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A grammar of Nchane: A Bantoid (Beboid) language of Cameroon
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Chapter 11

Clause structure

The specifics of Nchane clause structure are described in this chapter. The discussion is limited to clauses with verbs, although many of the characteristics of clauses with verbal predicates are present in those with non-verbal predicates. Clauses with non-verbal predicates and copulas are treated in Chapter 10.

There are five categories of clausal constituents identified by formal distinctions: Subject, Object, Applied Object, Comitative Oblique, Locative Oblique. These formal distinctions are discussed in §11.1. Conventional labels have been used in part out of convenience, since they offer an easily recognizable starting point for describing how the various constituents are realized and how they function. However, as pointed out by Haspelmath, the use of conventional categories as a means of describing clausal constituents is highly problematic since “the categories of language structure are language-particular” (Haspelmath 2007b: 121).

Therefore, these terms should be understood as attempts at recognizing common characteristics shared between a constituent associated with a traditional term and Nchane’s version of that constituent. For example, the Nchane Subject may be more like a traditional object in certain respects, but the label “subject” represents a closer approximation as compared to the label “object”. In order to avoid unintended claims regarding the assignment of labels, I will be describing the Nchane variety of constituents utilizing the proper noun form of the constituent label (e.g., Subject,

Object, etc.). However, as will be seen below, while these designations are useful in capturing formal characteristics of the various constituent types, they are of limited use in describing how these constituents are organized into clauses.

Certain verbs are noted to usually appear with certain types of constituents and in certain syntactic configurations. This characteristic of verbs is often treated in grammars through the notion of *transitivity*, along with the identification of *arguments* (i.e., constituents required by the verb for grammaticality). However, assessing Nchane clausal constituents for argumenthood is challenging. First, some of these constituents may be omitted from the clause whenever they are inferable. The phenomenon of clauses lacking certain argument-like constituents is particularly clear for objects, but is true of even subjects, as discussed in §11.1.1. Second, some verbs have multiple “argument frames”, appearing with different constituents, with different shades of meaning in each frame.

Consequently, rather than attempting to establish the transitivity of verbs, I will subscribe to the notion of clausal valency, categorizing clauses according to the number of constituents present. Descriptions of the different clause types are given in §11.2. In many cases, these constituents may be argued for as obligatory elements for grammaticality, in other words, as conventional arguments. But in other cases, the degree of obligation is not so clear.

I treat all of the constituent types as Nchane Arguments and make no attempt at distinguishing among them between Arguments and Adjuncts, because each of them, as will be further shown, can be seen as obligatory in particular clauses (though not necessarily in every one of those from the examples). Although such a distinction can certainly be made in semantic terms, it does not appear to have any bearing on formal expression in Nchane and is ignored for the moment.

An additional important observation is that the various constituent types have a tendency to appear in a particular order and in particular clausal “positions” or “slots”. I infer this tendency into an assumed canonical word order as presented in §11.3. Non-canonical word orders are observed which bring into question how Nchane organizes and governs clause syntax. There is some evidence to suggest that Nchane clause structure is oriented around semantic roles and information structure elements like Topic and Focus, in addition to grammatical relations. This issue is taken up in §11.4.

11.1 Syntactic constituent types

Nchane distinguishes two categories of clausal constituents in terms of phrasal elements: those that are formally marked and those that are formally unmarked. Altogether, five distinct types of constituents are observed: Subject, Object, Applied Object, Comitative Oblique, Locative Oblique. Subjects and Objects are unmarked constituents, most frequently differentiated by clause position, with Subjects occurring before the verb and Objects occurring after the verb. Applied Objects occur with the postposition applicative marker *lē* ‘APPL’ and follow the Object, if present.

The two oblique constituents also follow any co-occurring Objects and are both introduced by prepositions (which serves as a partial defining characteristic). Comitative Obliques are introduced by the preposition **bé** ‘with’ and encode accompaniment constituents as well as instrumentals.⁷⁴ Locative Obliques are usually marked by one of several prepositions and the applicative marker **lē** ‘APPL’.

These different clausal constituents are summarized in Table 11.1, with a detailed description of each given in subsections 11.1.1 and 11.1.2, where the constituent being described appears in brackets. The Applicative analysis presented here is somewhat unconventional and not undisputable. Therefore, a discussion regarding this postposition and choice of analysis is provided in subsection 11.1.3.

Constituent	Syntactic form
S	NP
O	NP
O _{APPL}	NP + lē
OBL _{COM}	bé + NP
OBL _{LOC}	prep + NP + lē

Table 11.1 Summary of Nchane clausal constituent types.

11.1.1 Formally unmarked constituents

Subject and Object are formally unmarked constituents and differentiated by clause position and agreement patterning. Descriptions of both are given in this section, beginning with the Subject, followed by the Object.

Subject

The formal characteristics of the Nchane Subject are as follows: 1) Subjects are unmarked, 2) Subjects occur to the left of the verb, the position associated with sentence topics, 3) Subjects generate subject agreement in certain cases. Note that this is the only constituent type that generates agreement on verbs. These characteristics are exemplified in (11.1) and (11.2), both of which also illustrate the tendency of Subjects to encode semantic AGENTS.

- (11.1) [kì-nfē: kí-mú] gē jēn-í
 c7-blind.man c7-some P3 walk-PROG⁷⁵

‘A certain blind man was walking around.’ What-goes-around.1.1

⁷⁴ The word **bé** actually functions as a conjunction as well as a preposition. See §8.2 for a fuller description.

⁷⁵ In addition to simply ‘walking’, the verb **jēné** expresses the notion of ‘strolling’ or ‘walking around’, without a particular destination in mind. It can also mean ‘visit’ and ‘travel’. Context is necessary to determine which shade of meaning is intended.

- (11.2) [mē] gē j̄-jā ŋ-gē: Ø-j̄-jèjè
 1SG.PRO P3 1SG-leave 1SG-go c1-NMZR-walk

'I left and went on a journey...'

Fire.1.2

Referents of Subjects are usually animate, but it is possible to have an inanimate Subject, as in (11.3). Inanimate Subjects are rare and might be limited to INSTRUMENTS in constructions which serve to suppress agentivity.

- (11.3) [f̄-j̄j̄] mō f̄ sē: wù f̄-bwé, wù mō
 c19-knife RES c19 cut 3SG c16-neck 3SG RES

wù gwē wù kwē
 3SG fall 3SG die

'The knife then cut him at his neck, he then fell and died.'

Greedy Friends.1.21

While the preverbal position usually is filled by a Subject, there are a number of circumstances in which this is not the case. One such situation is when the subject of the sentence is first-person singular. At times, no subject pronoun is used, leaving this position empty. However, the verb is usually marked with subject agreement as in (11.4). This is quite common in the text data.

- (11.4) j̄-já ŋ-gē: Ø-sùkū,
 1SG-leave 1SG-go c1-school

'I left and went to school...'

Fire.1.6

So-called *agent focus* constructions also may leave the preverbal position empty, as in (11.5).

- (11.5) chí yéŋ tādà wù lē
 P2 see T. 3SG APPL

'TADA saw him.'

In agent focus constructions, the logical subject (i.e., the AGENT constituent which canonically is expressed by a Subject) appears in the postverbal position, the position associated with Focus. But as this example shows, the postverbal constituent does not generate the expected subject agreement, taking on the properties of an Object and analyzed as such. So, although this clause has a logical subject, no syntactic subject is present.

This observation is important when viewing a clause like that in (11.6), where the preverbal and postverbal constituents of a neutral-focus clause have switched positions. This is the usual outcome of agent focalization in clauses with a PATIENT (at least those which are non-human); the PATIENT is said to be *defocalized* and moved to the preverbal position.

- (11.6) *bvū-ŋgá* *bw-ê:* *bvù-chí:* *gē* *ɲá* *Ø-ɲò*
 c14-power c14-ANA1 c14-all P3 give c1-god

'GOD gave all that power.'

Fire.57

Note that in this case—agent focalization of clauses with a Subject (AGENT) and Object (PATIENT)—the language apparently prefers having a constituent in the preverbal position. This preference is observed in neighboring Noni (Hyman 1981: 107), where the preverbal position is filled by either a dummy subject or a preposed object, as well as Naki (Good 2010: 11). See §16.3.1 for a fuller description of word order focus constructions.

The temptation to call the defocalized PATIENT the new Subject must be abandoned because this preverbal constituent does not generate subject agreement. This fact is illustrated in (11.7), which is grammatically acceptable, but where a semantically infelicitous reading is dictated when the semantic PATIENT in preverbal position generates subject agreement.

- (11.7) *#mūɲ-chōnē* *chí* *mū* *jí* *bā-nā*
 c18a-groundnut P2 c18a eat c2-cow

'Groundnuts ate the cows.'

**'The COWS ate the groundnuts.'*

Cleft constructions, a second focus strategy, also routinely result in an empty preverbal position. In other words, these constructions have no syntactic subject, as illustrated in (11.8). (See §16.3.2 for more details regarding cleft constructions.)

- (11.8) *lé* *Ø-ɲò* *wú* *gè* *ɲā* *jè* *yē-è*
 COP c1-god c1REL P3 give c9.path c9-ANA1

'It is GOD who gave that way.'

Fire.50.2

An argument could be made that in constructions like those in (11.5) and (11.8), where the preverbal position is empty, there is a null subject. However, there is no subject agreement in either example. And while other nearby languages make use of expletive subjects in these kinds of constructions, the occurrence of an expletive subject in Nchane is not attested. See §7.5 for further discussion of dummy subjects.

Object

Objects show the following characteristics: 1) Objects are unmarked, and 2) Objects do not generate agreement on verbs. Furthermore, they usually immediately follow the verb, the position generally associated with focus, although this is only a strong tendency. Examples (11.9) and (11.10) illustrate the typical Object, which is usually associated with semantic PATIENTS.

(11.9) bā lé bā yú [nàŋ yē-è]
c2 COP c2 kill c9.animal c9-ANA1

'...they have killed that animal.'

Inheritance.25

(11.10) bó kē bō jīŋs-è [ŋgú]
3PL begin 3PL extinguish-PROG c3.fire

'They started quenching the fire.'

Fire.3.4

Frawley (1992) distinguishes PATIENTS as undergoers of an action with a resulting change of state (as in the above examples) and THEMES as undergoers of an action with no change of state. Examples (11.11) and (11.12) have Objects encoding semantic THEMES, illustrating that Nchane makes no formal distinction between the two semantic roles. Therefore, while both terms are utilized in this description, they may often be considered as interchangeable.

(11.11) Ø-kwèsē wē-è būsē [shī],
c1-woman c1-ANA1 remove c9.chicken

'...that woman took the chicken out...'

Jealous Husband.12

(11.12) bó ká bǒ kēm-è [Ø-ŋ-téfé]
3PL ITER 3PL.FUT have-PROG c1-NMZR-advise

'They again will be having advice...'

Marriage.4.2

As mentioned above, agent focus constructions where the AGENT and PATIENT switch clausal positions have no Subject. Rather, the AGENT and PATIENT of these clauses are both Objects (see example (11.6) above). Another context which allows for clauses with two Objects is when a THEME and a RECIPIENT appear in the same clause. These constituents are usually expressed as Objects, with the RECIPIENT immediately following the verb and the THEME coming next. Examples (11.13) and (11.14) illustrate such double-object clauses. Both Objects appear in brackets and the RECIPIENT Object is bolded as well.

- (11.13) wú ná [b̄5] [ki-m-b̄5né]
 3SG.HORT give 3PL c7-NMZR-pray
 ‘...he will bless them...’ (lit. give them prayers) Marriage.3.7

- (11.14) nū b̄ɔ: bá Ø-kwésě wē-è, wū bé
 COP(N) c2.child c2AM c1-woman c1-ANA1 c1REL P1
 nā [ki-nf̄ɛ: kē-è] [m̄àŋ-kàlà m̄ā-ā]
 give c7-blind.man c7-ANA1 c6a-cassava.puff c6a-ANA1
 ‘...being the children of that woman who gave that blindman that
 cassava puff.’ What-goes-around.8.2

Note that RECIPIENTS may also be expressed through Applied Objects, as described in §11.1.2. In this case, the order of the two constituents is reversed, with the THEME-Object preceding the RECIPIENT-Applied Object.

The object is often inferable, and thus open to ellipsis, which is very common in the data. The omitted object in (11.15), indicated by a minus, is inferred from the full noun referent appearing in the previous clause.

- (11.15) b̄5 b̄áŋè mw-ē: mw-ē:, b̄5 t̄ɔŋ [-]
 3PL gather c18a-thing c18a-ANA1 3PL burn c18a
 ‘...they gathered those things and burned [them].’ Inheritance.6

In (11.16), the full noun referent **ŋgwè** ‘fishing pole’ appears in the first sentence of the example, and corresponds to the omitted object in the setting clause of the second sentence. Note that the use of the class 1 pronoun in the main clause of the second sentence might serve to make clear that the thing thrown into the water is the baited hook rather than just the termites.

- (11.16) bē sū: ŋḡ5 yē Ø-ŋgwè lē
 1PL string c10.termite on c1-fishing.pole APPL
 lē bé sū: [-], bē n̄ɔ wù à-j̄ɔ
 SET 1PL string c10 1PL throw c1 c18-water
 ‘We put termites on the hook. After putting [them on the hook], we threw
 it (the baited hook) in the stream.’ Fishing.1.4-5

Ellipsis of human objects is unattested in the data. Referential human Objects typically appear as pronouns, as illustrated in (11.17).

- (11.17) b́ ó t́ úŋ Ø-nà wē-è, lē kī-ŋchô kī Ø-nà
 3PL shoot c1-cow c1-ANA1 SET c7-horn c7AM c1-cow
- m̄ 5 kī b̄ 5 [wù], wù kwé
 RES c7 pierce 3SG 3SG die

'They sent that cow (on top of him) so that the cow's horn then pierced him and he died.'
 Greedy Friends.1.6

Locative nouns (described in §5.2.3) are derived from prepositional phrases and represent another type of Object—those which express semantic LOCATIONS.⁷⁶ They are observed as exhibiting distribution patterns comparable to their Locative Oblique counterparts (described later in this section), as seen in the examples below. Example (11.18) shows a LOCATION-Object following a PATIENT-Object, while in example (11.19) it follows a Comitative Oblique.⁷⁷

- (11.18) bá mb́ ú: bá mē sē, bá dē: m̄ -mē: [fè-tāŋ]
 they foam c2 finish c2 cook c6a-oil c16-fireplace(c7)

'After finishing foaming, they cook the on the fireplace.' (lit. at the fireplace)
 Making Palm Oil.1.8

- (11.19) wū bū bé kī-chídè [à-b5]
 3SG arrive with c7-food.mat c18-hand(c7)

'She appeared with a food-mat in [her] hand.' Two Wives.3.4

Examples (11.20)-(11.22) are other instances of LOCATION constituents without a preposition. The verb **gē**: 'go', illustrated in (11.20) and (11.21), usually does not have a prepositional phrase as complement, although it is possible. Likewise, locations expressed through proper nouns as in (11.22) typically are not introduced by a preposition.

⁷⁶ There is no reason to think that a locative noun could not also serve as a Subject, although the locational semantics severely limit the possible contexts in which it could be Subject. The most likely candidates for a locative noun Subject are those which are lexicalized, such as certain body parts.

⁷⁷ The fact that the LOCATION-Object follows the THEME-Comitative Object supports the analysis that clause syntax is organized by semantic roles rather than grammatical roles, at least to a degree. This asymmetry between semantic and grammatical roles is discussed in detail in §11.4.

- (11.20) mō n-lé ḡ-gē: [yē]
RES 1SG-enter 1SG-go c9.house
'...so, I just entered the house.' Fire.7.1
- (11.21) lé ḡ-gē: [Ø-sùkū] ā-ntānā,
SET 1SG-go c1-school c18-morning
'As I went to school in the morning...' Fire.1.7
- (11.22) bō gē jā [tikāli],
3PL P3 leave T.
'They left Tikari, ...' History.2.1

11.1.2 Formally marked constituents

The remaining clausal constituents are described in this section. Each of them appears with some kind of formal marking and usually follows the verb. The Applied Object is marked with the postposition applicative marker. The Comitative Oblique is introduced by a preposition, while the Locative Oblique is marked with a preposition and the postposition applicative marker.

The designations “Object” for Applied Object and “Oblique” for the two preposition-marked constituents, should not be considered as conventionally applied terms. They are simply reflections of the fact that Applied Objects may often be considered as obligatory constituents, while the two Oblique constituents often appear to have Adjunct status. Furthermore, the designation “Oblique” provides a means to recognize the formal similarities of the two different constituent types, both of which are marked by prepositions.

Applied Object

Applied Objects are marked with the phrase-final applicative postposition **lē** ‘APPL’ and usually occur immediately after the verb, unless an Object is present, then they follow the Object. They are less common than Objects, but are often seen with certain verbs like ‘see’, ‘tell’ and ‘touch’, as seen in (11.23)-(11.25) respectively. The semantic roles encoded are usually THEME, ADDRESSEE or BENEFACTIVE/RECIPIENT.

- (11.23) mē ḡ-gē ḡ-yēn-é [bà-mì lē] fē-kū,
1SG.PRO 1SG-P3 1SG-see-PROG c2-person APPL c16-down
'I was seeing people on the earth...' Training.1.16

(11.24) wù gē tī [wù lē] lē wù mòn-é sēŋ kì
 3SG P3 tell 3SG APPL COMP 3SG feel-PROG pain COMP(K)

wū yēn-ē lē wū gōn-é Ø-ń-fī:
 3SG breathe-PROG SET 3SG want-PROG c1-NMZR-help

'He told her that he was feeling pain when breathing so that he wanted help.'
 Lake.4.6

(11.25) ŋ-gē: kī-bó à-kfūŋ, lē fī: yé lēs-è
 1SG-put c7-arm c18-outside SET c9.air c9REL enter-PROG

yè kòn-è [mē lē]
 c9 touch-PROG 1SG.PRO APPL

'...I put my hand outside so as to receive fresh air.' (lit. *so that the air that is entering touches me*)
 Training.1.14

(11.26) tádà nā mùŋ-chōnē [ŋjì lē]
 T. give c18a-ground.nut N. APPL

'Tada gave groundnuts to Nji.'

Applied Objects encoding RECIPIENTS in clauses with a THEME-Object, like in (11.26), are uncommon in the data corpus. Usually, the object is inferable and thus, omitted as described in §11.1.1. In this case, the Applied Object occurs immediately after the verb, as illustrated in (11.27).

(11.27) wù mō wù búse m-bà: fó,
 3SG RES 3SG remove c6a-soup there

wù ná [Ø-jwè: lē]
 3SG give c1-husband.3SG.POSS APPL

'She just removed soup from there (the leaf) and gave [it] to her husband.'
 Jealous Husband.13

As a reminder, when the THEME-Object is retained, the RECIPIENT usually is expressed through a second Object, which follows the verb and precedes the THEME as in (11.13) and (11.14) above.

There are no convincing examples in the text corpus of an omitted Applied Object. However, (11.28) might illustrate such an omission. If there is an omitted Applied Object here, it would be encoding a RECIPIENT. But the RECIPIENT is apparently no one in particular.

- (11.28) wù ná Ø-ṅgē [-] gē: bú kī-fē
 3SG give c1-trouble the people(?) go reach c7-time
- kī Ø-mū ṅgāmū wú-mù gē fíṣè yē,
 c7REL c1-person old c1-some P3 twist c9.body
- wú dú wù lē lē
 3SG say 3SG APPL COMP

'...he gave trouble (was disruptive) to the point (lit. going and reaching time) that an elder turned and said to him...' Lake.3.1

Example (11.29) shows that the predication 'give trouble' can have a RECIPIENT, although in this case it appears as an Object rather than an Applied Object. Therefore, because the RECIPIENT can be encoded as an Object or an Applied Object, it is not possible to know which one of these constituents is omitted in (11.28), if in fact the RECIPIENT has been omitted.

- (11.29) wù tó wù nā-à mē Ø-ṅgē,
 3SG HAB 3SG give-PROG 1SG.PRO c1-trouble
- ṅchég: ségég-chī ségég-chī
 true when-all when-all

'...he is always giving me trouble, truly all the time.'

What-goes-around.2.3

Constructions involving a speech verb, but with no ADDRESSEE, as in (11.30), are another possible source of evidence for an omitted Applied Object. Speech acts can sometimes have no specific addressee. But the "blind man" is clearly being addressed in this example, even though he does not appear in the sentence.

- (11.30) wù dú [-], kò là
 3SG say blind.man catch CE
- màṅ-kàlà mā-nē, wó jí
 c6a-cassava.puff c6a-PROX 2SG.HORT eat

'She said (with irritation) [to the blindman], "Take this cassava puff, you should eat [it]."'

What-goes-around.4.9

Both of these examples with no grammatical applied object, along with the ellipsis of objects presented in §11.1.1, suggests that the notion of valency is of limited importance to Nchane. More discussion on this issue is provided in §11.2.

Example (11.31) is a rare example of a BENEFACTIVE in the text data. It is not surprising that it is expressed through an Applied Object, since RECIPIENTS often are as well.

- (11.31) mē ĩ-gē ĩ-gūd-é Ø-ĩkāŋ [bò lē],
 1SG.PRO 1SG-P3 1SG-buy-PROG c1-sha⁷⁸ 3PL APPL
'I was buying sha (i.e., corn beer) for them....' Fire.46

A few examples are observed in the text corpus that have Applied Objects expressing LOCATIONS. These could be prepositional phrases (i.e., Locational Obliques), but with the preposition omitted for some reason. Examples (11.32) and (11.33) are given to illustrate.

- (11.32) Ø-mwā wū Ø-bwī bó bèm gē jā
 c1-child c1AM c1-mother 3PL.POSS B. P3 leave
 [Ø-ñ-tásé-jé lé]
 c1-NMZR-cross-path APPL
'Their brother Bem left the junction...' History.3.4

- (11.33) bō kēm-é kī bō gē:
 3PL have-PROG COMP(K) 3PL go
 [bvū-shí bvū Ø-mù wù Ø-ŋò lē]
 c14-face c14AM c1-person c1AM c1-god APPL
'...they have to go before the man of God.' (lit. *go to the face of the person of God*) Marriage.3.6

Comitative Obliques

Comitative Obliques are marked with the conjunction/preposition **bé** 'with', which is described in detail in §8.2. These obliques immediately follow the verb in clauses with no object and express the semantic roles of ACCOMPANIMENT and INSTRUMENT, as seen in (11.34) and (11.35) respectively.

⁷⁸ *Sha* is a regional term used for locally produced corn beer.

- (11.34) kēfē wó wā:d-è [bé Ø-chíjī Ø-jwǔ:]
 VET 2SG quarrel-PROG with c1-father c1-husband.2SG.POSS
 ‘...don’t quarrel with your father-in-law...’ Marriage.6.6

- (11.35) Ø-táŋ wù m-mē: jē-dě chúlē,
 c1-time c1REL c6a-oil cool-COMPL well
 bā kē bā kǎl-è [bé kì-ntī],
 they begin c2 catch-PROG with c7-bowl
 ‘When the oil is cool, they start collecting [it] with a bowl...’
 Making Palm Oil.1.11

Examples (11.36) and (11.37) show that Comitative Obliques follow Objects. Occurrences of Comitative Obliques and Objects in the same clause are somewhat rare in the data, likely due to the tendency to omit inferable objects.

- (11.36) lē wú mēsē yē yī Ø-ŋǎ
 SET 3SG finish c9.word c9AM c1-god
 [bé Ø-bwē-yē w-è]
 with c1-mother-house c1-3SG.POSS
 ‘...after devotions with his host (lit. house-mother)...’ Lake.4.2

- (11.37) mé m-bǔ: wǎ [bé fī-ŋǎ fī-nē]
 1SG.PRO 1SG-stab 2SG with c19-knife c19-PROX
 ‘...I will pierce you with this knife...’ Greedy Friends.1.14

A formal distinction is made between Comitative Obliques which encode ACCOMPANIMENT and those which encode INSTRUMENT. The former are usually observed in the text corpus to use personal pronouns for referential entities, while maintaining the comitative preposition, as in (11.38). In contrast, referential INSTRUMENTS never appear with simple pronominal reference, but instead are modified by a relative clause and with the resumptive locative pronoun **yú** ‘on.it’, as illustrated in (11.39), where the locative pronoun is best translated as “with him”. See §7.2 for a description of **yú** and its multiple antecedent types.

- (11.38) lē bó gū Ø-nà wē-è, bō tó [bé wù]
 SET 3PL buy c1-cow c1-ANA1 3PL come with c1
 ‘When they bought the cow and came with it...’ Greedy Friends.1.4

(11.39) bó kô: bá dāmūmē,
3PL catch P. D.

wù bó gē jò bó dā jò [yú]
c1REL 3PL P3 take 3PL cross c9.stream on.it

‘...they captured Pa Damume, who they used in crossing the stream.’
(lit. who they crossed the stream with him) Land Dispute.2.3

These two examples are particularly striking since the ACCOMPANIMENT referent is -[human] and encoded with a personal pronoun, while the INSTRUMENT referent is +[human] but encoded with a locative pronoun, which would presumably require a referent with a lower animacy factor.

Example (11.40) is a rare case of a clause with two Comitative Obliques. While the literal interpretation is problematic, it seems that both of these obliques are encoding ACCOMPANIMENT.⁷⁹

(11.40) wó ká wó chēṅè [bé kī-ṅ-ché k-ūṅ]
2SG ITER 2SG spoil with c7-NMZR-stay c7-2SG.POSS

[bé Ø-ṅ w-ò]
with c1-god c1-2SG.POSS

‘You have also spoiled your own life with your God.’ School.23

The text corpus contains no examples of Applied Objects and Comitative Obliques in the same clause.

Locative Obliques

Locative Obliques are expressed through prepositional phrases consisting of one of several prepositions followed by a noun phrase and the phrase-final applicative postposition **īē**. These constituents usually express LOCATION and follow any Objects and/or Comitative Obliques that might be present. See §8.1 for a description of prepositions.

⁷⁹ The verb in this example is semantically complex and poorly understood. In constructions which have no post-verbal complement, it can mean “become spoiled” and the pre-verbal complement appears to be a PATIENT. Post-verbal complements are always introduced by the comitative preposition and the meaning is “destroy” or “cause to be spoiled”. The Comitative Oblique in such constructions appears to be affected by the action and therefore might be construed as a PATIENT rather than ACCOMPANIMENT. However, this would be the only known case of a Comitative Oblique encoding a semantic role other than ACCOMPANIMENT or INSTRUMENT.

Examples (11.41)-(11.43) demonstrate Locative Obliques expressed through prepositional phrases which are headed by the three primary prepositions, **fè** ‘at’, **à** ‘in’ and **yè** ‘on’, respectively.

- (11.41) bó bú [fè kî-tē ky-ē: lē]
 3PL arrive at c7-tree c7-ANA1 APPL
 ‘...they arrived at that tree.’ Jealous Husband.3.6

- (11.42) bā dē: [à Ø-ká lē]
 c2 cook in c1-barrel APPL
 ‘They cook [the palm nuts] in a drum.’ Making Palm Oil.1.3

- (11.43) wé, mē ŋ-gè j̄n-yēn-é lē
 up 1SG.PRO 1SG-P3 1SG-see-PROG COMP
 Ø-àfyóŋ sél-é [yè kî-njá lē]
 c1-airplane skip-PROG on c7-cloud APPL
 ‘Up (in the air), I felt (lit. saw) that the airplane was galloping on the clouds.’ Training.1.15

SOURCE constituents may be expressed through a Locative Oblique, as seen in (11.44). It may be that SOURCE is a subtype of LOCATION in Nchane.

- (11.44) Ø-bā wē-è lē mē lé bē
 c1-pa c1-ANA1 COMP 1SG.PRO COP with
 màn-kàlà yānē à kī-kē: lē, mà
 c6a-cassava.puff here in c7-bag APPL c6aREL
 n-lēg-é [à Ø-kwēsé wū-mù lē]
 1SG-beg-PROG in c1-woman c1-some APPL
 ‘That pa [said], “I have some cassava puff here in [my] bag, which I was begging from some woman.”’ What-goes-around.7.6

Locative Obliques follow Objects and Comitative Obliques, as shown in (11.45) and (11.46) respectively. Note that, while the Locative Obliques in the above examples are arguably adjuncts, example (11.45) illustrates a case where it is an obligatory constituent in this particular argument frame, since its absence would result in an alternative semantic reading of the verb (that he was set aside for some later use or purpose). Alternative argument frames are discussed in some detail in §11.2.4.

- (11.45) bā-mī bá-mù gē tò bō gē: wù [à kì-ntā lē]
 c2-person c2-some P3 come 3PL put 3SG in c7-chair APPL
 ‘...some people came, put him in a chair...’ Lake.5.1

- (11.46) yé gē bē bó, bī-X kô: lán-bōy,
 c10.sorrow P3 COP 3PL c2-X catch L.-B.
 bō gē: bē wù [à Ø-ntō wù-bó lē]
 3PL go with 3SG in c1-palace c1-3PL.POSS APPL
 ‘Unfortunately for them⁸⁰ (lit. sorrows were them), the X people
 captured Long-Boy and took him to their palace.’ Land Dispute.2.1

Although quite rare, topic-marked Locative Obliques occur clause-initially, which is illustrated in example (11.47).

- (11.47) [ā kī-tē lé], nēŋgé yèŋ shì lē
 in c7-tree APPL N. see c9.chicken APPL
 ‘In the tree, Nenge saw a chicken.’

Prepositional phrases as Locative Obliques may be referenced via locative pronouns, which occur in the same clausal position as their non-pronominal counterparts. See §7.2 for specific details. While locative noun phrases (described as Objects in §11.1.1) have similar distribution and semantics of Locative Obliques, they are only rarely replaced with a pronoun, and pronominal reference might be limited to lexicalized locative nouns like “palm of hand”, which might be more identifiable as PATIENTS/THEMES than as LOCATIONS.

11.1.3 The applicative postposition lē

The lē postposition does not present as a typical applicative marker, which is conventionally recognized as a verbal extension reconstructed for Proto-Bantu as *-id- (Meeussen 1967). Nevertheless, its occurrence with constituents encoding various types of semantic roles and of different syntactic types is suggestive of applicative-like function, with polysemy widely recognized as associated with applicatives (see for example Hyman 2018b: 179; and Jerro 2016a: 218). This section begins with a look at how the cognates of lē are treated in neighboring languages, followed by a brief presentation of some of the different contexts in which lē is observed and possible analyses. Language data contrasting clauses with and without lē is presented next, illustrating semantic alternation associated with lē and seeking

⁸⁰ The analysis of this apparently conventionalized phrase is not certain.

evidence of a core function of the postposition. The section concludes with a brief summary of the relevant points presented and justification for an applicative analysis.

The Nchane applicative marker **lē** is cognate with Mundabli **lā** (Voll 2017) and Mungbam =**nV** (Lovegren 2013), both of which are treated as marking dative case. However, it is also cognate with Noni **lé**, which has several proposed analyses, including “locative suffix” (Hyman 1981: 13), “in someone’s stead” (cf. benefactive) and a marker of “indirect object” (cf. dative) (Hyman 1981: 80–81). The Mungong cognate **nə** is analyzed as a locative marker (Boutwell 2014). However, it appears to be much less productive and occurs with fewer types of constructions.

Nchane RECIPIENTS/BENEFACTIVES are often marked with **lē**, as well as the complements of certain verbs like ‘see’ and ‘say’. (Examples of these are given in §11.1.2 above.) In the case of RECIPIENTS, a dative analysis as taken in Mundabli and Mungbam is supported. However, this analysis is less appropriate for the THEME complements of ‘see’ and ‘touch’, where the transfer of goods or services is not immediately evident.

It is possible that in each of these cases there is a sense of directionality involved in the predication. With RECIPIENTS, there is the movement of an object from one individual to another. Meanwhile, the act of “seeing” could be understood as the transfer of an image from the object to the eye/mind of the EXPERIENCER. Likewise, ADDRESSEES are the recipients of some kind of verbal message. Indeed, analyzing **lē** as a Locative postposition is well suited for its role in marking Locative Obliques. However, not all LOCATIONS are marked with **lē**. Note that I assume the postposition marking Applied Objects (e.g., RECIPIENTS) and Locative Obliques as representing a single morpheme.

De Kind and Bostoen (2012) argue that similar polysemy of the Ciluba (Bantu) applicative is best subsumed in the general term GOAL. An analysis of **lē** as a marker of GOAL seems plausible, but only infers its similarity to the applicative extension observed in other languages like Ciluba. Thus, an applicative analysis might be merited in order to capture similar function, even though **lē** is not a verbal extension.

Applicatives are also typically thought of as valency-changing operators, which would seem to make this analysis less appropriate for Nchane, since **lē** arguably does not affect the valency of the verb. However, recent attention has been given to the role that applicatives play in effecting semantic shifts in certain Bantu languages (see Jerro 2016b and; Marten & Mous 2017 for example), without an apparent change in valency. Semantic alternations can be observed in contrasting clauses with and without a **lē**-marked constituent, which is illustrated below.

In both of the clauses in (11.48) and (11.49), “Tada” is the THEME of the verb **chūpè** ‘show’ and the 3SG pronoun **wū** is the BENEFACTIVE, or the one for whom something is being shown. The interpretation of (11.48), with the double-object construction, must be that “he” was looking for “Tada”. While the same interpretation

is possible for (11.49), the clause with the Applied Object, it also could mean that “he” was altogether unaware of “Tada”.

- (11.48) òjì gē chūpè wū tádà
N. P3 show 3SG T.

‘Nji showed him Tada.’ (‘he’ was looking for Tada)

- (11.49) òjì gē chūpè tádà wù lē
N. P3 show T. 3SG APPL

‘Nji showed Tada to him.’ or ‘Nji introduced Tada to him.’

One way to interpret the difference between the two clauses is in terms of specificity. The clause in (11.48) with the two Objects (i.e., without an Applied Object) has a narrower range of expression, where the action of the AGENT is motivated by the desire of the BENEFACTIVE. On the other hand, the clause in (11.49) with the Applied Object expresses a more general situation, where the predication possibly happened without any intentionality or forethought of any of the parties involved.

Examples (11.50) and (11.51) show a similar semantic alternation involving the seeing of a tree. Example (11.50) has an Object followed by a locative pronoun, which provides a locational setting for the “tree”. This locative pronoun is also present in (11.51), but here it follows a prepositional phrase. In this second example, the reading is of seeing the *place* where the tree is rather than the tree itself.

- (11.50) nēŋgé yēŋ kī-tē yō
N. see c7-tree inside

‘Nenge saw a tree there (in the forest).’

- (11.51) nēŋgé yēŋ ā kī-tē lē yō
N. see in c7-tree APPL inside

‘Nenge saw the area of a tree there (in the forest).’

Again, the clause with the applicative postposition is used to express a predication with a broader or more general interpretation.

The next two sets of examples contrast a locative noun with its corresponding prepositional phrase. A locative noun is seen in (11.52) and expresses a specific location, while a prepositional phrase, with accompanying applicative postposition, occurs in (11.53) and expresses an approximate location.

- (11.52) bá dē: m̄-mē: [fè-tāŋ]
 they cook c6a-oil c16-fireplace
 ‘...they cook the oil on the fireside.’ Making Palm Oil.1.8

- (11.53) wū gē: m̄-mē: [fè kī-tānā k-àŋ lē]
 3SG put c6a-oil at c7-fireplace c7-1SG.POSS APPL
 ‘He put the oil near my fireplace.’

The locative noun in (11.54) also expresses a specific location. The “market” refers to a specific one that the speaker has in mind. Reference to “market” in (11.55) is made through a prepositional phrase and applicative postposition and gives a generic reading—the market is either one that the speaker does not personally know (i.e., has never seen it or been to it) or the specificity of the market is unimportant.

- (11.54) wū gē: [fè-wā:ŋ]
 3SG go c16-market
 ‘He went to the market.’ (one that is known)

- (11.55) wū gē: [fè wā:ŋ lē]
 3SG go at c3.market APPL
 ‘He went to a market.’ (market location is unknown)

In each of the example sets above, the clauses with the applicative postposition give a more general reading than do the clauses with an unmarked Object, suggesting that the marker is associated with some kind of semantic alternation. It is possible that this alternation is a reflection of what Jerro describes as the Applied Object making a “stronger pragmatic contribution” as compared to the non-applied variety (2016a: 218–19). Thus, the clauses with the Applied Object are pragmatically marked. For example, the sentence with the locative noun Object in example (11.54) is something commonly said, while the applicative example in (11.55) requires a more unusual context in order to be uttered.

To conclude, the **lē** postposition routinely occurs marking RECIPIENTS/BENEFACTIVES, ADDRESSEES, LOCATIVES, and the complement of certain verbs like ‘see’. The wide range of semantic roles associated with the postposition is comparable to that observed with applicative constructions in other languages and indicates a similar function. In addition, the presence of **lē** is sometimes observed effecting a semantic alternation, although the nature of that alternation is somewhat obscure. Finally, the form is plausible as a reflex of the Proto-Bantu applicative ***-id-**, which often is realized as **-il**, with the form **-le** present

- (11.60) S V O
 [bā] [lé bā yú] [nàŋ yē-è]
 they COP c2 kill c9.animal c9-ANA1
 ‘...they have killed the animal.’ Inheritance.25

In place of an Object, the clause can have an Applied Object. This variety of clause occurs with a small number of verbs like **yēŋ** ‘see’, as in (11.61).

- (11.61) S V O_{APPL}
 [wū] [yēŋ] [kī-chídè kē-è lē]
 3SG see c7-food.mat c7-ANA1 APPL
 ‘...she saw that food mat.’⁸² Two Wives.6.1

This configuration is also seen in clauses with a RECIPIENT when the THEME Object is omitted. Example (11.62) illustrates an omitted Object, where “cassava puff” in the final clause is inferable from the first clause of the sentence. The omitted Object often appears in an earlier sentence, or perhaps not at all, in the case of a universally known referent.

- (11.62) wù jó màŋ-kàlà m̄-ā mà
 3SG take c6a-cassava.puff c6a-ANA1 c6aREL
- S V O_{APPL}
 wù bé yéfè wū gē:, [wù] [ná] [wù lē]
 3SG ^pCOP rub 3SG put 3SG give 3SG APPL
- ‘She took that cassava puff, which she had rubbed [with poison] and set aside, and gave [it] to him.’ What-goes-around.4.8

Two-constituent clauses may also have a Subject and a Comitative Oblique or a Locative Oblique. These are illustrated in (11.63) and (11.64). The obliques in these clauses are not obligatory, in the sense that leaving them out would not affect grammaticality. Nevertheless, that fact does not appear to have any consequences beyond the clause having only two constituents.

⁸² This word translated as “food mat” is usually a flat, circular mat made of woven strips of dried palm frond shavings. The food mat is used in food processing, such as separating beans from chaff.

- (11.63) S V OBL_{COM}
 mē [gḗ n-t̩] [bé bī-gḗ]
 1SG.PRO P3 1SG-come with c8-teeth
'I brought some money.' (lit. *I came with teeth*) Fire.1.4

- (11.64) S V OBL_{LOC}
 [bó] [fúnè] [à Ø-afyōŋ lḗ]
 3PL fly in c1-airplane APPL
'...they flew in an airplane...' Training.1.10

11.2.3 Three-constituent clauses

Some verbs are able to take a Subject, an Object and an Applied Object, resulting in clauses with three constituents. The Object follows the verb and expresses the THEME, while the Applied Object follows the Object and expresses the RECIPIENT. The text corpus contains no examples of such object-applicative clauses, but the elicited clauses in (11.65) and (11.66) are given to illustrate.

- (11.65) S V O O_{APPL}
 [tádà] [gḗ ná] [Ø-ŋgōnē] [chà: lḗ]
 T. P3 give c1-banana c9.monkey APPL
'Tada gave a banana to the monkey.'

- (11.66) S V O O_{APPL}
 [tádà] [chíŋs-é] [m̄-bv̄:] [ŋ̀jì lḗ]
 T. send-PROG c6a-wine N. APPL
'Tada is sending wine to Nji.'

Clauses with a THEME and a RECIPIENT more commonly express these semantic arguments through two Objects, as seen in (11.67) and (11.68). The RECIPIENT immediately follows the verb and the applicative postposition is not present.

- (11.67) S V O₁ O₂
 [wū] [ná] [mḗ] [Ø-ŋgwè]
 3SG give 1SG.PRO c1-fishing.pole
'He gave me a fishing pole.' Fishing.1.2

(11.68)

				S	V
bḡ:	bā	Ø-kwēsé	wē-è	[wū]	[bé jā]
c2.child	c2AM	c1-woman	c1-ANA1	c1REL	^p COP give

O ₁		O ₂			
[ki-fḡ:	kē-è]	[màṅ-kàlà	ma-a]		
c7-blind.man	c7-ANA1	c6a-cassava.puff	c6a-ANA1		

'...the children of that woman who had given that blindman that cassava puff.' What-goes-around.8.2

It is possible that the preference for this configuration is the result of the higher rank of recipients on the animacy scale as compared with typical themes, with animates appearing closer to the verb and inanimates less close. (This observation is also relevant to the notion of the postverbal position as associated with focused constituents, as discussed in §§11.4 and 16.3.)

Three-constituent clauses may also have a Subject, an Object or Applied Object, and one of the oblique constituent types. (11.69) and (11.70) show clauses with a Subject, an Object and a Comitative Oblique, the first example having an INSTRUMENT constituent and the second example having an ACCOMPANIMENT constituent. Meanwhile, (11.71) illustrates a clause with a Subject, an Object and a Locative Oblique. In each case, the oblique follows the Object, which follows the verb.

(11.69)

S	V	O	OBL _{COM}		
[mḡ]	[m-bḡ:]	[wḡ]	[bé fī-jḡ	fī-nḡ]	
1SG.PRO.FUT	1SG-stab	2SG	with	c19-knife	c19-PROX

'...I will pierce you with this knife...' Greedy Friends.1.14

(11.70)

S	V	O	OBL _{COM}		
[jḡ]	[gḡ là]	[wá:]	[bé bī]		
N.	P3	go.goal	c3.market	with	c9.goat

'Nji went to the market with a goat (e.g., to sell).'

- (11.71) S V O
 [kì-nfɛ̀: ky-ē:] [gēn-è kī lēg-è] [màŋ-kàlà]
 c7-blind.man c7-ANA1 go-PROG c7 beg-PROG c6a-cassava.puff
- OBL_{LOC}
 [à Ø-kwēsé wē-ē lē] à-jū à-chī à-jū à-chī
 in c1-woman c1-ANA1 APPL c18-day c18-all c18-day c18-all
- '...the blindman was coming and begging cassava puff from that woman, day after day.'* What-goes-around.1.5

Clauses with a Subject, an Applied Object and an oblique constituent, as in (11.72), are rare. As indicated by the parentheses, the postposition applicative marker is optional for the first postverbal constituent (i.e., “monkey”). Therefore, this clause can appear with an Applied Object or an Object. It is unclear if there is an actual semantic difference between the two versions (e.g., see vs. look at), although the semantic role of “monkey” is THEME in both.

- (11.72) S V O_(APPL) OBL_{LOC}
 [nēŋgé] [yēŋ] [chā: (lē)] [ā kī-tē lē]
 N. see c9.monkey APPL in c7-tree APPL
- 'Nenge saw a monkey in a tree.'*

The text corpus contains no examples of clauses with more than three of the primary nominal constituents, but the elicited examples in (11.73), alternative iterations of the same clause, show that they can be formed. It could be argued that the Locative Oblique in (11.73)a is modifying the RECIPIENT-Applied Object, and therefore not actually a clausal constituent. However, this argument is less tenable for the clause in (11.73)b, where the Locative Oblique and the RECIPIENT-Object are separated by the THEME-Object.

- (11.73) a. S V O O_{APPL} OBL_{LOC}
 [tádà] [gē ná] [Ø-ŋgòŋē] [chā: lē] [ā kī-tē lē]
 T. P3 give c1-banana c9.monkey APPL in c7-tree APPL
- 'Tada gave a banana to the monkey in the tree.'*
- b. S V O₁ O₂ OBL_{LOC}
 [tádà] [gē ná] [chā:] [Ø-ŋgòŋē] [ā kī-tē lē]
 T. P3 give c9.monkey c1-banana in c7-tree APPL
- 'Tada gave the monkey a banana in the tree.'*

The applicative postposition marking the Applied Object in (11.73)a is obligatory in this case, avoiding a potentially problematic double-object construction. I assume that the grammar dictates that the first Object in such constructions be interpreted as the RECIPIENT and the second Object as the THEME. Thus, omitting the applicative postposition would result in a semantically infelicitous utterance.

11.2.4 Alternative argument frames

A small number of verbs have been observed to have more than one argument frame. In other words, the same verb appears in different clauses with different kinds of, and/or different numbers of, clausal constituents. This sometimes leads to difficulties in determining which constituents are required by a given verb, as stated in the chapter's introduction. Thus, rather than considering the valency of verbs, I have chosen to describe the valency of clauses. This section illustrates some of these verbs and the accompanying semantic shift presented by the alternative frames.

The examples below illustrate the alternative argument frames of the verb **ɲá** 'give'. In example (11.74), the verb takes two Objects, (or as shown in (11.65) above, an Object and an Applied Object). In contrast, the verb in example (11.75) takes an Object and a Comitative Oblique. Considering the Semantic roles in each clause, (11.74) has a RECIPIENT and a THEME, while (11.75) has a BENEFACTIVE and a THEME (or perhaps INSTRUMENT).

- (11.74) S V O_{RECIPIENT} O_{THEME}
 [wū] [ɲá] [mē] [Ø-ŋgwè]
 3SG give 1SG.PRO c1-fishing pole

'He gave me a fishing pole.'

Fishing.1.2

- (11.75) S V O_{BENEFACTIVE} OBL_{THEME?}
 [Ø-sōŋō] [ɲá-á] [bè] [bé m-mē:]
 c5-oil.palm give-PROG 1PL with c6a-oil

'The palm tree provides us with oil.'

King of Trees.1.3

The verb **gē**: 'put' often takes an Object and a Locative Oblique as seen in (11.76). A second argument frame is illustrated in (11.77), where there is no locative constituent. In this second frame, the verb expresses the notion of something being put aside or stored for use at a later time.

(11.76) S V O_{PATIENT}
 [bā-mī bā-mû] [gē tò b5 gē:] [wù]
 c2-person c2-some P3 come 3PL put 3SG

OBL_{LOCATION}
 [à kī-ntā lē]
 in c7-chair APPL

'...some people came, put him in a chair...'

Fire.5.1

(11.77) S V O_{PATIENT}
 wù gē: bī-nfūnē
 3SG put c8-corn

'...she put the corn aside...'

Disobedient Child.1.3

The lack of a locative element in this example does not simply imply that the location is unimportant and therefore unspecified. When this is the case, the generic location **bvūjū bvūmū** [c14-place c14-some] can be used.

The verb **yéŋ** 'see' also has multiple argument frames, as illustrated in examples (11.78) and (11.79). The first takes an Applied Object and expresses that the object is actually seen or will be seen. The second example takes a complement clause and functions like a verb of cognition.

(11.78) S V O_{THEME}
 mē ŋ-gē ŋ-yēn-é [bà-mì lē] fē-kū,
 1SG.PRO 1SG-P3 1SG-see-PROG c2-person APPL c16-down

'I was seeing people on the earth...'

Training.1.16

(11.79) S V COMPLEMENT
 [wù] [yéŋ] [lē lé Ø-nlò]
 3SG see COMP COP c1-poison

wù b5: bā-ā jí]
 c1REL c2.child c2-ANA1 eat

'...he realized that it is POISON that the children had eaten.'

What-goes-around.9.7

11.3 Order of clausal constituents

The canonical order of clausal constituents (in terms of grammatical roles) is given in Figure 11.1. This schema reflects the basic order of words in positive declarative main clauses with default or neutral topicality and focus.

Subject-Verb-(Object)-(Object_{APPL})-(Oblique_{COM})-(Oblique_{LOC})

Figure 11.1 Canonical word order.

The above order is extrapolated from examples with various constituent combinations, since all of the constituent types have not been observed together in a single clause. All of the constituents following the verb are in parentheses, indicating that they are optional elements of the clause. In some clauses, a first-person singular subject is expressed only through an agreement prefix on the verb. However, as this is the only case in which it could be argued that the Subject constituent is not present, at least in canonical sentences, I maintain an analysis of the Subject as an obligatory constituent of the clause.⁸³ This observation has been made for the nearby language Mundabli (Voll 2017: 269) and is likely representative of all the languages in the area.

Note that time adverbs like “yesterday” and “next week” are somewhat free in their clausal position, although they tend to occur either clause-initially or clause-finally.

In general, there is no case marking of constituents, and grammatical relations are dictated to a large extent through word order. Yet, there is a strong tendency for object pronouns to carry a L tone or a H tone, while subject pronouns usually have a M tone, although this tendency is considered to be associated with clause position rather than with grammatical case. (See §11.4 for further discussion).

Departure from the canonical word order primarily has to do with topic-marking and focus strategies. These are described in Chapter 16.

11.4 Clausal constituent alignment

In this section I attempt to identify how Nchane organizes and governs clauses. There are three areas with apparent influence over constituent alignment and selection: grammatical roles, semantic roles, information structure. First impressions are that much of clause governance falls within the domain of grammatical roles. However, as will be demonstrated below, semantic role and information structure considerations are more active in influencing clause syntax. The hypothesized constituent mapping as controlled by these three systems is summarized in Figure 11.2.

⁸³ It might be more precise to say that the only obligatory constituent is the Agent rather than the Subject. See §11.4 and §16.3.1 for details regarding this point.

Slot	1	V	2	3	4	5
GR:	SUBJ	VERB	OBJ	OBJAPPL	OBLCOM	OBLLOC
SR:	AGT	VERB	PAT/THM	RECIP	INSTR	LOC
IS:	[TOPIC]	VERB	[FOCUS...			...]

Figure 11.2 Comparison of constituent mapping in clauses via grammatical roles vs. semantic roles vs. information structure.

Each of these systems are addressed below in order.

Nchane can be viewed as an SVO language, with grammatical relations encoded largely by word order. As observed for Mundabli (Voll 2017: 279), support for grammatical relations is relatively weak beyond word order. The only possible evidence of case marking is found in the pronominal system, where preverbal pronouns may be differentiated from postverbal pronouns by the realization of tone. As mentioned earlier, preverbal pronouns usually have a mid tone, while postverbal pronouns usually have a low or a high tone.

However, this variation in tone appears to be more associated with clause position than with grammatical role. As was stated in §7.1, the observation that postverbal pronouns usually have a low or a high tone extends not only to Objects, but also to Applied Objects and Comitative Obliques; in other words, any postverbal pronoun. Thus, for example, tone cannot be said to specifically mark for Accusative case, although it might be argued that pronouns are marked tonally as Subjective/Nominative case, in opposition to non-Subjective/Nominative case.

Another possible evidence for grammatical relations is agreement marking on verbs. It is clear that in focus-neutral, declarative sentences with certain TAM configurations, verbs agree with the Subject, as in (11.80).

(11.80) **bā-nā** ché **bā** jí kì-nfūnē
 c2-cow p2 c2 eat c7-corn

'The cows ate the corn.'

However, as (11.81) shows, in agent focus constructions where the logical subject and the logical object switch clausal positions, the preverbal “object” does not elicit verbal agreement. Nor does the postverbal “subject” (which by my definition is an AGENT-Object).

(11.81) kì-nfūnē ché jí **bā-nā**
 c7-corn p2 eat c2-cow

'The COWS ate the corn.'

Constructing a sentence with the inanimate referent serving as a grammatical subject (i.e., preverbal and eliciting verbal agreement) results in the clause in (11.82). This clause is grammatical, but semantically infelicitous.

(11.82) #kì-nfūnē ché kī jí bā-nā
 c7-corn p2 c7 eat c2-cow

'The corn ate the cows.'

The above observations demonstrate that clause positions are not strictly designated according to grammatical roles. Subjects are limited to the preverbal position, but not all preverbal constituents are Subjects. Furthermore, non-agentive preverbal constituents are normally not Subjects. As reflected in Figure 11.2, there is a fairly strong tendency for constituents encoding the various semantic roles to occur in a particular position and in a particular order relative to the other constituents. In other words, AGENTS almost always precede the verb and PATIENTS and THEMES usually follow the verb. INSTRUMENTS follow PATIENTS and LOCATIONS come last.

One common exception to the semantic role mapping in Figure 11.2 is observed in double-object constructions, where RECIPIENTS precede THEMES. As mentioned in §11.1.2, this word order might be related to animacy concerns. But the important thing to observe about this exception as it relates to constituent alignment is that the RECIPIENT can only precede the THEME when it is encoded as an Object, not as an Applied Object. This indicates two competing influences in the alignment process.

Good (2010: 64–65) notes similar concerns related to the clause structure of Naki, Noni and Aghem, stating that "...the interpretation of the word order facts indicate(d) that such grammatical roles [i.e., subject and object] play relatively little role in these languages' surface syntax." He suggests that information structure concerns such as topic and focus are critical in determining constituent alignment, such that these languages could be described as "discourse centered" rather than "grammatical-role centered."

The degree to which Nchane is similar to Naki in terms of syntax management is difficult to determine. However, it seems clear that Nchane clause structure also displays strong tendencies for Topic and Focus positions (or "fields" as Good puts it). Topics usually appear in the preverbal position, although it seems that clause-initial position is more topical than the immediately before verb position, since non-subject constituents marked as topic are observed to precede preverbal subjects when they are present.

Focus is associated with the postverbal position. This is evidenced in postverbal agent focus constructions as well as the focusing cleft construction (see

examples (11.6) and (11.8) respectively). In both of these constructions, the focused constituent follows the verb (or the copula in the case of the cleft construction).

The argument for Topic and Focus influence over clause syntax is further supported by the “dummy” focus element **l̩** ‘FOC’ in certain predicate focus constructions, as in (11.83). The focus particle is obligatory in this example and apparently fulfills the syntactic requirement of this verb form to have a complement in the postverbal position, the clausal position which happens to be associated with focus.

(11.83) wù gē ná Ø-ntāŋ lē wū kwé-é l̩
 3SG P3 give c1-thought COMP 3SG die-PROG FOC

‘He thought that he was dying.’

Lake.4.4

Hyman makes similar observations regarding the same focus marker in Noni, noting that certain verb forms “require a verbal complement” (Hyman 1981: 77). One can therefore infer that, in these cases, where the focus is on the entire predication, the language prefers to have some element in the postverbal focus position rather than having it empty. See §16.3.5 for a description of this focus marker.

However, it does not necessarily follow that the sentence topic always occurs preverbally. In the case of postverbal agent focus constructions where the logical object is preposed (or *defocalized*), the preverbal THEME-Object is normally more topical than in its canonical postverbal position, but it might not be the de facto Topic. In fact, postverbal agent focus constructions with no PATIENT/THEME-Object end up without a preverbal constituent altogether. The same is true of cleft constructions, which have no subject, dummy or otherwise. Nevertheless, topic-marking strategies usually position the Topic to the left of the verb.

In addition, while there is some validity to the notion of the postverbal position being associated with Focus, only postverbal agent focus constructions place the focused constituent immediately after the lexical verb. The focused constituent follows the copula in cleft constructions, while in counter-expectation focus constructions, the focused constituent follows the n-copula and can remain *in situ*, as illustrated in (11.84).

(11.84) á wū bé ná bvū-lē: n̩ shì lē gè
 NEG1 3SG P1 give c14-fufu COP(N) c9.chicken APPL NEG2

‘She did not give fufu to THE CHICKEN.’ (she gave it to someone else)

In summary, Subjects only appear in the preverbal position, but Objects may be postverbal or preverbal (in certain contexts). However, Applied Objects never precede Objects and Locative Obliques are almost always clause-final. Likewise, AGENTS tend to be preverbal and to serve as sentence Topics. There is a preference

for RECIPIENTS to precede THEMES, but only when encoded as an Object. But when a RECIPIENT follows a THEME, it is encoded as an Applied Object. Topics usually are somewhere to the left of the verb, with non-Subject Topics preceding the preverbal Subject. But postverbal Topics are attested (for example (16.6)). In addition, there is strong evidence that Focused constituents follow the verb or a copula. But the expression of focus through the postverbal position of the lexical verb is limited to *in situ* Objects (in so-called neutral focus constructions) and postverbal agent focus constructions.

I conclude that no single system can be viewed as primary in clausal constituent selection and alignment. It appears that all three of these areas (grammatical roles, semantic roles and information structure) are working together to control the placement of the various clausal constituents. However, the influence of grammatical roles is significantly limited in comparison with discourse-semantic concerns.