

# Passive of Affect in Kam (Dong) and other Kadai Languages: The Missing Link from Synchrony<sup>\*</sup>

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*Like many East Asian and Southeast Asian languages, Kam (Dong), a Kadai language spoken in China, employs a verbal string as the unique marker of passive (i.e. the string  $\tau\text{əu}^{33}$ ). There is an ongoing controversy about whether strings such as Kam's  $\tau\text{əu}^{33}$  should be viewed as coverb or as matrix verb. In the light of the Kam data, the coverb hypothesis is rejected and the matrix verb hypothesis strengthened on three fronts. First, the string  $\tau\text{əu}^{33}$  functions as a simple verb meaning 'touch'. It exhibits a large patient-noun paradigm ranging from concrete physical objects to abstract relational nouns (e.g. 'event', 'calamity'). The suggestion deduced is that the Kam passive can be viewed as a kind of metaphorical touching of events. Second, the  $\tau\text{əu}^{33}$ -construction displays properties for the deletion of coreferential arguments and resembles other matrix clauses in this regard. I establish a typology of matrix constructions based on their property to allow deletion of coreferential arguments and position the  $\tau\text{əu}^{33}$ -construction within this typology. Third, a cross-linguistic typology of passives is proposed. It is argued that most passives can be distilled as simple verb passives, whereas the corresponding construction of Southeast Asian languages (including Kam) represents a case of complex or matrix verb passive. Finally, this article surveys the passive constructions of 23 other Kadai languages belonging to five officially recognized nationalities in China: the Dong, Bouyei, Gelao, Shui and Zhuang nationalities.*

## 1. Introduction

This article contributes to the study of passives in East Asian and Southeast Asian languages. The attention of authors working on this linguistic area has mainly focused on Mandarin Chinese where a flurry of papers attempted to account for the *bei*-construction. A relatively small number of articles from other Southeast Asian languages, notably from Thai and Vietnamese, have demonstrated that the passive

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