-le SHAPE CLASSIFIER-two (ROUND) I chicken  
 gut-u Tomás ŋeru.  
 eat-COM Thomas from

*'Two chickens were killed, I ate Thomas's chickens.'*

The -le passive verb form focuses on the result of the action as can be seen in the above examples (3b) and (4). In (4) the action of killing Thomas's chickens produced a result, i.e., two dead chickens. It is this result which is in focus, rather than the action of "killing" which produced the result. The narrator is neither focusing on when the chickens were killed nor who killed them, but he is focusing on the fact that the chickens were available for him to eat when he needed strength.

This same suffix -le attaches to nouns and in this way forms either (1) an adjective, which then becomes part of the noun phrase, or (2) an adverb, which then becomes part of the verb phrase.

Examples

## ADJECTIVES

- (5) Kwia<sub>ꞌꞌ</sub> sera-gda bita-le čag-e-du du-ge.  
 person leg-bone piece-le walk-NC-COM canoe-by  
*'The person (with) the amputated leg travelled by canoe.'*

- (6) Ča bligda čo-le gut-u.  
 I food salt-le eat-COM  
*'I ate the salty food.'*

- (7) Kwia<sub>ꞌꞌ</sub> dža-le ho čk-e dba blebita-ske.  
 person liquor-le went(COM) arrive-NC down mud-in  
*'The drunken person fell down in the mud.'*

## ADVERBS

- (8) Ba űa-čk-e űwe-re.  
 you smell-arrive-NC fish-le  
*'You smell fishy.'*

- (9) Kirogwa ho to-i hwi-re una-ske.  
 child went(COM) live-NC homeplace-le city-in  
*'The child went to live permanently in the city.'*

- (10) Kwia<sub>ꞌꞌ</sub> igi kag-u űwale male<sub>ꞌ</sub>  
 person money send-COM empty so  
 kl-e čag-e ko-le.  
 is-NC walk-NC hand-le

*'The person spent all his money foolishly so he is broke (walking empty-handed).'*

(NOTE: čke in (7) functions as a main verb following an auxiliary verb and in (8) it functions as part of a compound verb.)

## 1.2 Function

As was stated in the above section, the use of this -le verb form brings into focus the result achieved by some action, rather than focusing on the action itself. The importance of this shift of focus becomes evident when seen in the context of narrative discourse. The text from which (4) was taken illustrates this.

The narrator is the main participant in the text and is describing an event in his life. The entire text centers on him and his injury. Therefore, the killing of the chickens for food is not in focus, but the fact that they were killed and he ate them is important.

Also the use of this form necessarily involves suppression of the agent (i.e., the person who killed the chickens) of the action. In (4) the chickens were brought into focus because at this point in the text they are an important/vital prop related to the main participant's well-being. The important facts about the chickens are that (1) they are edible, and (2) they have been prepared (killed). It is not important to the progression of the narrative to know who killed them.

Another function of this -le verb form is to introduce background information during the discourse. Therefore, the state of the object/patient is one way of giving the setting for the following section of the discourse.

Example

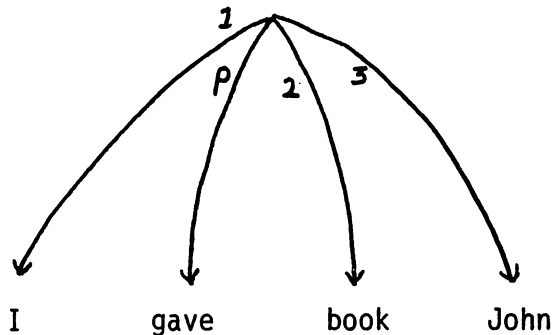
- (11) (a) Ča ho čk-e ne ŋwa-di,  
I go(COM) arrive-NC that place-at
- (b) geru-dre ŋabebitabi:  
say- le in the early morning
- (c) "Če he bla nate."  
we(INCL) will-go(CONTRACTION) bananas after
- (d) Ča du-le,  
I carry-le(take)
- (e) ča ho Anita ole.  
I go(COM) Anita with

'(When) I arrived at that place, (it) was said early in the morning: "Let's go fetch bananas," so I, being taken along, went with Anita.'

In the above example (11), the narrator obviously is the main participant as is evident by the appearance of the first person pronoun čá 'I' in three out of the five clauses of the sentence. Clauses (a) and (e) are main narrative line information (evidenced by their completed verb suffixes), important to the movement/progression of the discourse. Clauses (b), (c) and (d) are all backgrounded giving a setting to the mainline action. These three clauses give the listener a hint that the narrator blames his mother-in-law (Anita) for what happens to him later on in the text, i.e., cutting himself with an axe. When he says 'čá dule' in clause (d), he is implying that Anita influenced or persuaded him to go in spite of the bad dream he had had the night before. The only mention of the dream directly is the first sentence in the discourse which states "Be careful of dreams". In the Buglere culture having a bad dream dictates what one can or cannot do the following day. This whole text illustrates the consequences of not adhering to this belief.

In this paper the passive in Buglere is treated in a Relational Grammar framework. The three main relations borne by nominals in a clause are subject, direct object and indirect object. In RG these TERM relations are referred to respectively as 1, 2, and 3. Every basic clause also has a PREDICATE (P) which governs the nominals in the clause.<sup>5</sup>

When visually representing a clause, arcs are used to indicate grammatical relations. A relational network is given below for the sentence, 'I gave the book to John'.



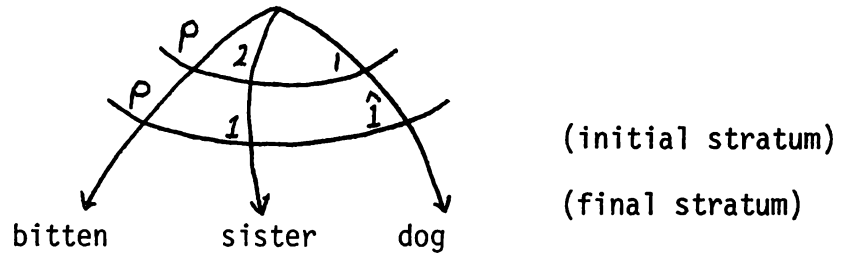
There are also NON-TERM relations which are labelled OBLIQUES and include such notions as Benefactive, Locative, Instrumental, Accompaniment, etc.

For a given clause, it sometimes becomes necessary to refer to levels (strata) of relations.

'My sister was bitten by the dog.'

In the above sentence, my sister has the syntactic properties of a subject. But semantically it is the dog that is the agent with my sister being the patient. In RG it can be said that my sister is both a subject and an

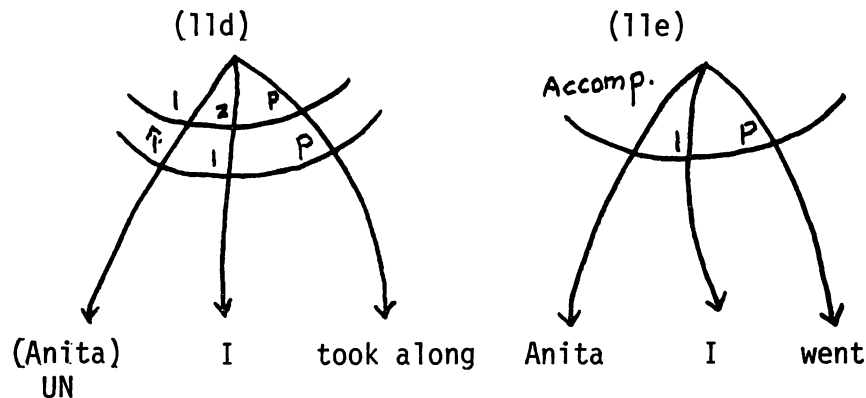
object (patient). The two relations of my sister are in different strata.<sup>6</sup>



According to RG, then, a passive construction can be described in terms of three requisite features.

- 1) The direct object (2) in one stratum becomes the subject (1) in the next stratum.
- 2) The subject of the initial stratum bears the *chômeur* relation in the next stratum.<sup>7</sup>
- 3) There is something in the verb to show that it has changed status from a transitive verb to an intransitive verb.

The stratal diagrams for clauses (11d) and (11e) provide helpful insights into the Buglere passive.



The three requisite features of a passive are present. Anita is the initial subject of (11d) -- this is known by context. But in the final stratum (and what is finally represented on the surface), the direct object (2) becomes the subject (1) and the subject of the initial stratum (Anita) is completely suppressed. Also the verb is changed from active, du 'carried' to passive du<sub>le</sub> 'was carried' by adding the suffix -le to the verb.



Even though Anita (earlier identified as his mother-in-law) was the one who said, "Let's go fetch bananas" (11c) and the one who took him along (influenced him to go), she is never in focus and is obligatorily eliminated in (11d) and (11b) where she is also an initial subject. This syntactic suppression is typical of the treatment given non-central participants even when they are agents.

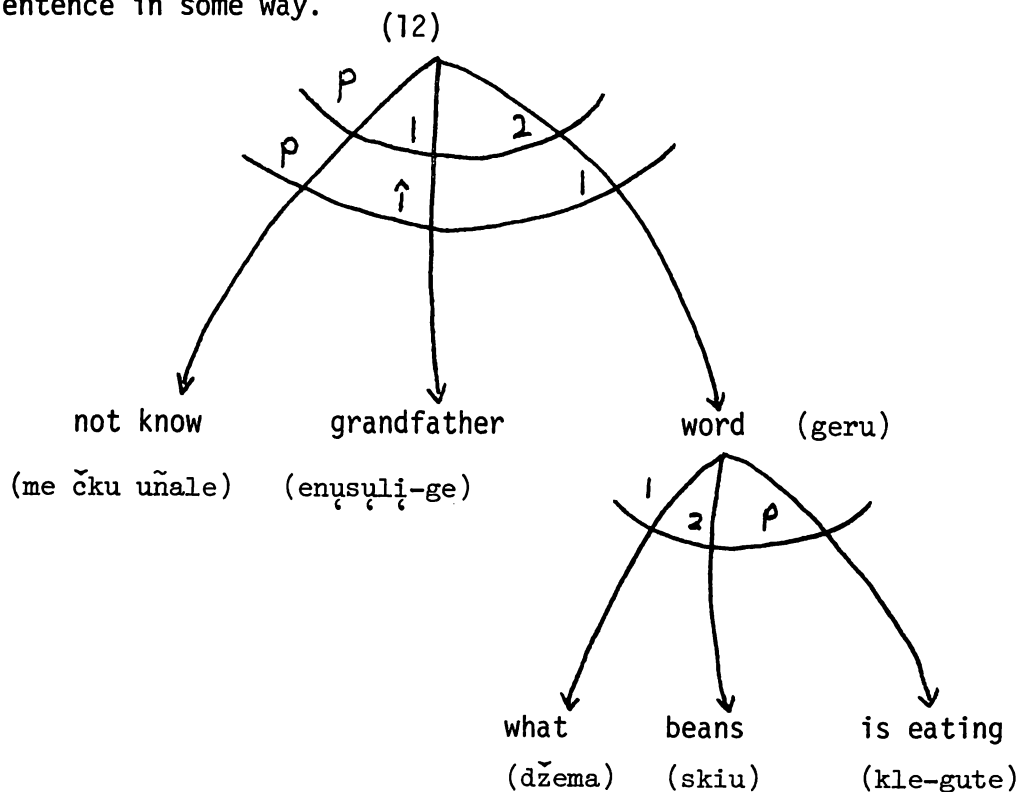
Although not commonly done, the result of an action can be brought into focus by employing an auxiliary in the completed form.

### Example

(12)	Geru	me	<u>č</u> k-u	uñ-a- <u>le</u>	enųsųliġ-ge
	word	NEG	arrive-COM	know-PASS- <u>le</u>	grandfather-to
			džema	kl-e	skiu gut-e.
			what	is-NC	beans eat-NC.

*'It was not known to grandfather what was eating the beans.'*

The verb used in (12) uñale 'known' is the -le passive form but functions differently than the normal -le forms.<sup>8</sup> As seen in (12) the agent of the verb uñe 'know' is grandfather. That agent is demoted and is marked like a final 3 in the stratal diagram of this sentence. No other verb in the -le form has been observed in which the agent is retained in the sentence in some way.



The headless relative clause is shifted to the right and leaves geru 'word' as an anaphoric copy having the initial object relation in the main clause. Other -le verb forms have been observed to co-occur with various auxiliary verbs, but this is relatively uncommon. Uñale often appears with an auxiliary.

As shown in this section, I suggest that the -le form of the verb passivizes the clause and has four main functions:

- 1) To bring the initial object into focus.
- 2) To eliminate or de-focus the final subject because that agent is not an important participant of the narrative at that point.
- 3) To place the resultant state of the initial object in focus, not the action which achieved that state.
- 4) To place the information of the clause in the background where it provides setting for the mainline action.

## 2. Inverted passive

### 2.1 Form

The normal word order of a Buglere sentence containing an auxiliary verb is as follows: OTHER-SUBJ-AUX-OBJ-VERB-OTHER.

#### Examples

(13a) Kwia      čk-e              ča      do-e              gude.  
 people   arrive-NC    I      carry-NC      to-the-house

*'People arrive carrying me to the house.'*

(14a) Ča      ŋenu-a              čk-u              geru      kad-e              ča-ge.  
 I      father-POSS    arrive-COM    word    invite(call)-NC    I-to

*'My father arrived to ask me (something).'*

(15a) Kwia      be      ŋa      bat-e      ne      ŋwa-di      džani.  
 people   FUT    place    hit-NC    that    place-at    there

*'The people will clear the fields at that place there.'*

- (16a) Ča hru-dža ho geru kad-e sukia-ge.  
 I uncle(maternal)-POSS go(COM) word invite(call)-NC sage-to  
 'My uncle went to ask (something) of the sage.'
- (17a) Dže ŋa-ske kl-e skiu gut-e enʊsʊli ŋeru.  
 thing forest-in is-NC beans eat-NC grandfather from  
 'A wild animal is eating grandfather's beans.'
- (18a) Kwia kl-e čag-e du-ge.  
 people are-NC walk-NC canoe-by  
 'The people are travelling by canoe.'

To form the inverted passive, the suffix -a (passive/inverted suffix)<sup>9</sup> is added to the transitive verb root and the non-completed suffix -e is added to the intransitive verb root. Then the auxiliary is attached to that new form.

#### Examples

- (13b) Ča do-a-čk-e gude.  
 I carry-PASS-arrive-NC at-the-house  
 'I was being carried arriving at the house.'
- (14b) Geru kad-a-čk-u ča-ge.  
 word invite(call)-PASS-arrive-COM I-to  
 '(It) was asked of me.'
- (15b) ŋa bat-a-be ne ŋwa-di džani.  
 place hit-PASS-FUT that place-at there  
 'The fields will be cleared at that place there.'
- (16b) Geru kad-a-ho sukia-ge.  
 word invite-PASS-go(COM) sage-to/of  
 '(It) was asked of the sage.'

- (17b) Skiu gut-a-kl-e enuṣuḷi ɲeru.  
 beans eat-PASS-are-NC grandfather from  
*'The beans were being eaten from grandfather.'*

- (18b) Čag-e-kl-e du-ge.  
 walk-NC-is-NC canoe-by  
*'(Someone) is traveling by canoe.'*

The auxiliary verbs čke 'arrive' and hoge 'go' are members of a set of motion verbs which move participants and props from place to place in Buglere discourse. From the use of these motion verbs, the narrator's point of reference can be determined.

When used in the inverted passive, the auxiliary čke 'arrive' can appear in its completed (past) form or its non-completed (present) form. Be 'FUTURE' is never inflected in the language. Hoge 'go' can only appear in its completed (irregular) form and kle 'be' can only appear in its non-completed form when attaching to the main verb following the -a suffix.

When the inverted passive form is used in a negative clause, it is more evident that the new subject (object in the initial stratum) occupies the subject position. The negative morpheme me occurs after the subject and precedes the inverted verb form.

### Examples

- (19) Ča me kl-e samla gut-e.  
 I NEG am-NC meat eat-NC

*'I am not eating meat.'*

- (20) Samla me gut-a-kl-e.  
 meat NEG eat-PASS-is-NC

*'Meat is not eaten/the meat is not being eaten.'*

When a clause is negative-future, the constructions are as follows:

- (21) Ča mi samla gut-e.  
 I NEG-FUT meat eat-NC

*'I will not eat meat.'*

- (22) Samla me gut-a-be.  
 meat NEG eat-PASS-FUT  
 'Meat will not be eaten.'
- \*(23) Samla gut-a-mi.  
 meat eat-PASS-NEG/FUT

Two auxiliary verbs may appear along with the main verb.

### Examples

- (24) Ča daba-dža. ho čk-e ča do-e gude.  
 I brother-POSS go(COM) arrive-NC I carry-NC at-the-house  
 'My brother went arriving bringing me home.'
- (25) Ča do-a-ho čk-e gude.  
 I carry-PASS-go(COM) arrive-NC at-the-house  
 'I was being carried arriving at home.'

Although the inverted passive verb normally occurs with an auxiliary verb, it is occasionally found without one.

### Example

- (26) Ča do-a.  
 I carry-PASS  
 'I was being carried.'

## 2.2 Function

There are three main functions of the inverted verb form in Buglere discourse.

- 1) To bring the initial object into focus.

### Examples

- (27) ACTIVE Ča skatamana-dža kl-e ča kad-e Ječi.  
 I friend-POSS is-NC I call-NC Jechi.  
 'My friend calls me Jechi.'

- (28) PASSIVE Ča kad-a-kl-e Ječi.  
 I call-PASS-is-NC Jechi  
 'I am called Jechi.'

2) To de-focus the initial subject and thus avoid mentioning it.

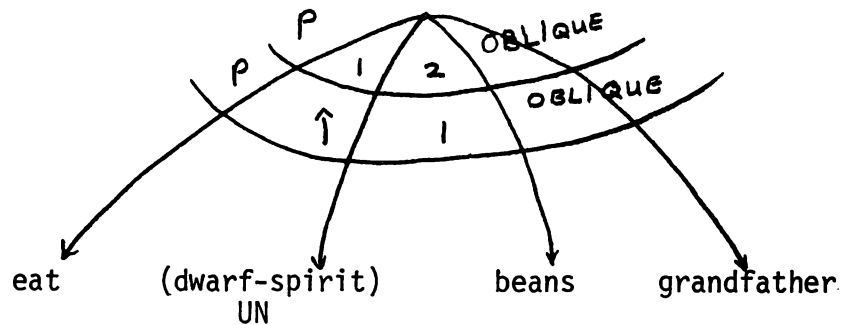
### Examples

- (29) Hodrega kl-e skiu gut-e enųsųlię ņeru.  
 dwarf-like evil spirit is-NC beans eat-NC grandfather from  
 '*The dwarf-spirit is eating grandfather's beans.*'

- (29a) Skiu gut-a-kl-e enųsųlię ņeru.  
 beans eat-PASS-is-NC grandfather from  
 '*Grandfather's beans are being eaten.*'

In the context of the discourse from which (29a) was taken, the agent (hodrega) is not only being de-topicalized but is being intentionally obscured until further along in the text in order to create mystery.

The stratal diagram for (28a) is as follows:



Grandfather is expressed as a negatively affected oblique, roughly equivalent to the semantic role of source.

3) To indicate habitual or customary action, the auxiliary kle 'be' is used in the inverted verb form.

### Example

- (30) Gli dat-a-kl-e mo giti uņ-a-le.  
 tree chop-PASS-are-NC axe with know-PASS--le  
 '*(It is) known (that) trees are chopped with an axe.*'

The form is also used in many procedural texts, indicating 'this is how it is customarily done'.

### Examples

- (31) Du      dod-a-kl-e              gli      kad-a-kl-e              dugé,  
          canoe make-PASS-is-NC      tree      call-PASS-is-NC      cedar  
                          ama      dod-a-kl-e              du-le.  
                          it      make-PASS-is-NC      canoe-ish(-le)

*'Canoes are made from the cedar tree.'*

- (32) Ama-ge      čag-e-kl-e.  
          it-by      walk-NC-is-NC  
                          *'By canoe, (one) travels'* (Lit: 'it is travelled')

In this text the narrator describes the process of canoe-making. Canoes are customarily made from the cedar tree and people habitually travel by canoe.

### 3. Distribution of the two passive forms in Buglere discourse

Having described Buglere as utilizing two passive forms, it is now necessary to define more thoroughly the usage of the two. Both forms are used to bring the initial object into focus. The following examples are from the same sentence (contiguous clauses) in a text. The verb forms underlined are derived from the irregular verb doe 'carry'.

### Examples

- (33) Ča      du-le              aṅkwa-ge,  
          I      carry-le      pole stretcher-on/by  
                          *'Being carried on a stretcher, . . .'*
- (34) ča      ne      do-a-ho                      čk-e              jimq      džani.  
          I      that      carry-PASS(COM)-go      arrive-NC      beach      there  
          . . . *'I was taken to the beach there.'*

The narrator had been badly injured and much time and detail has been given in his discourse concerning just how various people transported him from the forest to where he could be taken by launch to a hospital. But the

narrator consistently arranges the discourse so the focus is on himself. He is the 'hero' (main/principal participant), not those who saved his life. So in both examples the initial subject, i.e., the rescue party, is de-emphasized--in this case completely eliminated.

However, when looking at the two examples (33) and (34), the difference between the two passive forms becomes clear. In (33), the emphasis is not on the action or process of his being carried, but rather on the 'state' of his being on the stretcher. Perhaps a better gloss would be, 'Lying on a stretcher, I was carried to the beach.' In (34) on the other hand, the focus is on the actual action of carry.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to Carl H. Harrison of the SIL for directing my study of Buglere discourse. Without his help and insights, the writing of this paper would not have been possible.

<sup>2</sup> Buglere, also known as Bokotá, is spoken by some 2000 people scattered throughout three provinces of western Panamá. The language is a member of the Chibchan family and embraces people of two distinct cultures: the Buglere, who live in the district of Bastimentos, Bocas del Toro, and the district of Santa Fé, Veraguas, between the Chucará River to the west and the Caloveborita River to the east; and the Guaymí-Sabanero who are scattered among the Guaymí living in the provinces of Chiriquí and Veraguas, and a few who reside among the Buglere (cf. M.R. Gunn, 1977: footnote #1).

<sup>3</sup> Data for this paper were gathered on various field trips to Río Luís, Veraguas, between July 1970 and October 1977, under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the National Institute of Culture, Panamá. The text materials used were contributed by Máximo Carpintero, Romelio Cibala and Luís Emilio Vernaza.

<sup>4</sup> The derivational suffix -le has three allomorphs: -re attaches to words ending in e or i; -dre attaches to a certain class of verbs; and -le attaches to forms ending in any other letter.

<sup>5</sup> Donald G. Frantz, 1981. Grammatical Relations in Universal Grammar, Indiana: Indiana University Linguistics Club, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> A *chômeur* is neither a term nor an oblique, but a special relation resulting from the demotion of what was a term in the preceding stratum. See Frantz (1981.10) for fuller discussion.



<sup>8</sup> Certain verbs have been observed to take both the inverted/passive suffix -a and the -le passive suffix. These verbs function for some purposes in the same way as the inverted passive form which utilizes the -kle 'be' auxiliary.

<sup>9</sup> The suffix -a is also attached to the verb root without any passive connotation when (1) the desiderative suffix -kalin is added, and (2) the prior information suffixes -ba and -bale are added, and (3) the potential-impersonal suffix -dale is added. But for the purposes of this paper, the -a suffix is labelled PASSIVE in the interlinear glosses of the examples.

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