

## Valency in NlIng

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### The NlIng language

- last living member of the !Ui branch of the Tuu (aka “Southern Khoisan”) family (Güldemann 2006)
- moribund
- today less than ten speakers in Northern Cape Province, South Africa
- all speakers are multi-lingual (Afrikaans plus Nama or Setswana)
- NlIng not used in daily communication anymore
- several dialects
- former name *N/uu*, now only used as a name for one of the dialects of NlIng

### The language documentation project “A text documentation of Nluu”

- funded by ELDP
- project members: Tom Güldemann, Sven Siegmund, Alena Witzlack-Makarevich, Martina Ernszt
- several field trips since 2007
  
- Main goals of the project:
  - creation of a corpus of NlIng, incl. audio and video recordings
  - annotation and analysis of collected data (Toolbox)
  - focus on naturally spoken language = texts (e.g. folk stories, personal stories, conversations)
  - focus on idiolectal and dialectal variation
- current the corpus consists of:
  - 50 hours of spoken language
  - 100.000 words transcribed, translated and glossed

=> all data is archived at the *Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR)*

## Typological profile of NlIng

- complex phoneme system (incl. 45 clicks), no (?longer) tone
- mainly isolating-analytic
- TAM marking mainly by means of particles
- S V O, constituent order very rigid
- no agreement on verbs
- pro-drop possible for all arguments (but object pro-drop more frequent than subject pro-drop)

## Language-specific grammatical relations in NlIng

- subject (SUBJ)
- (direct) object (OBJ)
- indirect object (= dative, DAT)
- prepositional arguments and adjunct

## Participant marking

### • Subject and direct object

- SBJ:
  - no need to distinguish between S and A
  - two types of subject (unmarked vs. followed by *ke/-a*) do not concern valency
- both SBJ and OBJ unmarked for case
- SBJ and OBJ differentiated by relative position to the verb
  - SBJ: preverbal

(1) *na si lhaa ku*  
1SG IRR kill 3H.SG  
'I will kill him.'

### • Indirect object (DAT)

- postverbal
- precedes the OBJ
- marked by NP-final dative suffix *-a*; sometimes additionally followed by the postposition *i*

(2) *na aa #huin-a llai-ke*  
1SG give dog.PL-DAT bone.PL-PL  
'I give the bones to the dogs.'

- **Prepositional arguments and adjuncts**

- follow all other grammatical relations
- marked by one of only three prepositions
  - comitative-instrumental (COM/INS) *n/a*
  - similative (SIM) *//aa*
  - multi-purpose oblique (OBL) *ng*

- **Comitative-instrumental *n/a* ('with'):**

**COM/INS: comitative:**

- (3) *si lqoqon, lqoqon n/a llhailaa*  
 1PL.EXCL dance dance with girl  
 'We dance, (we) dance **with the girl.**'

**COM/INS: instrumental:**

- (4) *ʔoo laa pree n/a nʔona*  
 man cut bread with knife  
 'The man cuts the bread **with the knife.**' (elicited)

- **Similative *//aa* ('like'):**

- (5) *ha !xaru //aa !qoeki*  
 3SG snore like lion  
 'He snores **like a lion.**'

- (6) *kinn ke llu ʔxoa //aa si*  
 3PL ? NEG speak like 1EXCL.PL  
 'They don't speak **like us.**'

**Multi-purpose oblique *ng***

- can code a wide range of semantic roles, e.g. location, goal, source, time, addressee, cause etc.

- (7) *ng xa !xoo-a ng Glui*  
 1SG PST grow-?PFV OBL place.name  
 'I grew up **at Glui.**'

- (8) *ʔoo saa ng gllaa*  
 man come OBL night  
 'The man comes **at night.**'

(9) *na hoo ng glari*

1SG come.from OBL place.name

'I come from Uppington.' (elicited)

(10) *na si kx'uu o'ui'i ng haqa'iki*

1SG IRR do be.sick OBL heat

'I will get sick from the heat.' (elicited)

(11) *kua xng kx'uu llhabe-a blom-ke ng !khaa*

3SG PST make wet-?PFV flower-PL OBL water

'He has watered the flowers.' (= 'He has made the flowers wet with water.') (elicited)

### Valency in NlIng studied within the "The Leipzig Valency Classes Project"

- typological study of "Valency Classes in the World's Languages"
- carried out by Malchukov et al. (MPI EVA, Leipzig)
- comparison of approx. 20 languages, incl. NlIng
- contributors provide the data and fill in a database for "their" language

### The database:

- basis: 70 "verb meanings" = semantic concepts, e.g. 'hit', 'die', 'look at', 'appear', 'rain', 'be hungry', 'feel cold' ...  
=> see full list on extra handout
- contributors provide information on:
  - counterpart verbs: the verb (or other lexical item(s)) that expresses the meaning
  - coding frames of counterpart verbs
  - possible valency alternations

### Some definitions of the LVCP:

(cf. [http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/valency/files/database\\_manual.php#ftn1](http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/valency/files/database_manual.php#ftn1))

### Valency:

"... the **valency** of a verb is the list of its **arguments** with their coding properties (**coding frame**), their behavioural properties (**syntactic-function frame**), and with the relationship of the arguments to the roles in the verb's **role frame**."

### Coding properties:

- **flagging** (case or adposition marking)
  - relevant for NlIng DAT and prepositional arguments
- **indexing** (agreement, cross-referencing)
  - not relevant for NlIng
- **word order** (in the absence of other kinds of marking):
  - relevant for NlIng SBJ and OBJ

### Coding properties => coding frame:

Examples:

(12) *na si lhaa ku*  
1SG IRR kill 3H.SG  
'I will kill him.'  
=> coding frame: SBJ V OBJ

(13) *na hoo ng g!ari*  
1SG come.from OBL place.name  
'I come from Upington.' (elicited)  
=> coding frame SBJ V OBL

### Basic coding frames in NlIng

- "intransitive" frame: SBJ V

(14) *si !qora*  
1SG.EXCL play  
'We are playing.'

- "transitive" frame: SBJ V OBJ

(15) *ng llu llxaea kike*  
1SG NEG know 3PL  
'I don't know them'

- "oblique" frame: SBJ V OBL

(16) *ng hooke ng n!ng laeki*  
1SG come.from OBL 1SG woman  
'I come from my wife.'

- “transitive+dative” frame: SBJ V DAT OBJ

(17) *ku aa l'huunsi-a #xani-si*  
 3H.SG give Boer-DAT letter-SG  
 ‘He gives the the Boer the letter.’

- = “transitive+oblique” frame: SBJ V OBJ OBL

(18) *#oo ke !'hoe'in mari ng #oo a ko*  
 man ? ask.for money OBL man this other  
 ‘The man asks the other man for money.’ (elicited)  
 (lit.: The man asks for money from/by the other man.)

- “clause-taking” frame: SBJ V Clause

(19) *ng #ain u si xuu kike nla kinn nllaa !'aun*  
 1SG think 2PL IRR leave 3PL PURP 3PL stay ground  
 ‘I think you must leave them so that they stay on the land.’

- “oblique+clause-taking” frame: SBJ V OBL Clause

(20) *ng si ku ng l'huun-si a xa ll'ae !kx'abe-si*  
 1SG IRR say OBL white.person-SG 2SG PST go.to cream-SG  
 ‘I will say to the Boer (that) you went to the cream.’

**Summary: Basic coding frames in NlIng**

- SBJ V = “intransitive” frame
- SBJ V OBJ = “transitive” frame
- SBJ V OBL = “oblique” frame
- SBJ V DAT OBJ = “transitive+dative” frame
- SBJ V OBJ OBL = “transitive+oblique” frame
- SBJ V CLAU = “clause-taking” frame
- SBJ V OBL CLAU = “oblique+clause-taking” frame

## Non-basic coding frames

=> (until now,) only found as non-basis (=alternative) frame:

- “dative” frame: SBJ V DAT

(21) *ku lɤx'ae ku xainki-a i*  
3H.SG tell 3H.SG mother-DAT DAT  
'He tells his mother.'

- “comitative/instrumental” frame: SBJ V COM/INS

(22) *maar llaa'a llaqla'a nla !uu*  
but PROH speak with person  
'But don't speak with anybody!'

- “transitive+comitative/instrumental” frame: SBJ V OBJ COM/INS

(23) *#oo ke n!ao kuni-si nla lhee*  
man ? load cart-SG with grass  
'The man loads the cart with grass.' (elicited)

## Valency alternations

- in general, valency alternations can be **coded** or **uncoded**
- “Prototypes” of valency alternations:
  - **Type 1: coded alternations:**
    - valency change marked in the predicate  
example: German passive:  
(24a) *Ich **schlage** den Mann*  
(24b) *Der Mann **wird geschlagen**.*
  - **Type 2: uncoded alternations:**
    - no marking of valency change in the predicate
    - helpful to distinguish two basic subtypes
      - **Type 2a:** addition or deletion of an participant  
example: English “ambitransitive” verbs  
(25a) *I eat*  
(25b) *I eat **an apple***  
=> patient (=object) can be absent or present

- **Type 2b:** re-arrangement of arguments (arguments coded differently)

example: English “dative shift”:

(26a) *I give **him** a book.*

(26b) *I give a book **to the man**.*

=> recipient either encoded as dative or as prepositional phrase with ‘to’

=> less prototypical types possible, e.g. alternations can be of type 2a and 2b at the same time

### Valency alternations in Nllng

- in Nllng, all three types of valency alternations exist, but type 2a is the most common

- **Type 2a (uncoded, addition or deletion of a participant)**

- **S=A ambitransitivity**

SBJ V

SBJ V OBJ

(27a) *kinn kx'ain'in*

3PL laugh

‘They laugh.’

(27b) *ha kx'ain'in gllain*

3SG laugh hyena

‘They laugh **at the hyena**.’

- **intransitive <=> oblique**

SBJ V

SBJ V OBL

(28a) *#qoa ke #'unna*

pot ? be.full

‘The pot is full.’ (elicited)

(28b) *ooe ke #'unna ng sunn*

meat ? be.full **OBL fat**

‘The meat is full **of fat**.’

- **transitive <=> transitive+oblique**

SBJ V OBJ

SBJ V OBJ **OBL**

(29a) ng ll'ama !xoo-si  
 1SG buy pipe-SG  
 'I buy a pipe.' (elicited)

(29b) na ll'ama loaxu ng ku  
 1SG buy sheep **OBL** 3H.SG  
 'I buy sheep **from him.**' (elicited)

- **Type 2b (uncoded, arguments marked differently)**

- **transitive <=> oblique**

SBJ V OBJ



SBJ V **OBL**

(30a) ... nla si hoo marisi  
 ... PURP 1PL.EXCL get money  
 '... so that we can get **money**'

(30b) nllngʔee huniki hoo ng ki  
 people all get **OBL** 3NH.SG  
 'All people get **(some)** of it (*here*: '...of the cake').'

- **transitive+oblique <=> transitive+COM/INS**

SBJ V OBJ **OBL**



SBJ V OBJ **COM/INS**

(31a) #ia kx'uu !qam 'nllngke  
 IMP make porridge **3PL.OBL**  
 'One makes porridge **out of them** (the seeds).'

(31b) #oo ke xng kx'uu-a nllng nla !ao-ke  
 man ? PST make-?PFV house **COM** stone-PL  
 'The man built the house **with stones.**' (elicited)

- **S=O ambitransitivity**
  - shows properties of both type 2a and type 2b

SBJ V



SBJ V OBJ

(32a) dyoo †'hubi

skin burn

'The skin burns.'

(32b) gla †'hubi ki

2SG.Q burn 3NH.SG

'Do you burn it (the candle)?'

### IMPORTANT:

- not all formally identical alternations are also semantically identical
- example: verbs that occur both in the intransitive and in the transitive frame:

SBJ V vs. SBJ V OBL

=> two fundamentally different types of alternations

S=A ambitransitivity ≠ S=O ambitransitivity

=> widely accepted that these are two distinct phenomena (hence the different names)

- but what about S=A ambitransitivity? Is this a homogenous phenomenon?

=> in principle, at least three different alternations are possible:

- S V ⇔ S V O transitivity?
- S V ⇔ S V O ambitransitivity?
- S V O ⇔ S V detransitivity?

=> corpus study: How frequent do "ambitransitive" verbs occur in the intransitive or the transitive frame?

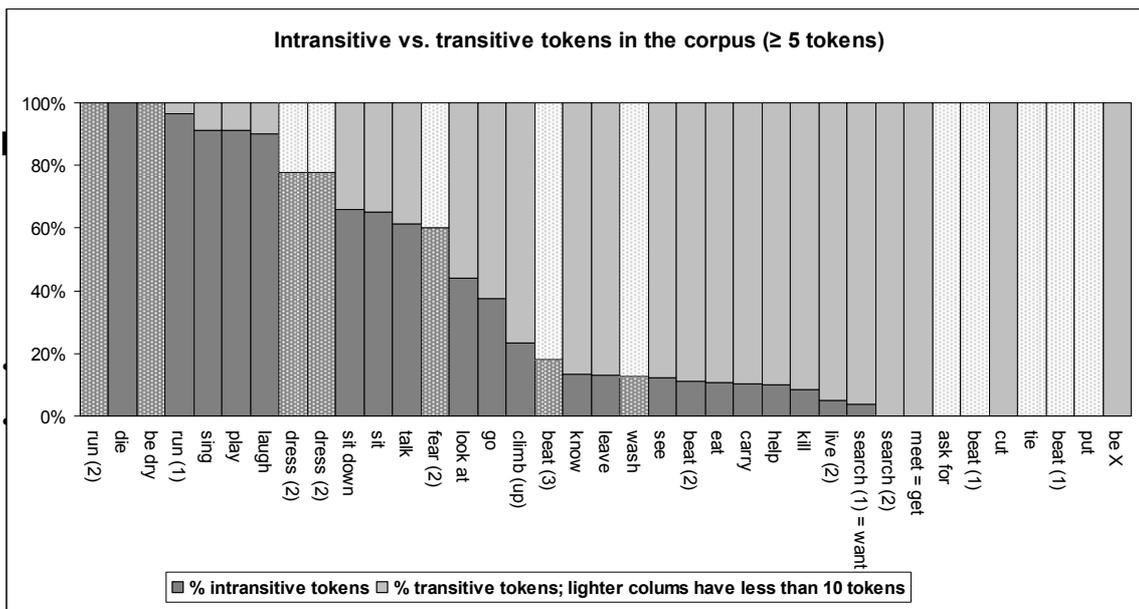
frequency alone is not a sufficient criterion for classifying verbs into valency classes, but it can help to get a good impression of the data

- corpus study step 1:
  - all tokens of every verb from the database have been classified in regard to their coding frame

- the most common coding frame(s) have been used to classify the verbs “basic coding frame”
  - dropped arguments, which were clearly identifiable from the linguistic or extra-linguistic context have been treated like overt arguments
  - adjuncts do not differ formally from arguments; semantic criteria have been used to assign argument or adjunct status to a given NP
 => both methods were often easy to apply, but sometimes it was problematic
- results: cf. table on extra handout

corpus study step 2:

- for verbs which were classified as “intransitive”, “S=A ambitransitive”, or “transitive”, we compared the number of tokens in the intransitive frame with the number of tokens of the same verb in the transitive frame



results:

- only very few verbs are 100% intransitive or 100% transitive
- (X/Y) = ratio of intransitive and transitive tokens in the corpus
  - intransitive:** /'aa 'die' (20/0)
  - transitive:** /aa 'cut (0/22)
- some verbs are clearly **S=A ambitransitive**, e.g. they occur frequently both in the intransitive and in the transitive frame
  - soo* 'sit' (45/24)
  - //aa* 'go away, go to' (34/57)

- other verbs occur both in the intransitive and in the transitive frame, but they show a preference for either the intransitive or the transitive frame
  - **mainly intransitive verbs.: transitive use rare but possible, e.g.:**
    - *!ae* ‘run’ (53/2) => *!ae reisie* ‘run a race’
    - *#eeke* ‘sing’ (21/2) => *#eeke lai* ‘sing the *lai* (a traditional song)’
    - *!kx’ora* ‘play’ (31/3) => *!kx’ora haansi* ‘play (to be a) horse’
  - **mainly transitive verbs, e.g.:**
    - *!’aa* ‘kill’ (2/22)
    - *#aqake* ‘search’ (1/26)

when these verbs were used intransitively in the corpus, there was no clearly identifiable object (hence we did not assume pro-drop), but nevertheless, there was a restricted set of possible objects in these contexts:

    - intransitive ‘kill’ => animals which are generally hunted e.g. for meat or fur
    - intransitive ‘search’ => edible plants; food
  - **some other mainly transitive verbs** are used intransitively quite often (with respect to number of tokens), but many of these intransitive tokens are fixed expressions used in conversations:
    - *n!aa~n!ai* ‘see’ (7/50)
 

(33a) <i>gla n!ai</i> 2SG.Q see ‘you see?!’	(33b) <i>n!aa!</i> see.2SG.IMP ‘look!; ‘pay attention!’
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    - *!lxae(-a)* ‘know’ (8/51)
 

(34) <i>gla !lxaea</i> 2SG.Q know ‘you know?!’	
--	--
    - *xuu* ‘leave’ (3/20)
 

(35) <i>xuu-a</i> leave-2SG.IMP ‘leave (me) alone!; ‘leave it!; ‘don’t do that!’	
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=> verbs do not form a semantic class but rather a “pragmatic class”

## Conclusions: “S=A ambitransitive” verbs

- purely formal discussion of verb classes cannot explain different frequency patterns of intransitive and transitive tokens of “ambitransitive” verbs
- semantic (and pragmatic) analysis of different types of formally “ambitransitive” verbs necessary to detect more subtle differences
- => formally identical alternations can represent semantically very different phenomena
- => corpus analysis important to get less prototypical valency frames

the same applies to other formally identical alternations (e.g. the transitive-oblique alternation can probably have different semantic effects etc.)

## Valency alternations in NlIng (cont.): type 1 - coded alternations

### • benefactive

- DAT (= beneficiary) is added as a new argument
- verb frequently (but not always) marked with BEN-suffix *-a*

(36a) *hng kx'uu tcuin*

3PL make fat

'They make fat.'

(36b) *hng kx'uu-a l'huun-a nllaen*

3PL make-BEN Boer.PL-DAT blanket.PL

'They make blankets for the Boers.'

### • causative

- causative marker precedes main verb
- Eastern dialects: causative marker *l'kx'ui* = CAUS

(37a) *ng o'ui'i*

1SG be.sick

'I am sick.'

(37b) *a l'kx'ui o'ui'i ng*

2SG CAUS be.sick 1SG

'You make me sick'

- Western dialect: causative marker *kx'uu* = 'do,make'

(37c) *ha kx'uu o'ui'i ng*

3SG make be.sick 1SG

'It (the old age) makes me sick.'

- **directional SVC alternation**

- “directional serial verb constructions” consisting of a major verb and a minor verb can be used to express additional participants, e.g. goal or source
- minor verb is frequently
  - a directional motion verb (‘go in’, ‘come’, ‘go to’, ‘go out’, ‘go down’) or
  - a verb of (directional) physical transfer (‘put in’, ‘remove’)

- 2 subtypes:

- SBJ V => SBJ V V<sub>minor</sub> OBJ

(38a) *ku        !ae*  
 3H.SG    run  
 ‘He runs.’

(38b) *a        kinn !ae ll'aa l'huun*  
 then 3PL run go.to Boer.PL  
 ‘Then they run to the Boers.’

- SBJ V OBJ => SBJ V V<sub>minor</sub> OBJ OBL

(39a) *a        #ae !khaa*  
 2SG pull water  
 ‘You pull water (e.g. out of a borehole).’

(39b) *#ae l'ee tya kuni-si ng wanis*  
 pull put.in that cart-SG OBL cart.shed  
 ‘(They) pull the cart into the cart shed.’

### Valency frames in the “directional SVC” alternation

=> SVCs have their own coding frame!

- directional SVC can have the same coding frame as both single verbs

(40) *loeke ke !ae saa*  
**children** ? run come  
 ‘**The children** come running’  
**SBJ** run  
**SBJ** come  
**SBJ** run-come

- directional SVCs can have the same coding frame as one of the verbs (either the major or the minor verb)

(41) *si*            *!ae* *ll'aa* *Mosplaas*  
**1PL.EXCL** run go.to **place.name**

'We run to **Mosplaas**.'

**SBJ** run

**SBJ** go.to **OBJ**

**SBJ** run-enter **OBJ**

=> SVC has the same coding frame as the minor verb

(42) *kua*        *ʔaqbe* *ll'aa* *boek-si*  
**3H.SG** throw go.away **book-SG**

'He throws **the book** away.' (elicited)

**SBJ** throw **OBJ**

**SBJ** go.away

**SBJ** throw-go.away **OBJ**

=> SVC has the same coding frame as the major verb

- SVC can have a coding frame different from both the minor and major verb's coding frame

(43) *a*    *ke* *si*    *!xau* *ll'ae* *llhaan* *a*    *ng* *glari*  
**2SG** ?    IRR carry go.to **bag**    **this** **OBL** **town**

'You must carry **this bag to town**.' (elicited)

**SBJ** carry **OBJ**

**SBJ/SBJ** go.to **OBJ**

**SBJ** carry-go.to **OBJ OBL**

- NlIng directional SVCs are an important means to express additional participants (especially goal or source arguments)!

### Serial verb constructions (SVCs) as valency changing device?

Should the directional SVCs really be regarded as valency changing strategy?

- flagging (case marking and prepositions) are an important part of the coding frame; function of minor verbs in the NlIng directional SVC is very similar to the function of prepositions or case marking in other languages
- directional SVC are quite productive (they can be used when semantics allow it)

- directional SVC are structurally similar to the causative alternation: in the Eastern dialect, a dedicated CAUS marker is used (which might go back to a verb), but in the Western dialect, a transparent SVC with the verb 'do, make' is used

=> the Nilng directional SVCs are not a prototypical case of a valency changing strategy, but they share some important features with them

### **Abbreviations:**

BEN – benefactive; COM – comitative; DAT – dative; EXCL – exclusive; H – human; IMP – impersonal; INCL – inclusive; INS – instrumental; IRR- irrealis; NH – non-human; OBL – multi-purpose oblique; OBJ – object; PFV – perfective; PL – plural; PROH – prohibitive; PURP – purposive; PST – past; Q – question; SBJ – subject; SG – singular; SIM – similitive; TF – term focus