

Passivization Transformation in the New Gun Bible Translation: The Translation of “It was allowed” in Rev 13.5, 7, 14

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Abstract

In the Hebrew and Greek Bibles, various kinds of passive forms are used in sentence constructions. Some have both the patients and the agents clearly specified; others have only patients. Frequently, the agent is implied, ambiguous, or even unknown. The Gun language (a language of Benin) does not have forms for passive construction; only active forms are used. In Rev 13.5, 7, 14 the unspecified agent has been identified in the 2003 Gun New Testament as the “dragon.” This paper argues that the identification of the agent should be revisited before the publication of the whole Bible. It discusses various ways passive constructions can be dealt with in translation. Contrary to the choice of identified agent in the 2003 Gun New Testament, this article supports an alternative position, one which was adopted in the 1923 Gun Bible: that is, to use an ambiguous agent in the form of the impersonal pronoun *ye*, translated as “one,” “someone,” “it,” “they,” and so forth.

Keywords

passivization, God, Satan, Gun, Gbe, *ye*, Revelation 13.5, 7, 14

Introduction

The Gun language, which is referred to as a dialect by some linguists, belongs to the Gbe cluster of languages. According to the genetic classification of African languages proposed by Greenberg, “Gbe belongs to the Kwa family of the Niger–Congo branch of Niger–Kordofanian” (Capo 1991, 5).

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Capo divides Gbe into five major groups with more than fifty mutually intelligible dialects, among which are Gun, Aja, Fon, and Gen. However, Gun speakers identify themselves as speaking the Gun language, not a dialect, as do some speakers of the Gbe language. Gun, which is spoken in Nigeria and Benin, has four dialects of its own: Ajra, Alada, Seto, and Toli.¹

The book of Revelation uses passive constructions with an implicit agent, as is common throughout the Bible. An agent can be defined as the person or thing that performs the action in a passive construction and would be the subject of the equivalent active sentence; in contrast, the patient is the person or thing upon whom the action is performed. Very often, agents need to be made explicit in Bible translation, especially when the passive voice is transformed into active voice. But the identity of the agent is not always obvious. This paper looks at Rev 13.5, 7, and 14 to address the question of how passive verb forms are generally rendered in the Gun New Testament. It considers arguments in favour of Satan as the agent as well as those in favour of God as the agent in the passage, and proposes a solution for translating the passage that may also inform translation of the passive voice elsewhere in the Bible.

I. Rendering passive verb forms in the Gun New Testament

In traditional grammar, “the term VOICE refers to grammatical means allowing the arguments of the verb (participants of an action or event) to be expressed in different ways” (Fagyal, Kibbee, and Jenkins 2006, 126). Like many African languages, Gun does not make use of the passive voice but instead uses the active voice. In contrast, the Hebrew text of the Old Testament makes abundant use of passive constructions with no explicit agent, including the divine passive where the implied subject is God. Such constructions were often taken up directly by the Greek Septuagint (LXX), and from there by the New Testament in its quotations of the LXX. Unfortunately, they were not filtered through Greek grammar, which makes use of passive voice in addition to middle voice and active voice. In the New Testament, wherever there is an explicit agent, it is introduced by the particle *ὑπό* (*hupo*) “by.” Without an explicit agent, the passive voice is not easy to translate. Even when language is thought of as a kind of code in which “the meaning is essentially contained within the text,” there is a need to take into consideration other elements, as is often done through exegetical analysis. And more recent pragmatic “theories of communication have taken into

¹ <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/guw>.

account the importance of context, inference, and the cooperation between participants in the construction of meaning” (Pattemore 2011, 266).

Linguists, especially those who work with generative grammar, assert that all passive constructions in all languages are active constructions at the level of deep structure. In other words, any sentence that is in the passive voice can easily be transformed into the active voice provided the arguments of the transitive verb are expressed or known. In Rev 13.5, 7, 14, we have the verbal phrase “was given/was allowed” in which the agent is not explicitly expressed. In this context, the implied agent may be God or Satan (the dragon), depending on one’s exegetical conclusions. Here are the verses in Greek and in RSV:

Rev 13.5

Kai edothē autō stoma laloun megala kai blasphemias kai edothē autō exousia poiēsai mēnas tessarakonta [kai] duo.

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

Rev 13.7

kai edothē autō poiēsai polemon meta tōn hagiōn kai nikēsai autous, kai edothē autō exousia epī pasan phulēn kai laon kai glōssan kai ethnōs.

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.

Rev 13.14

kai plana tous katoikountas epī tēs gēs dia ta sēmeia ha edothē autō poiēsai enōpion tou thēriou, legōn tois katoikousin epī tēs gēs poiēsai eikona tō thēriō, hos echei tēn plēgēn tēs machairēs kai ezēsen.

and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

In these verses, the passive form is expressed by the verb ἐδόθη (*edothē*), which is an indicative aorist passive.

In the 2003 Gun New Testament, various constructions are used as alternatives for passive constructions that have no explicit agent. At least four techniques have been identified: (1) use of an identified implicit agent:

God/Jesus/Holy Spirit/angel, and so forth, (2) impersonal pronoun used in the active voice, (3) restructuring of the sentence, and (4) conversion of the indirect object beneficiary.

1.1 The use of an identified implicit agent

In many passages, an implied agent has been identified as God or his representatives. In the following verses, the agent is unknown in the passive sentences in the UBS Greek New Testament (as well as in RSV). It has been identified as God and used in the active construction in the Gun New Testament.

Matt 28.18b

Greek: *Edothē moi pasa exousia en ouranō kai epi [tēs] gēs.*

RSV: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Gun: *Ace lekpo we Jixwéyewe ná mi to Olǎn me kpóḍ to ayǐgba jí.*

Gloss: It is all power that **God** gives me in Heaven and on earth.

John 1.17a

Greek: *hoti ho nomos dia Mōuseōs edothē*

RSV: For the law was given through Moses

Gun: *Moyizi jí we Jixwéyewe gbɔn dó ná mǐ osén*

Gloss: It is through Moses that **God** gave us law

In the preceding verses and in many others (e.g., Eph 3.8; Matt 7.1-2; 1 Tim 4.14), the context shows that God is the agent of the passive verb. In Matt 28.18, we know that it is God who gave Jesus authority, and that is obvious in the books of the New Testament. Theologically, then, there is no obstacle to saying explicitly that God, the Almighty (Gen 17.1; 28.3; 35.11; Exod 3.14; Ezek 10.5; 2 Cor 6.8; etc.), is the giver of the authority. This is expressed in translation through the use of the name *Jixwéyewe* “God” as the subject. Other translations in the Gbe group, namely Fon, Aja, and Gen, have also used “God” as the subject in these cases. In John 1.17a, God is again identified as the implicit agent.

Thus we see that “God” has been used as the subject in the active voice in Gun as well as in other Gbe languages. However, it may happen that the agent is not clearly identifiable. The following examples show that the identification of the agent is often problematic.

Mark 2.5

Greek: *kai idōn ho Iesous tēn pistin autōn legei tō paralytikō, Teknon, aphantai sou hai hamartiai.*

RSV: And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

Gun: *Jesu mō yīse yētōn bo dɔ hlán awükúzɔnnɔ lɔ dɔ: «Ovī ce! Nyɛ jó nyladò towe le ná we!»*

Gloss: Jesus saw their faith and said to the paralytic, “My child! I leave/forgive your sins to you.”

In this verse, the verb is ἀφίενται (*aphientai*), 3 pl. indicative present passive, with no explicit agent; it is translated as “are forgiven.” The sentence is transformed in Gun with the introduction of the pronoun Nyɛ (I), which represents Jesus as the implicit agent. The discussion that follows in v. 7, where the “scribes felt Jesus was usurping the right of God and actually forgiving sins” (Bratcher and Nida 1961), reinforces the argument that Jesus is the agent. If it were God, Jesus might not be criticized the way he was in that passage. However, in contrast to the Gun translation, in Aja, Fon, and Gen, an impersonal pronoun is used as the agent.

Matt 10.19

Greek: *hotan de paradōsin humas, mē merimnēsēte pōs ē ti lalēsēte: dothēsetai gar humin en ekeinē tē hōra ti lalēsēte;*

RSV: When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour;

Gun: *Amɔ hwenue ye ná ylɔ ohwe mì to ohwe nukɔn, mì xanú dɔ nawe mì ná dɔxó gbɔn kavī été mì ná dɔ blóo, onú dǔe mì ná dɔ, Gbigbo Wíwé ná ná mì to ojǔ éne me.*

Gloss: But when they will call you to court, don’t be anxious about how you will speak or what you will say; what you will say, the **Holy Spirit** will give you.

In Mat 10.19, the verb with the implicit agent is δοθήσεται (*dothēsetai*), glossed as “will be given.” In Gun, *Gbigbo Wíwé* (Holy Spirit) is introduced as the agent, the one who will give to the disciples what they will say in that hour. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is the one who endows people with force, courage, enlightenment (e.g., John 14.26; Acts 1.8; 9.31). Based on this argument and on the context, translators chose the Holy Spirit as the agent.

However, in the Aja translation, God is the agent, while in Fon and Gen the impersonal pronoun is used.

1.2 The use of an impersonal pronoun

Let us now consider the use of the impersonal pronoun for converting passives in the Gun NT translation.

The Gun New Testament makes use of the impersonal pronoun when the agent in the passive voice is unknown. In passages where there are no (or only minor) theological implications, the translation will not suffer from any impediment to understanding, as we can see in the following example. Only one example is given here for illustrative purposes.

John 12.5

Greek: *Dia ti touto to muron ouk eprathē triakosiōn dēnariōn kai edothē ptōchois?*

RSV: Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?

Gun: *Etéwútu wε ye ma zé lófíndá éne sa nyí abɔgankwé fɔdékankweko (300) nádó má ε ná agbátónɔ lé?*

Gloss: Why couldn't one (**someone**) sell this perfume at 300 coins and share it to the poor?

John 12.5 is a typical example of a passive construction that can be transformed into active voice with the use of an impersonal pronoun as subject. The impersonal pronoun here is *ye*, which means “one,” “someone,” “they.” Introducing an impersonal pronoun here does not have any theological effect in the translated text.

1.3 Restructuring of the sentence

We now examine how sentences are restructured in the Gun NT translation. Let us consider the following verse:

Matt 10.30

Greek: *humōn kai de hai triches tēs kephalēs pasai ērithmēmēnai eisin.*

RSV: But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

Gun: *Ná mívule tɔn, oɖa d̄ée to ota ná mì lɛkpó sín sɔxa wε Jíxwéyewe nywé.*

Gloss: Concerning you, it is the counting of all the hair that is on your head that **God** knows.

In the Gun translation, the verb “number (count)” has been nominalized (the counting). The verb “know” is used, and the agent supplied here is God, the subject in the text. The following verse is a bit different.

Matt 15.28c

Greek: *kai iathē hē thugatēr autēs apo tēs hōras ekeinēs.*

RSV: And her daughter was healed instantly.

Gun: *Hwenénu tlóló ́, azɔn gbɔ nú vǐ tɔn.*

Gloss: At the same moment, “sickness healed” for her daughter.

The verb $\acute{\iota}\alpha\theta\eta$ (*iathē*) is used in Greek; it is described as aorist passive indicative. It is not often easy to distinguish between passive voice and middle voice as the two are at times morphologically identical.

According to Ekem and Kissi (2010), “The middle voice is used in Greek to show that what is being said or done concerns oneself.” Another definition comes from Heiser and Setterholm (2013):

The middle voice signifies that the subject of the verb is being affected by its own action or is acting upon itself. The passive voice signifies that the subject is being acted upon; i.e., the subject is the receiver of the verbal action. A verb in the passive voice with God as the stated or implied agent is often referred to as the “divine passive.”

Based on these definitions, we could conclude that the verb $\acute{\iota}\alpha\theta\eta$ (*iathē*) might also be middle voice.

Gun has used the active voice with *azɔn* (sickness) as the subject and *gbɔ* (heal) as the verb. The verb used in Gun in this verse belongs to the category of verbs that can have both a direct object as a complement and an indirect object, which is the beneficiary. It can also have only the indirect object (beneficiary) as in this verse. This category of verbs in Gun does not necessarily need an agent when the passive voice is transformed to active.

1.4 The conversion of an indirect object beneficiary

Let us now consider the conversion of an indirect object beneficiary. Converting an indirect object beneficiary to a subject is another technique for Gun to transform passive constructions to active ones. Second Corinthians 12.7b is an illustration:

Greek: *edothē moi skolops tē sarki*

RSV: a thorn was given me in the flesh

Gun: *nyε mɔyi to agbasa ce me owun dε*

Gloss: I received in my body a prickle

At times, when an indirect object beneficiary is used (as in the above verse), it is not necessary to “resurrect” the agent. In the active form, the beneficiary becomes the subject. This saves the translator from struggling to look for an agent.

We now consider passages that show that it is conceivable for Satan to have authority, in preparation for arguments to support Satan as the agent in Rev 13.5, 7, 14.

2. Arguments in favour of Satan as the agent in the passages in Revelation

Revelation attributes Satan with having some kind of power in this world. With the power that God has granted him, he has authority and can delegate it to whom he wants. Thus Revelation 12.9 talks about the dragon, the Devil, and Satan. He no longer has a place in heaven, but he is powerful in this world: “The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (NRSV). As a deceiver, and as the one who gave his power to the beast in Rev 13.2, he can give authority to the second beast in Rev 13.5, 7, 14. The following comments show that there is good reason to suppose that he can be a giver of authority in these verses.

The book of Revelation tries to show clearly the identity of Christ, to warn Christians and to encourage them. Therefore, Jesus reveals to John messages to seven churches in Asia. Then suddenly, according to ch. 4 and the following chapters, John sees upsetting images, symbols, and visions involving conflict between forces of good and evil. The dragon who is Satan has power in heaven, but he is driven out and cast down to earth with his fiends (surely by the Creator!). He is in a rage and fury, and on earth he gives his power and authority to the beast to fight against God and his people. Chapter 13 is within this scope. In this chapter, John sees a beast with seven heads and ten horns; each horn has a diadem (crown), and on each head is a blasphemous name (v. 1). In vv. 2 and 4, the dragon gives the beast authority. In the contexts of Rev 13.5, 7, 14, one could wonder why God gives power to the beast to oppose him. It does not

seem reasonable that God would “give arm” to Satan so that Satan could fight against God.

The dragon or the beast is explicitly identified in the book of Revelation (12.9; 20.2) as “that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan.” Jesus calls him the ruler of this world (John 12.31b; 14.30; 2 Cor 4.4), “the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2.14c). Concerning Satan and his fiends, Paul refers to them as “the principalities, the powers, the world rulers of this present darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6.12). He uses “all power, signs, lying wonders” (2 Thess 2.9).

To show that he has some kind of power in this world, Satan, speaking to Jesus, says, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me” (Matt 4.9). Indeed, he claims to have authority over the whole world, and he delegates authority to whomever he wants, even if it is limited by God, who granted it to him. Satan is described as having power.

3. Arguments in favour of God as the agent in the passage

Revelation is a book of hope, declaring that Christ, who is God and the Son of God, will come back to judge this world and save his people; but it is also a book of warning, and Christ invites churches and Christians to follow the right way of God. Satan has no authority without the permission of God, who controls the whole world. God is the creator of heaven and earth and all creatures, including the angels and Satan. There are good reasons to think that God is probably the one who gives authority to the beast in Rev 13. 5, 7, 14. He knows that Satan does not have an everlasting power. God allows Satan and his fiends to perform actions; Satan’s temporary authority is granted by God. Concerning Satan’s end, Rev 20.2 says, “And he [the angel] seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.”

Commentaries on Rev 13. 5, 7, 14 emphasize that the giver of authority to the beast or Satan is God, “the ultimate source of all power” (Mounce 1997, ad loc.). Aune writes, “the singular aorist passive verb ἐδόθη, ‘was given,’ occurs four times in the identical phrase καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ, ‘and it was given’; in each instance the passive voice of the verb can be construed as a passive of divine activity, i.e., as a circumlocution for the direct mention of God as subject of the action of the verb” (1988, ad loc.).

In other words, as far as translation of these passages in Rev 13 is concerned, “God” can be explicitly mentioned as the one who gives authority to the beast or Satan. This point of view is also shared by Beale: “That God is

the ultimate source of the beast's authority in these verses is implied by the decreed time limit and the predestined number of those who worship him in v 8" (1999, ad loc.). Therefore, limitation of the beast's power shows that that power comes from the Almighty God.

Omnipotence (Gen 17.1; 28.3; 48.3; Rev 4.8; 11.17; etc.) is one, if not the most outstanding, of the attributes of God. Because he is sovereign, he can delegate his authority to whomever he wishes. He can give it to human beings (Matt 9.8). His son Jesus also delegates authority to his disciples (Matt 10.1; Mark 6.7; Luke 9.1; 10.19; 2 Cor 10.8; 13.10; Rev 2.26). If God has the authority to cast Satan out of heaven (Rev 12.8-9), he can also allow him to perform things in Rev 13.5, 7, 14.

4. The proposed solution for translating the passages

The Old and New Testaments make use of abundant passive constructions. The Gun translation uses some grammatical constructions in place of passivization, as mentioned earlier in the discussion. As also stated previously, Rev 13.5, 7, 14 is a typical passage containing passive constructions in NT Greek where the agent is unspecified. In these verses, the verb in the passive form is ἐδόθη (*edothē*), translated as "was given/allowed/granted" in NRSV. Before we come back to the text in Revelation, let us examine some passages in the New Testament where the 3 sg. aorist indicative passive verb ἐδόθη appears. This will give us some idea about how Gun makes use of the four ways that we have identified of transforming the passive into the active voice.

ParaText (a computer application for Bible translation) reveals that the aorist indicative passive verb ἐδόθη appears thirty-one times in the New Testament, of which twenty-one are in the book of Revelation. Some passages have been transformed in the Gun translation with the use of *ye*, which corresponds to *wo* in the Aja language. *Ye* and *wo* are originally the 3 pl. personal pronoun ("they" in English). In the normal conjugation of a verb, *ye* is used to replace people or things previously mentioned in a sentence or passage. That is the first connotation associated with this pronoun. More and more, *ye* with a little tonal variation is used as an impersonal pronoun in the Gun language. The low-rising tone (˘) on the vowel "e" becomes mid-tone, thus transforming *yě* (they) to *yē/ye* (one/someone).

Among these thirty-one occurrences, besides using the impersonal pronoun, the Gun translation also supplies an explicit agent, restructures the sentence, or converts the indirect object beneficiary to a subject patient.

The distribution of these transformations into the active voice is as follows: (1) Use of the impersonal pronoun *ye* 16 times: Matt 14.11; Luke 12.48; John 12.5; Rev 6.2, 4, 8, 11; 7.2; 8.3; 9.1, 3, 5; 11.1, 2; 16.8; 19.8; (2) use of an explicit agent as subject 8 times: Matt 28.18; John 1.17; Eph 3.8; 1 Tim 4.14; 13.5, 7 (2x); 13.14; (3) conversion of the indirect object beneficiary to a subject patient 6 times: 2 Cor 12.7; Eph 4.7; Rev 6.4; 13.5, 15; 20.4; and (4) restructuring of the sentence once: Gal 3.21.

In addition to the above references and passages previously mentioned, there are many other passages with passive constructions with an unspecified agent. In passages where the sentence is a general statement, like John 12.5, there is no major problem in translation. The translation problem becomes serious where we have unknown or implicit agents like God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, angels, or Satan and his fiends.

The Gun Bible was published for the first time in 1923. In the 2003 Gun New Testament (a new translation), which should be revised before publication of the whole Bible, we have the following translation where the implied agent is made explicit in Rev 13:

Verse 5: *Dlagóón ló ná kanlin ló ace*

The dragon gave the beast authority

Verse 7: *Dlagóón ló ná kanlin éne ace*

The dragon gave that beast authority

Verse 14: *Azñnyawü xe dlagóón ló ná ε ace étón*

The dragon gave him power to perform wonders

The translation in these verses clearly shows that *dlagóón* (the dragon) is the one who gave the beast authority. The passive forms have been transformed into active ones, understanding “the dragon” as the agent in the passive form and making it the subject in the active form.

But do the experts agree that the implicit agent of the passive forms is “dragon” in these verses, as the Gun New Testament says? In fact, most say that the agent is probably “God.” We have already noted the opinions of Aune and Beale. Commenting on v. 5, Bratcher and Hatton write:

The beast was given a mouth: . . . The passive verb points to God as the one who allows the beast to speak. So in those languages that do not use the passive, one may say: “God allowed the beast to . . .”

. . . **It was allowed to exercise authority:** again, God is in control; “God allowed the beast to have authority.” (1993, 196)

They make similar comments on vv. 7 and 14. On v. 7:

It was allowed: as in verse 5; God allowed it, that is the beast.
. . . **Authority was given it:** God gave him this authority.

And on v. 14:

It is allowed to work: the passive indicates that only by God's consent was the second beast able to perform its miracles.

Concerning the issue, Trail has the same opinion:

1. The implied actor is God . . . : God gave it a mouth to speak. This is giving in the sense of God's permission
2. The implied actor is the dragon . . . : the dragon gave it a mouth to speak. Although the dragon gave the beast this ability, God is the ultimate source. (2008, ad loc.)

This quotation from Trail supports the suggestion that the implied agent is God.

Fee's point of view is not fundamentally different from the previous one; however, it is a bit more balanced: "Its power was not inherent to its nature as a beast, but to the twofold reality that the power came from Satan (v. 2b) and was allowed by God" (2011, ad loc.). When we examine the comments of Bratcher and Hatton (1993) and those of the other authors mentioned and compare them with the Gun 2003 New Testament, we can see that there is a clear difference as far as the agents are concerned in Rev 13.5, 7, 14. While these authors defend the proposition that the implied agent in these verses is "God" throughout, the Gun New Testament opts for "the dragon." How can we reconcile these two opposite positions? We need to refer to the context and co-text. In Rev 13.2, the dragon confers his authority on the beast. The UBS Handbook says, "From now on the beast is the dragon's deputy, his lieutenant, with authority to speak and to act in the name of the dragon" (Bratcher and Hatton 1993). If the dragon can act this way in v. 2, we can reasonably infer, like the Gun 2003 New Testament, that he can also be the agent in vv. 5, 7, and 14. Other passages mentioned earlier showing how powerful Satan and his fiends are corroborate this hypothesis. In ch. 12, we saw that Satan was cast out of heaven. He knows that his time is short, and in the limited time which remains to him he is determined in fury and rage to do as much harm and damage as he possibly can. Commenting on ch. 13, Barclay says, "To cause that damage on earth he delegates his power to the two beasts who are the central figures in this chapter. These two beasts are

the agents and the instruments through which Satan's malevolent power is exerted on earth" (1974, 109). It is worth mentioning, however, that Satan's power has been granted to him by God for a limited time to achieve God's purposes (Rev 20.1-3). In other words, God is in control of every power, every authority given to his creatures, including Satan.

From our point of view, whether we choose Satan, represented by the dragon, or God as agent in Rev 13.5, 7, 14, we cannot be absolutely sure that either is the right solution. Confronted with this dilemma, we might find a way out by exploring alternative solutions in the language. An impartial or ambiguous one would fit the context. We earlier discussed four ways for Gun to transform passive constructions to active, and using the impersonal pronoun *ye* is one of them. We propose that solution here. We saw that the Fon and Gen Bibles have adopted it, and, ironically, the 1923 Gun Bible also adopted it! It can work, and it is then up to the reader to make his or her own decision as to who the subject is instead of providing the reader with a "ready-made" solution that may go against his or her exegesis and understanding of the text. The new Gun Bible, which is a new translation (not a revision of the first one), will be published very soon. In reference to the arguments of Bible experts cited in this article, the 1923 Gun Bible could be used again as a model for the translation of Rev 13.5, 7, 14. The new translation will not revert to the 1923 Gun Bible nor use it verbatim, as the language has changed lexically and syntactically. Furthermore, the translation in the old Gun Bible is literal (with a slightly different alphabet), while the new translation is based on the functional equivalence principle:

Rev 13.5

Gun 1923: *Yè na onù in, é to onú daho po nùzinzan po do; yè sọ yí huhlõn na ẹn nado nõtemọ hò osùn kande e lán awe.*

They (impersonal) give him a mouth, he is speaking great things and insulting things; they (impersonal) also give him power in order to continue for forty and two months.

Proposed New Gun: *Ye ná kanlin l5 ace nãdó n5 to ogoyiyigbe kpó ozungbe kpó dó hlán Jìxwéyewe. Ye ná ε ace nãdó to m3 basi x5 osun kanđénukún-awe.*

They (impersonal) give the beast authority to be uttering arrogant and insulting words to God. They give him authority to be acting for forty-two months.

Both texts use the impersonal pronoun *ye*, even though they are different syntactically and their punctuation is not the same. Gun 1923 uses pronouns whereas the noun "beast" and the name "God" are used in the new Gun

translation. Also, referring to the English gloss, it can be seen that the verse in Gun 1923 is fairly literal.

Conclusion

The above discussion deals with how the 2003 Gun New Testament has transformed the passive constructions in Rev 13.5, 7, 14 into active constructions. The implied agent that is made explicit in that NT version is “the dragon,” whereas most commentaries suggest that the agent is rather “God.” This article has explored the different ways of transforming passives into actives in Gun, which does not make use of passive constructions. It has also explored arguments for the probable agents in the passage—either God or Satan as represented by “the dragon.” Various biblical passages have been used to support the alternative hypotheses. In the end, I have proposed for these verses active constructions in which the impersonal pronoun *ye*, which can be translated as “one,” “someone,” “it,” “they,” and so forth, is used.

It is always better to detect through exegesis the implicit agent that underlies the passive construction in order to use it in an active construction for a language which does not make use of the passive voice. It may happen that arguments in favour of two or more possible implicit agents, which may at times be opposite, are so convincing that one is faced with a dilemma. Yet, a translator has to decide when translating the text. When we face a situation like this, it seems better not to choose an agent that would create controversy. At times, making the agent ambiguous in a text by using an impersonal pronoun or a substitute grammatical form can be preferable to being more explicit, as in the case of the Revelation passage.²

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Abbreviations

- LXX Septuagint
 NRSV New Revised Standard Version (1989)
 RSV Revised Standard Version (1952)