

Verb classes

How verb classes (a-valent, monovalent, bivalent, trivalent), defined by their **semantic ability** and combinatorial properties to occur in one or several constructions (impersonal, intransitive, (mono)transitive, ditransitive), are dispatched in different languages

1. Avalent/monovalent verbs and obligatory/optional impersonal constructions (Creissels -Lexico-semantic impersonal constructions \emptyset)

1.1. No argument at all

meteorological phenomena (also in Romance: Ital. *piove*; Span. *lluve*)

EAST UVEAN (Wallis, Polynesian)

- | | | | | |
|----|------------------------|------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| 1. | <i>'e</i> | <i>'ua</i> | <i>'e</i> | <i>matagi</i> |
| | NPAST | rain | NPAST | wind |
| | -It rains. \emptyset | | -It is windy. \emptyset | |

XÂRÂCÛÛ (South of the Mainland, New Caledonia)

- | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|------------|--|-----------|------------|
| 2. | <i>kwiè</i> | <i>xwa</i> | <i>daa</i> | <i>wâ</i> | <i>daa</i> |
| | rain | fall | day | PFV | day |
| | -It rains \emptyset | | -It \emptyset getting light. \emptyset | | |

CÈMUHÎ (Centre of the Mainland, New Caledonia)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--|
| 3. | <i>utè</i> | <i>bwén</i> |
| | rain | night |
| | -It rains \emptyset | -It \emptyset dark. \emptyset (Rivierre 1980:63) |

XÂRÂCÛÛ

- | | | | | |
|----|--|-----------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 4. | <i>wâ</i> | <i>jômââdéé</i> | <i>wâ</i> | <i>mô</i> |
| | PFV | flood receding | PFV | night |
| | -The flood had been receding \emptyset | | -Night is falling. \emptyset | |

1.2. Verbs occurring in impersonal constructions only

- With a dummy 3sg pronoun

XÂRÂCÛÛ

- | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|------------|------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|----------|
| 5a. | <i>è</i> | <i>dù</i> | | | | | | |
| | 3SG | possible | | | | | | |
| | -It \emptyset possible \emptyset -It \emptyset enough \emptyset | | | | | | | |
| 5b. | <i>è</i> | <i>dù</i> | <i>kaù</i> | <i>mè</i> | <i>rè</i> | <i>mê</i> | <i>wérè-nâ?</i> | |
| | 3SG | possible | INTERR | COMP | 3SG | come | COM-1SG | |
| | -Is it possible for him to come with me? \emptyset | | | | | | | |
| 5c. | <i>è</i> | <i>sii</i> | <i>dù</i> | <i>kèè-fârâ</i> | <i>rè</i> | <i>ri</i> | <i>péci</i> | <i>a</i> |
| | 3SG | NEG | possible | NMLZ-read | POSS | 3PL | book | DEIC |
| | -They cannot read this book. \emptyset (lit. it is not possible their reading this book) | | | | | | | |

- Clausal argument only

NYELÂYU (North of the Mainland, New Caledonia)

- | | | | | | |
|----|--|-----------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| 6. | <i>anooyu</i> | <i>me</i> | <i>hava</i> | <i>temwa</i> | <i>bwee-r</i> |
| | possible | COMP | 1PL.EXCL | go | top-its |
| | -We can walk on top of it. \emptyset (Ozanne-Rivierre 1998:47) | | | | |

EAST UVEAN

7 'e lagi ne'e t t ia Sioli ke talanoa atu ki te teuteu
 NPAST seem PAST forget ABS Sioli that tell DIR OBL DEF preparation
 o te fakah h faiva o te Pasifika
 POSS DEF show arts POSS DEF Pacific
 -It seems Sioli forgot to tell you about the preparations for the Pacific Festival.∅

8. 'e lagi ko tonatou 'api 'a atu
 NPAST seem PRED their home DEIC DIR
 -It looks like it is their house.∅

2. Monovalent/one-actant/intransitive verbs

- actor subject argument:

9a. Mwêê-nâ xânî cuè tö nä.
 uncle-1SG often sit LOC there
 -My uncle often sits there.∅

9b. Mwêê-nâ fa-cuè nâ tö nä.
 uncle-1SG CAUS-sit 1SG LOC there
 "My uncle makes me sit there."

- undergoer subject argument:

10a. Ääda niyaa.
 food bitter
 -The food is bitter.∅

10b. Mîî kètè müüi a fa-niyaa na ääda.
 PL place humid.cold DEIC CAUS-bitter PST food
 "These humid and cold places rendered the food bitter."

Typically, however, monovalent verbs mainly denote positions or movements, natural events, physiological or communicative manifestations, inherent reciprocity, and qualities.

3. Bivalent/transitive verbs

Creissels: [í] In all languages, many verbs that are not core transitive verbs according to the definition select a type of argument coding identical to that selected by core transitive verbs. Cf. Examples (7) and (8) in the first handout.

3.1. Bivalent verbs with direct objects

Xârâcùù has at least two dozen non-derived bivalent verbs: *bu* -smell∅ *cee* -peel∅ *ciwi* -help∅ *da* or *kê* -eat∅ *jee* -wipe∅ *nârâ* -think∅ *néxä* -know∅ *ngûrû* -wash∅ *pè* -take∅ *sue* -put∅ *tée* -see∅ *cee* or *coa* -peel∅ *xwêê* -pour∅ *xwèrii* -want∅ -like∅ and also *chavaa* -pay attention to∅ *fütù* -to make fool of∅ *nèi* -lay out∅ *wîjò* -drink∅ *xöyö* -marry∅ *xwata* -hear∅ *tê* -throw∅ etc.

The non-derived bivalent verbs occur with direct objects, referring mainly to location (15), goal (16-17) or patient (18-19) participants:

- location:

15. Siibù cura bwasituu rè sêgè.
 rat creep heap POSS stone
 -The rat is creeping away under the stones.∅

- goal:

16. Nâ nä nârâ rè kamè-nâ.
 1SG IPFV think IPFV home- 1SG
 -I am homesick.∅

17. *Gèè téé kèè-kê rè nè.*
 grandmother look.at NMLZ-burn POSS fire
 -The grandmother is looking at the burning fire.∅
 - patient:
18. *Nèxuu coa ku mê kumwara êrê-nuu.*
 girl peel yam and sweet.potato contents-bounia
 -The girl is peeling yam and sweet potatoes for the bounia.∅
19. *Êê nää chûrû mê bikörö rè pî-köfi.*
 3SG.IPERS PST.PROG grill and turn+crush IPFV grain-coffee
 -We used to grill and grind coffee beans.∅

3.2. Bivalent verbs with an oblique object

Xârâcùù makes fine coding distinctions among verb classes due to the availability of different oblique prepositions, each with a specific semantic role and various functions.

20. *Kamûrû xangââ na xû nèxuu.*
 man shout PST BEN girl
 -The man shouted to the girl.∅(to say hello to her)
21. *È pia, è bere wâ dèèri.*
 3SG unkind 3SG angry AT people
 -He is unkind, he gets angry at people.∅
22. *Papêê jana na ngê mwè.*
 COLL+woman trade PST INS taro
 -Women are trading [their] taros.∅

4. Trivalent/ditransitive verbs

A trivalent verb is a verb that can occur in a ditransitive construction, consisting, in addition to this verb, an agent argument (A), a recipient-like argument (R) and a theme argument (T), that is, three participants in an event. This definition makes "crucial reference to the meaning, while the formal manifestation of the arguments is irrelevant." (Malchukov et al. 2011) Malchukov et al. (2010) among others use -ditransitive∅ for constructions as well as for verb classes,¹ though trivalent verbs may also occur in transitive and in intransitive constructions. English

23. *Mary gave John a pen*
 A R T

Trivalent verbs are:

- verbs of physical transfer such as 'give', 'sell', 'lend', describing an event in which an agent participant causes an object, prototypically inanimate, to pass in the possession of an animate receiver, the recipient, typically human.
- some verbs denoting a mental transfer such as 'show' or 'tell', with a recipient-like argument.

¹ More precisely, Haspelmath (2005, 2011) and Malchukov et al. (2010) have a semantically-based definition of transitive and ditransitive constructions. Transitive clauses have a P and an A argument, with verbs such as -kill∅ -break∅ -cut∅ and ditransitive clauses are built on verbs such as -give∅ -buy∅ -write∅ and so on. Such ditransitive constructions involve three semantic arguments: an agent (A), a recipient or goal (R/G), and a theme (P/T). These semantic definitions suppose that the arguments referring to A, P or R are always marked in the same way, at least with the typical verbs belonging to the predefined semantic categories. Xârâcùù, like many Oceanic languages, does not have a single major transitive construction, since objects often refer to several other roles than patient, and patients themselves are often flagged diversely; very few bivalent verbs have two direct arguments, most of them have a direct argument and a prepositional one.

Crosslinguistically, the number of trivalent verbs is smaller than the number of divalent verbs, and often do not behave uniformly, occurring in a variety of constructions.

Newman (1997) discusses the following components for the verb 'give':

- interaction between a *giver* and a *thing*;
- interaction between a *recipient* and a *thing*;
- a change in control over the *thing*, passing from the *giver* to the *recipient*;
- involvement (typically) of the hands of the *giver* and the *recipient*;
- motion of the *thing*.

"Languages with syntactic three-place predicates vary according to whether they treat Recipient and Theme in the same way in their morphosyntax: symmetrical languages treat them alike, while asymmetrical languages have different coding or syntactic properties for R and T." (Margetts & Austin 2007:396). Languages also differ in the way they treat T and R with respect to the P of bivalent predicates:

- T = P ≠ R in languages which oppose direct object (DO) and indirect object (IO)
- R = P ≠ T in languages opposing primary object (O1) vs. secondary object (O2)
- R = T = P: neutral object languages
- O1 = R, O2 = T: split object languages.

4.1. Three-place predicate strategy

a) direct-argument strategy

English: *John gave Mary a book. John baked Mary a cake; John promised his son a toy.*

Oceanic languages: just a few verbs, including 'give', 'tell', 'show'

Erromangan (Vanuatu) (Crowley 1998:202)

24. *Y-ovog-oc nvag*
3SG-give-2SG food
"She gave you the food."

b) causative strategy

The causing agent is added to a two-place verb by a derivational morpheme.

Saliba (Papua New Guinea) (Margetts 1999)

25. *Niu ka he-kai-di.*
coconut 1PL.EXC CAUS-eat-3PL.OBJ/POSS
"We feed them coconuts."

c) applicative strategy

Frequent strategy found in Bantu, Austronesian, Australian and Amerindian languages

Taba (Eastern Indonesia)

- 26a. *Banda n=ot yan bakan.*
Banda 3SG=get fish be.big
"Banda caught a big fish."

- 26b. *Banda n=ot-ik yak yan.*
Banda 3SG=get-APPL 1SG fish
"Banda gave me some fish."

4.2. Oblique and adjunct strategies

Two direct arguments, third participant expressed as an oblique.

John gave a book to Mary. John baked a cake for Mary; John promised a toy to his son.

Levin (1993) about English verbs taking obliques with *to*, *for* and *from*:

with *to*: say verbs: *communicate, admit, declare, confess*; verbs of putting with specified direction: *drop, hoist*; verbs of fulfilling: *credit, entrust, present*

with *for*: obtain verbs: *acquire, borrow, collect, obtain*; verbs of selection: *indicate, prefer, select, pick*; create verbs: *compose, construct, create*; steal verbs: *capture, grab, extract*
with *from*: remove verbs: *delete, dismiss, eject, vomit*; banish verbs: *evacuate, banish, expel, remove*; steal verbs: *capture, extract, confiscate*.

Xârâcùù

27. Anyââ xâdùù na chaa lotoo xù Yaya.
Mummy pay PST one car BEN/REC Yaya
-Mummy bought Yaya a car.ø

28. Nèxuu pèdè na péci taa afainû.
girl steal PST book OFF teacher
-The girl stole the book from the teacher.ø

4.3. Serial verb strategy

"The three-participant event is expressed through two verbs that combine in a complex construction sharing the three participants between them" (Margetts and Austin 418).

- R-type serialized P:

Tukang Besi (Sulawesi, Donohue 1999)

29 No-wila kua daoa ako te ina-no.
3R-go ALL market do.for CORE mother-3POSS
"They went to the market for their mother."

Example of a T-type serialized P:

Barai (Non-Austronesian, Papua New Guinea; Foley and Olson 1985:44)

30. Fu burede ije sime abe ufu.
he bread DEF knife take cut
"He cut the bread with a knife."

4.4. Incorporation strategy

Incorporated nouns with argument status (Mithun type III and IV noun incorporation): the incorporated nominals retain full argument status (referentiality, modification by demonstratives, numerals and possessives):

Bininj Gun-wok (Northern Australia) (Evans 2003)

31. Gamak gan-bolk-bukka-n ge.
good 2/1-country-show-NPST your
"It's good that you will show me your country."

Noun incorporation most often reduces the valency:

Niuean (Polynesian) (Seiter 1980)

32. Kua t fakatino he tama e malala.
PFV draw picture ERG child ABS charcoal
"The child has been drawing pictures with charcoal."

Three other strategies are listed by Margetts & Austin:

- Adnominal strategy
- Directional strategy
- Absorption strategy