

Chapter 11

The Syntax of experiencers in Sereer-Siin

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The special grammatical status of experiencers has been at the center of various studies within linguistics for several decades (Belletti & Rizzi 1988; Ameka 1990; Pesetsky 1995). This attention is due to the fact that there are specific syntactic features that are only associated with experiencers (Landau 2010). This study investigates object experiencers in Sereer-Siin – a dialect of Sereer, a West Atlantic language of the Niger Congo family spoken in Senegal. I show that object experiencers in Sereer can be classified in two groups according to their syntactic behavior. In this study I provide evidence that Sereer experiencers can be used to extend Belletti and Rizzi's traditional classification of experiencers. Using data from Italian, Belletti and Rizzi have classified object experiencers in two groups. The first one they refer to as class II, has a nominative theme and an accusative experiencer whereas the second one, class III, has a nominative theme and a dative experiencer. In Sereer, like in Italian, different properties of object experiencers account for asymmetries noted with respect to constructions like passive, antipassive and nominalization.

1 Introduction

1.1 Language Background

Sereer-Siin (Sereer) is a West Atlantic language of the Niger Congo family spoken in Senegal. It is genetically related to Wolof and Pulaar (Simons & Fennig 2017). There are various dialects of Sereer. This variety, considered the standard, is spoken in the areas traditionally known as Siin and Saalum. The basic word order of Sereer is SVO. Sereer is an agglutinative language; this is exemplified in (1).



- (1) a. o njaac onqe bog -u -ir -k -at -ir -an
 CL child CL_{DEF} wash -REF -INST -IPFV -IT -NEG -3OBJ
 ‘The child will not wash him/herself with this again’
- b. xa caac axe bog -u -ir -k -at -ir -an
 CL_{PL} child CL_{DEF-PL} wash -REF -INST -IPFV -IT -NEG -OBJ
 ‘The children will not wash him/herself with this again’

There are various studies dealing with the noun class system in Sereer (Fal 1980; Faye 1979; Faye 2013; Renaudier 2012); however there is no agreement about the number of noun classes found in Sereer. For instance, Faye (2013) argues that Sereer has nine noun classes, whereas for Fal (1980) and McLaughlin (1992), Sereer has thirteen noun classes. Table 1 from McLaughlin (1992: 284) gives a list of the different noun classes found in Sereer.

Table 1: Sereer noun classes

Class	Prefix	Clitic determiner	Class content
1	o-	oxe	human singular
2	∅-	we	human plural
3a	a-	ale	singular
3b	a-	ale	augmentative singular
4	a-	ake	plural
5	∅ -	le	singular
6	∅-	ne	singular
7	∅ -	fee	singular
8	fo-	ole	plural
9	∅-	ke	plural
10	o-	ole	singular
11	xa-	axe	plural

Indefiniteness is shown with the presence of a noun class marker (*prefix* in Table 1) before the noun whereas definiteness is shown through the presence of a prenominal and a postnominal class marker (*clitic determiner* in Table 1).

Consonant mutation is another important characteristic of Sereer. It is used to show subject-verb agreement with regard to number; it is also used for inflectional and derivational processes (see McLaughlin for a detailed analysis on consonant mutation in Sereer). Finally, in Sereer, object pronouns are suffixes incorporated to the noun (Baier 2018).

1.2 Experiencers in Sereer

There are different types of experiencers. An example of subject experiencer is shown in (2a) with the verb *bug* ‘love’. Object experiencers are shown in (2b–d) with the verbs *diidlat* ‘be scared’, *bet* ‘surprise’ and *soob* ‘miss’ respectively.

- (2) a. Subject Experiencer
 Faatu a bug -a Maamkoor
 Faatu 3SG love -PERF Maamkoor
 ‘Faatu loves Mamkoor’
- b. Object Experiencer
 Awa a diid -lat -a o fes ole
 Awa 3SG be.scared -CAUS PERF CL young.man CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa frightened the young man’
- c. Object Experiencer
 Faatu a bet -a o njaac onqe
 Faatu 3SG surprise -PERF CL child CL_{DEF}
 ‘Faatu surprised the child’
- d. Object Experiencer
 o fes ole a soob a o tew oxe
 CL young.man CL_{DEF} 3SG miss PERF CL woman CL_{DEF}
 ‘The woman misses the young man’

In (2b) the psych verb appears with a causative suffix whereas in (2c) and (2d) the verb does not bear any extra morphology. The rest of this paper is on object experiencers (2b–d).

2 Previous Studies

In their seminal work on experiencers, Belletti & Rizzi (1988) use Italian to posit three classes of experiencers. They are illustrated in (3) from Belletti & Rizzi (1988: 291–292).

- (3) Italian (Indo-European; Belletti & Rizzi 1988)
- a. Gianni teme questo
 ‘Gianni fears this’
- b. Questo preoccupa Gianni
 ‘This worries Gianni’

- c. A Gianni piace questo
‘Gianni pleases this’
- d. Questo piace a Gianni
‘This pleases to Gianni’

Belletti & Rizzi (B & R) make the claim that (3a) and (3b) are syntactically similar as they can both be related to transitive structures. Thus verbs like *temere* in (3a) belong to a class of experiencer verbs which have an experiencer as a subject and a theme as an object. In contrast, in (3b) with *preoccupare* type verbs, the experiencer is in object position whereas the theme is in subject position. Finally, in (3c) with experiencer verbs of the *piacere* class, the verb appears with a dative experiencer as a subject and a nominative theme, however these arguments of the verb can appear in a different order as shown in (3d).

In his study on the syntax of experiencers, Pesetsky (1995) puts aside the expression “theme” in B & R and argues for the following:

- Subject argument with object experiencers are always *Causers*.
- Object experiencers always have one of these roles: Target of Emotion or Subject Matter of Emotion.

Landau (2010: 3) builds on B & R and uses the three classes of experiencers to classify English experiencers.

- Class I: Nominative experiencer, accusative theme.
John loves Mary.
- Class II: Nominative theme, accusative experiencer.
The show amused Bill.
- Class III: Nominative theme, dative experiencer.
The idea appealed to Julie.

Landau argues that experiencers are mental locations (locatives) and that universally “object experiencers behave like oblique arguments, whether their governing preposition is overt or not” Landau (2010: 127). He further makes the claim that in some languages object experiencers are overtly quirky and for that reason can occur in subject position.

Throughout this paper I use B & R’s classification of Italian experiencers and adapt it to classify Sereer experiencers.

2.1 Classifying Sereer experiencers using B & R

In this section, I show that Sereer experiencer verbs come in three classes (adapted from B & R). Verbs in the first class come with a nominative experiencer and an accusative theme whereas the verbs in the second class appear with a nominative causer, accusative experiencer. Finally, the last class of experiencer verbs have a nominative theme and a dative experiencer. These different classes of experiencers are illustrated next.

2.1.1 Class I: Nominative experiencer, accusative theme

In this class, verbs like *bug* ‘love’ and *and* ‘know’ are found, they have the structure of a regular transitive verb.

- (4) a. Faatu a bug -a Maamkoor
 Faatu 3SG love -PERF Maamkoor
 ‘Faatu loves Mamkoor’
- b. o tew oxe a and a Maamkoor
 CL lady CL_{DEF} 3SG know PERF Maamkoor
 ‘The lady knows Mamkoor’

In (4a) and (4b) the entity undergoing a psychological experience is in subject position. The next two classes describe object experiencers.

2.1.2 Class II: Nominative causer, accusative experiencer

These experiencer verbs come in two types. The first type must appear with a causative suffix whereas the second type does not occur with a causative suffix. Note that this is different from B & R’s Class II. Even though they do not use “causer”, my assumption is that a causer role is added to the subject of experiencer verbs of Class II. In (5a) and (5b) the verbs *diidlat* ‘frighten’ and *jaaxdat* ‘worry’ are used transitively and are morphological complex.

- (5) a. Awa a diid -lat -a o fes ole
 Awa 3SG be.scared -CAUS PERF CL young.man CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa frightened the young man’
- b. Faatu a jaax -dat -a o tew oxe
 Faatu 3SG be.worried -CAUS PERF CL lady CL_{DEF}
 ‘Faatu made the woman worried’

In (5a) and (5b), the experiencers are in object position. The other type of object experiencer in this class is shown in (6).

- (6) a. Faatu a bet a o njaac onqe
Faatu 3SG surprise PERF CL child CL_{DEF}
'Faatu suprised the child'
- b. Faatu a weg a o tew oxe
Faatu 3SG be.unlucky PERF CL lady CL_{DEF}
'Faatu brought bad luck to the woman'

In (6a) and (6b) there is no overt causative suffix on the verb. My assumption is that there is a silent causative suffix. As will be show in §3 these verbs behave the same in some syntactic environments. Object experiencers, according to Pesetsky (1995), add an additional causer argument. In addition, the argument related to the "cause" must be realized as the subject (Grimshaw 1990).

Verbs of this class (Class II) behave like regular transitive verbs projecting a light verb headed by an overt or a silent causative.

2.1.3 Class III: Nominative theme, dative experiencer

Arguments of verbs of this class, shown in (7), appear in the same order as the ones of verbs of Class II described (6).

- (7) a. o fes ole a soob a o tew oxe
CL young.man CL_{DEF} 3SG miss PERF CL woman CL_{DEF}
'the woman misses the young man'
- b. Awa a fel a o njaac onqe
Awa 3SG appeal PERF CL boy CL_{DET}
'Awa appeals to the boy'

In (7a) and (7b) the verbs do not have a causative component associated with them. These verbs have been argued to be stative/unaccusative. My assumption is that the object experiencers of these verbs are introduced by a silent preposition making them oblique. As will be shown, these objects behave like typical datives. The different classes of experiencers in Sereer are summarized in Table 2.

The remainder of this paper focuses on Class II and Class III experiencers by discussing syntactic differences between the two types of object experiencers that account for the classification in Table 2. More specifically, I show that they behave differently with respect to passivization, nominalization and antipassivization.

Table 2: Sereer experiencers

Class I	Nominative experiencer	Accusative theme
Class II	Nominative causer	Accusative experiencer
Class III	Nominative theme	Dative experiencer

3 Distinguishing between the two object experiencers in Sereer

3.1 Passivization test

In Sereer, passive is shown through the promoting of the verb internal argument to subject position whereas the external argument is demoted through suppression. Passive construction is marked through the use of the suffix *-el*¹ on the infinitive verb (Faye 1979; Renaudier 2012; Faye 2013), however, this suffix has various allomorphs conditioned by aspect, tense and/or negation.

- (8) a. Awa a ñaam a maalo fe
 Awa 3SG eat PERF rice CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa ate the rice’
 b. maalo fe a ñaam-e? (*Awa)
 rice CL_{DEF} 3SG eat-PASS Awa
 ‘the rice was eaten’

As seen in (8), with a regular transitive verb, the demoted external argument *Awa* cannot appear in passive constructions. Passivizing experiencer verbs yields different results according to the nature of the object.

Sereer Class II object experiencers can successfully undergo passivization. This is illustrated in (9) and (10) with the verbs *diidlat* ‘frighten’ and *bet* ‘surprise’.

- (9) a. Awa a diid -lat a o fes ole
 Awa 3SG be.scared -CAUS PERF CL young.man CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa frightened the young man’
 b. o fes ole a diid -lat -e?
 CL young.man CL_{DEF} 3SG be.scared -CAUS -PASS
 ‘The young man was frightened’

¹This suffix is referred to in Faye & Mous (2006) as anticausative.

In (9b) derived from (9a) the object experiencer is promoted to subject position and the verb, which is morphologically complex, must appear with a passive morpheme. A similar situation can be observed in (10a–b) with the verb *bet* ‘surprise’ which is morphologically simple. Note however that I mentioned earlier that this verb is semantically similar to *diidlat* ‘frighten’ as they both have the “cause” component.

- (10) a. Faatu a bet -a o njaac onqe
 Faatu 3SG surprise PERF CL child CL_{DEF}
 ‘Faatu surprised the child’
 b. o njaac onqe a bet -eʔ
 CL child CL 3SG surprise -PASS
 ‘the child was surprised’

In (10) the verb behaves as expected since it allows passivization. The object experiencer can move to subject position along with a demotion of the original subject through suppression.

Next I show that Class III object experiencers cannot undergo passivization. This is illustrated in (11) with the verb *soob* ‘miss’.

- (11) a. o fes ole a soob a o tew oxe
 CL young.man CL_{DEF} 3SG miss PERF CL woman CL_{DEF}
 ‘the woman misses the young man’
 b. *o tew oxe a soob -eʔ
 CL woman CL_{DEF} 3SG miss -PASS
 ‘The woman was missed’ (intended)

(11b) shows that passive morphology is incompatible with verbs of this class, that is the object experiencers cannot be promoted to subject position. This is evidence that they are different from the ones in Class II. (12) follows a similar pattern with the verb *fel* ‘appeal to’.

- (12) a. Awa a fel -a o njaac onqe
 Awa 3SG appeal PERF CL child CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa appeals to the boy’
 b. *o njaac onqe -a fel -eʔ
 CL child CL_{DEF} 3SG appeal.to -PASS
 ‘The child was appealed to’ (intended)

After this passivization test, I use another test which consists of nominalizing the clause containing an object experiencer.

3.2 Nominalization test

Grimshaw (1990) argues that nominalization and passivization are related in that in both cases the external argument is optional and as such, can be suppressed. Indeed in English, for instance, the external argument in such constructions is optional as (13) shows.

- (13) a. The door was opened (by John)
 b. The opening of the door (by John)

These sentences show that in English the external argument can be suppressed in nominalization and passivization. In Sereer, a similar situation can be observed, however the suppression of the external argument in these constructions is mandatory as mentioned earlier with passives. If these two constructions (i.e. passivization and nominalization) are related, one should expect to see results similar to the ones observed with the passivization test.

In Sereer, Class II experiencer verbs can successfully undergo nominalization as (14) shows.

- (14) a. Awa a diid -lat -a o fes ole
 Awa 3SG be.scared -CAUS PERF CL young.man CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa frightened the young man’
 b. Nominalization
 o diid -lat ole no o fes ole
 CL be.scared -CAUS CL_{DEF} P CL young.man CL_{DEF}
 ‘The frightening of the young man’

In (14b) the nominal derived from (14a) appears with noun class markers. In addition, the internal argument of the verb, the object experiencer, is introduced by the preposition *no*. A similar pattern can be observed in (15) with the verb *bet* ‘surprise’.

- (15) a. Faatu a bet -a o njaac onqe
 Faatu 3SG surprise PERF CL child CL_{DEF}
 ‘Faatu surprised the child’
 b. Nominalization
 o bet ole no o njaac onqe
 CL surprise CL_{DEF} P CL child CL_{DEF}
 ‘the surprising of the child’

Just like in the previous example, in (15) the object experiencer appears in a prepositional phrase whereas the nominalized verb occur with nominalizers (i.e. noun class markers).

Class III experiencer verbs fail to undergo nominalization. This is illustrated in (16).

- (16) a. Awa a sooḃ -a o tew oxe
 Awa 3SG miss PERF CL woman CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa misses the woman’
- b. *o sooḃ ole no no tew oxe
 CL miss CL_{DEF} P CL woman CL_{DEF}
 ‘The woman being missed’ (intended)

In (16b), derived from (16a), nominalizing the verb results in ungrammaticality. This is expected since the verb does not assign accusative case to the object experiencer. A similar situation is can be noted in (17).

- (17) a. Awa a fel -a o tew oxe
 Awa 3SG appeal.to PERF CL woman CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa appeals to the woman’
- b. *o fel ole no no tew oxe
 CL appeal.to CL_{DEF} P CL woman CL_{DEF}
 ‘The woman being appealed to’ (intended)

In (17) the verb *fel* ‘appeal to’ cannot be nominalized as the ungrammaticality of (17b) shows. Surprisingly, if the passive morphology *-el* appears with a verb of this type (Class III) nominalization is possible as shown in (18).

- (18) a. Awa a fel a o njaac onqe
 Awa 3SG appeal PERF CL boy CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa appeals to the boy’
- b. o pel -el ole no o njaac onqe
 CL appeal -PASS CL_{DEF} P CL boy CL_{DEF}
 ‘The appealing to the young man’ (intended)
- c. *o pel ole no o njaac onqe
 CL appeal CL_{DEF} P CL boy CL_{DEF}
 ‘The young man being appealed to’

Faye (2013) argues that another use of the passive marker *-el* is to derive nominals from stative verbs. The behavior of Class III experiencer verbs with respect to nominalization shows that these verbs are different from the ones of Class II.

These types of experiencer verbs are superficially transitive but underlyingly unaccusative (Belletti & Rizzi 1988; Pesetsky 1995; Landau 2010).

In the next subsection, I use antipassivation to further distinguish between the two types of object experiencers.

3.3 Antipassivization test

The term “antipassive” is generally used to refer to a characteristic of voice in ergative languages (Crystal 2008). In antipassive constructions, the verb is semantically transitive but does not project a direct object (Polinsky 2017).

Polinsky further argues that crosslinguistically, antipassive can be diagnosed through case marking, noun incorporation, agreement, word order, verbal affixation. She also provides evidence that antipassive can be found in accusative languages (see also Heaton 2017).

In Sereer (Renaudier 2011), and related languages like Wolof (Creissels & Nouguié-Voisin 2008) antipassive is marked through verbal suffixation.

- (19) a. o fox ole a ηat -a o njaac onqe
 CL dog CL_{DEF} 3SG bite PERF CL boy CL_{DEF}
 ‘The dog bit the boy’
- b. o fox ole kaa ηat -a -a (*o njaac onqe)
 CL dog CL_{DEF} IPFV.3SG bite -ANTIP -PERF
 ‘The dog bit’

In Sereer, the suffix *-a* is used on the verb to mark the antipassive construction. The antipassive morpheme is very productive (not only related to verbs of transfer and ditransitives as argued in Renaudier).

With respect to experiencer verbs, different results are noticed according to the type of object being dealt with. Verbs belonging to Class II can undergo antipassivization, that is they can appear with the passive marker along with a suppression of the object experiencer. This is shown in (20) and in (21).

- (20) a. Awa a diid -lat a o fes ole
 Awa 3SG be.scared -CAUS PERF CL young.man CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa frightened the young man’

- b. Awa kaa diid -lat -a -a
 Awa IPFV.3SG be scared -CAUS -ANTIP - PERF
 ‘Awa frightened’
- (21) a. Faatu a bet -a o njaac onqe
 Faatu 3SG surprise PERF CL child CL_{DEF}
 ‘Faatu surprised the child’
- b. Faatu kaa bet -a -a
 Faatu IPFV.3SG surprise -ANTIP PERF
 ‘Faatu surprised’

These examples show that experiencer verbs of Class II behave like regular transitive verbs in that they can undergo antipassivization. In both (20b) and in (21b) the object experiencer argument is suppressed.

Contrary to Class II verbs, verbs of Class III cannot occur with the antipassive marker *-a*.

- (22) a. Awa a fel -a o tew oxe
 Awa 3SG appeal PERF CL woman CL_{DEF}
 ‘Awa appeals to the woman’
- b. *Awa kaa fel -a -a
 Awa IPFV.3SG appeal -ANTIP -PERF
 ‘Awa appealed to’ (intended)

In (22b) the verb *fel* ‘appeal to’ appear with the antipassive marker and this yields ungrammaticality. The same situation can be observed in (23b).

- (23) a. o njaac onqe a soob a o tew oxe
 CL boy CL_{DEF} 3SG miss PERF CL woman CL_{DEF}
 ‘The woman misses the boy’
- b. *o njaac onqe kaa soob -a
 o njaac CL_{DEF} IPFV.3SG miss -antip

In this section I have used various tests (i.e. passivization, nominalization and antipassivization) to substantiate the claim that Sereer object experiencers come into two classes, Class II and Class III.

4 Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to describe object experiencers in Sereer in light of Belletti & Rizzi (1988). I have shown that they come in two types, Class II and Class III. Contrary to Landau (2010), I have shown that Class II object experiencers are not oblique and behave like regular transitive verbs. In contrast, Class III object experiencers are oblique and as such do not display typical object properties. It is my assumption that these objects are introduced by a silent preposition. This is in line with B & R's analysis of experiencers of this type as being assigned an inherent dative case. This study is not only a contribution to the literature of experiencers but is also a contribution to the study of argument structure in Sereer. Table 3, repeated from above, summarizes the different properties of the experiencer verbs found in Sereer.

Table 3: Sereer experiencers

Class I	Nominative experiencer	Accusative theme
Class II	Nominative causer	Accusative experiencer
Class III	Nominative theme	Dative experiencer

Abbreviations

ANTIP	antipassive	NEG	negation
CAUS	causative	PASS	passive marker
CL	noun class marker	P	preposition
CL _{DEF}	definite	PERF	perfective
FOC	focus	REF	reflexive
INST	instrument	3OBJ	third person object pronoun
IPFV	imperfective	3SG	third person singular
IT	iterative		

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