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## **A grammar of Mundabli : a Bantoid (Yemne-Kimbi) language of Cameroon**

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### **Citation**

Voll, R. M. (2017, October 26). *A grammar of Mundabli : a Bantoid (Yemne-Kimbi) language of Cameroon*. LOT dissertation series. LOT, Utrecht. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/56258>

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**Title:** A grammar of Mundabli : a Bantoid (Yemne-Kimbi) language of Cameroon

**Date:** 2017-10-26

# CHAPTER 11

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## Basic clause structure

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This chapter deals with the structure of basic clauses, i.e. pragmatically unmarked declarative main clauses. The discussion is restricted to verbal predicates. Non-verbal predicates are dealt with in Chapter 13. The current chapter starts off with a description of the attested types of argument frames (§11.1). Following this is a section on constituent order within the clause (§11.2), which is in turn followed by a detailed description of the different attested syntactic constituents (§11.3). Finally, the last section discusses the status of grammatical relations in Mundabli (§11.4).

### 11.1 Types of argument frames

This section deals with the argument structure of verbs. However, it is restricted to nominal arguments. In the case of complex verbal cores (or serial verb constructions), arguments should be understood as arguments of the whole verb complex rather than arguments of specific individual verbs. For ease of reference, I will simply refer to these complex verbal cores as verbs in this chapter. Lovegren (2013: 320) offers an account on how the argument structure of a verbal core can be deduced from the argument structure of the verbs it contains for the related language Mungbam. As the two languages behave nearly identically as regards the argument structure of verbs, his findings can most likely be transferred one-to-one to Mundabli.

A valency distinction based on the minimal number of core arguments makes no sense in Mundabli because arguments other than the subject can always be omitted when their content can be inferred from the context. This

<sup>1</sup> It has been stated for other languages that any verb can occur with a cognate noun as object, see Heath (2013: 149ff.) for the Dogon of Beni and Lovegren (2013: 350-351) for Mungbam. This would mean that there are no real intransitive verbs. At first glance, I thought the same was the case in Mundabli. Mundabli has what I call the cognate deverbal noun construction (cf. §14.3.1) which expresses verb focus by adding an infinitive deverbal noun to the end of an intransitive or transitive clause. However, I believe that the deverbal noun is not an object in the case of Mundabli, because it can co-occur with an object in a transitive clause, in which case it generally follows the object. As it is not otherwise possible to have two objects in one clause, I believe that the infinitive in the cognate deverbal noun construction in Mundabli has an adverbial function, and that therefore there *are* true intransitive verbs which cannot take an object argument.

an object and an oblique constituent. This distinction was made by Dixon and Aikhenvald (2000: 3) and was adopted by Lovegren (2013) for Mungbam. The current chapter is strongly inspired by Lovegren's treatment of the same issues in Mungbam; see Lovegren (2013: 314ff.).

### 11.1.1 Extended intransitive verbs

There are a few extended intransitive verbs, i.e. verbs which take an oblique argument but no object. This section only deals with oblique arguments which are included in the verb semantics, although formally, they are no different from obliques which are not included in the verb semantics. The oblique argument in the examples is enclosed in square brackets.

The verb **dā** 'see' usually takes a dative complement (452) rather than an object. However, the undergoer, which is usually expressed as dative, may also take the form of a direct object, in which case the verb is transitive (453). In (453), the verb is part of a relative clause and takes the **CL7** pronoun **kí** as its object.

- (452) **tō**            **dòm** **lā** **bòm**            **dā**    [**wú** **lā**], **wù** **kà** **gān**  
          CL7/8.day some DAT CL9.antelope see(a) CL1PP DAT CL1 P3 go(a)  
          **d3wō**  
          CL1/2.water\_place

'One day, an antelope saw her when she went to the stream.'

- (453) **k-én**            **dí**    **ŋkín**            **k-ó**            **nín**            **nō**  
          CL7-DEM.PROX be(b) CL7;1SG.POSS CL7-DET CL7.thing SUBORD  
          **ń = dā**            **k-ó**            [**kí**]  
          1SG = see(a) CL7-REL CL7

'This is my own thing that I see.'<sup>2</sup>

Another example of an extended intransitive verb is **ǃ**, which takes a comitative complement when it means 'happen' (454).<sup>3</sup>

- (454) **à**    **dā**    **mē**            **ná** **nd3óm**    **bī** **ǃ**            **b-ó**            [**ā** **wà**]  
          2SG see(a) finish(a) as CL8.things CL8 pass(b) CL8-REL COM 2SG

'As you have already seen what happened to you...'

The movement verb **yó** 'run' is also attested as an extended intransitive, taking a locative postpositional phrase as its oblique argument, as in (455). In this case, it basically means 'run away from, escape'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>A less literal but better translation might be 'This is the way I see things.'

<sup>3</sup>In combination with other verbs in an SVC, **ǃ** can mean 'disappear' or 'be useless'.

<sup>4</sup>The verb **yó** 'run' is also attested as a simple intransitive verb.

- (455) kō kà yó tǿ [dzōm kân] bǒ mī  
 Koshin P3 run(c) come(b) CL9/10.war hands.LOC CL2 CONSEC  
 tǿ kwó kún bí yǒ  
 come(b) enter(c) hunt(c) go\_out(b) go\_up(c)

‘The Koshin people ran away from war, then they came in[to this area] and chased away [the Nshwen].’

- (456) ē, wù ywō tī [kū y-ō kân]  
 yes CL1 run(c) surprisingly CL9.ratmole CL9-DET hands.LOC

‘Yes, he ran away from the ratmole.’

The verb **nīm** ‘be located, stay’ is also attested as extended intransitive verb, in which case it takes a comitative complement (457).

- (457) ɲwóm nē tǿ yē bǒ nīm [ā wà], à  
 CL2.children mother.2POSS come(b) COMP CL2 live(a) COM 2SG 2SG  
 mī mù bǒ, à mī gǐ yē dǐ mfō  
 CONSEC take(a) CL2 2SG CONSEC put(b) COMP be(b) CL9.slave  
 y-ǎ  
 CL9-2SG.POSS

‘Your siblings have come to stay with you and you make them your slaves.’

### 11.1.2 Extended transitive verbs

There is at least one extended transitive verb, namely **fǒ** ‘give’. The verb **fǒ** accepts two different argument frames, both of which involve an object and an oblique constituent.<sup>5</sup> One possibility is for the object to represent the recipient and for a prepositional phrase with the comitative preposition **ā** to represent the theme, as in (458). The second possibility is for the object to represent the theme and for an adpositional dative phrase to represent the recipient, as in (459) (see §11.3.5 for more on dative constituents).

- (458) ɲùŋfù fǒ ntí [ā kpǒ]  
 N. give(b) N. COM CL3/7a.money

◊‘Nyungfu gave Ntie money.’

- (459) ɲùŋfù fǒ kpǒ [í ntí lā]  
 N. give(b) CL3/7a.money LOC N. DAT

◊‘Nyungfu gave money to Ntie.’

<sup>5</sup>This alternation seems to be found throughout Lower Fungom (and in Naki) (Good, p.c.).

The choice between these two constructions is determined pragmatically. While adpositional phrases are not usually considered to be arguments of the verb, verbs like ‘give’ represent borderline cases, as their use demands the presence of an adpositional phrase. The verb ‘give’ is also attested as an extended transitive verb with the locative noun/postposition **kān** ‘in hands’ as the locative argument (460). The object in (460) is not realized. Verbs of placement like **gĩ** ‘put’ or **tén** ‘pour’ take locative complements, cf. e.g., (461) or (462).

- (460) wù fǎ [wān nǐ wū-bwé dzū  
 CL1 give(b) CL1.child CL1.mother.3SG.POSS CL1-toddler CL1.other  
 kān]  
 hands.LOC

‘She gave [it] to her little sister.’

- (461) wù dā bā kè gí tē [ĩ gbō  
 CL1 see(a) IMPERS P3 put(b) CL7/8.walking\_stick LOC CL3.house  
 sē]  
 front.LOC

‘She saw that someone had put a walking stick in front of the house.’

- (462) à mī tén wú [kyà mī]  
 2SG CONSEC pour(c).SUBJ CL3 CL9/10.basket in

‘and you pour it into a basket [to remove all the water].’

## 11.2 Constituent order within the clause

The basic constituent order in Mundabli is SVO. The schema in Figure 11.1 shows the unmarked constituent order of a positive declarative main clause with neutral focus.

**Subject** – [...[V]<sub>verbal core</sub>...] *verbal complex* – (**Object**) – (**Oblique Argument**)  
 – (X)

Figure 11.1: Basic word order

While the presence of subject and verb are obligatory, none of the constituents following the verbal complex in the above schema have to be present, as indicated by the parentheses. Oblique arguments include dative or comitative arguments like **ā kō**<sup>6</sup> ‘with a knife’ in (463). The X in Figure (11.1) represents adverbial phrases (e.g., temporal and locative phrases), such as **jwén**

<sup>6</sup>The noun **kō** refers to a specific type of knife used by the so-called ‘Aku people’. According to IWGIA (2017), the local term ‘Aku’ refers to the ‘Galegi’, a subgroup of the Mbororo. However, the source of this information is unclear.

‘now’ in (464). Alternatively, temporal adverbials can occur at the beginning of the sentence.

- (463) yē wǔ bwól bí yā bí ā  
 COMP CL1;F1 remove(c) exit(b) CL7/8.intestines CL8;3SG.POSS COM  
 kǒ  
 CL3/10.aku\_knife

‘[...], that he<sub>i</sub> will remove his<sub>j</sub> intestines with a knife.’<sup>7</sup>

- (464) mǒ w-ǒ táŋ tsú b-ǒ ɲwén  
 CL1.person CL1-DET buy(b) CL7/8.banana CL8-DET now

‘The man bought the banana now.’

Comparison with constituent order patterns in related languages shows that SVO constituent order, as attested in Mundabli, is typical for Grassfields languages (Watters 2003: 248). Looking at universal patterns of constituent order, the more detailed constituent order shown in Figure (11.1) is typical for SVO languages in general (Hyman 1981: 76). Different constituent order patterns are attested in clauses with a marked information structure. When the subject is focussed, it may occur after the verbal complex, i.e. in immediate after verb (IAV) position,<sup>8</sup> which is the prominent focus-position. When the object or an oblique argument are topicalized, the topicalized elements occur at the beginning of the sentence, before the verbal complex. Marked patterns of constituent order are discussed in Chapter 14, which deals with information structure. With no case marking and no agreement on verbs, constituent order is the only clue to the grammatical role of a full NP not functioning as the object of an adposition.

## 11.3 Syntactic arguments

This section gives an overview of syntactic arguments and their structure. While the arguments include subject, object and oblique constituents, the only obligatory argument in Mundabli is the subject. All other arguments, including the object, can be omitted when they can be inferred from the context. If one took obligatoriness as a criterion for argument status, i.e. if one considered only the minimally present constituents of a phrase as arguments, only the subject could ever be considered an argument of the verb. However, if we consider the maximally present constituents which can occur with a verb instead, more than one argument may be supported. While some verbs, such as

<sup>7</sup>In example (463), the subject pronoun *wù* and the F1 marker *ǀ* are contracted. The resulting form *wǔ* integrates the tone of the F1 marker with the shape of the subject pronoun. Phonological mergers like this are occasionally attested.

<sup>8</sup>For an explanation of this term, see first footnote in Chapter 14 of this thesis.



**mwē** ‘be sad’ and **kwé** ‘return from the bush’ in (465)-(466) can take only one argument, namely a subject, others, such as **tsu** ‘contribute’, **dzyē** ‘cook’ and **mū** ‘take’ in (467)-(469) can take an object as well.<sup>9</sup> If the object is omitted, as in (479), it is still semantically present, which supports the status of objects as verb arguments.

- (465) wù mwē  
CL1 be\_sad(a)  
‘She was sad.’

- (466) kpé w-ṽ kwé dzǝŋǎ  
CL1.woman CL1-DET return\_from\_bush(c) again  
‘The woman came back again.’

- (467) bǝ tsú dǝ  
CL2 contribute(c) CL3.beans  
‘They contributed beans.’

- (468) bǝ dzyē dǝ w-ṽ  
CL2 cook(a) CL3.beans CL3-DET  
‘They cooked the beans.’

- (469) wù mū ʃɪŋnām  
CL1 take(a) CL3/7a.fufu\_stick  
‘She took the fufu stick.’

A syntactic distinction between non-core (oblique) constituents and adverbial phrases (or adjuncts, in each case non-arguments) is not warranted by formal criteria. For convenience, I will refer to all constituents other than the subject and object, i.e. all constituents which are formally flagged,<sup>10</sup> as non-core or oblique constituents. The following constituents are thus attested:

<sup>9</sup>Verbs in isolation are given with their citation tones, which differ in some cases from their tones in the examples.

<sup>10</sup>I use the term ‘flag’ as explained by (Haspelmath 2008: 506): “There is no widely accepted cover term for cases and adpositions, but the terms **flag** and **relator** have sometimes been used as terms which are neutral with respect to the case/adposition distinction.”.

1. Subject (unflagged constituent, usually directly precedes the verb)
2. Object (unflagged constituent, usually directly follows the verb)
3. Comitative (preceded by the particle *ā*)
4. Locative (optionally preceded by the preposition *ĩ*, followed by a spatial postposition; or unmarked)
5. Dative (optionally preceded by the preposition *ĩ*, followed by the dative postposition *lā*)

Locative and Dative are both optionally preceded by the preposition *ĩ* (glossed *LOC*) and obligatorily followed by a postposition. While one could lump them together, I chose to split them because this allows for a more detailed treatment. In the remaining sections, the listed constituents are discussed in the given order.

### 11.3.1 Subject

The subject is a bare noun phrase which, in a sentence with neutral information structure, precedes the verb complex, as in the intransitive sentence in (470) and the transitive sentence in (471).

(470) *mī wān kà tǐǎ kǐ*  
 1SG CL1.child P3 long\_ago die(b)

‘My child died long ago.’

(471) *ní w-ō jwóm jām b-ó*  
 CL1.mother CL1-DET stir(b) CL8a.fufu CL8a-DET

‘The mother stirred the fufu.’

When the subject is in focus, it occurs in the position immediately after the verb complex (472) with the object following it.<sup>11</sup>

The canonical subject position immediately before the verb complex is then filled with a purely tonal dummy subject. However, consisting of a low tone, this dummy subject is only detectable when it precedes a Class *B* verb and only in certain inflectional forms, causing the superhigh tone of the Class *B* verb to be realized as low-high rising tone, as e.g., in (472) (cf. §3.4.2 and §14.2.3 for details).

(472) *tsǔ ŋkǒ jùŋfù*  
 DS.hit(b) N. N.

◊‘NGKO hit Nyungfu.’

<sup>11</sup>See §14.2.3 for more on subject focus.

The subject is the only obligatory argument. While objects are freely omitted when they can be inferred from the context, subjectless sentences are extremely rare. The only two cases of subject ellipsis attested are (473) and (474). This strategy seems to be restricted to stylistic repetition and enumeration. Subject ellipsis is neither attested in multi-clause sentences, nor in sequences of main clauses.

- (473) wù tsú wù sùtée, tsú wù tsú wù tsú wù tsú wù  
 CL1 hit(b) CL1 so\_much hit(b) CL1 hit(b) CL1 hit(b) CL1 hit(b) CL1

‘She beat her, so much, beat her again and again.’

- (474) tsēm b-ó tʃú kwó gbó, tsú  
 CL7/8.python CL8-DET come(b) enter(c) house.LOC hit(b)  
 kpè w-ō áná tsú wù áná tsú wù áná,  
 CL1.woman CL1-DET like\_that hit(b) CL1 like\_that hit(b) CL1 like\_that  
 lyím wù, kù wù  
 wrap\_around(b) CL1 tie(a) CL1

‘The pythons came and entered the house. They beat the woman like this, beat her like this, beat her like this, wrapped themselves around her and tied her up.’

### 11.3.2 Object

Just like subject NPs, object NPs are not marked by adpositions. The object is distinguished from the subject mainly by its characteristic position within the sentence. In basic clauses, i.e. simple declarative clauses with pragmatically unmarked word order, the subject precedes the verbal complex, while the object follows it, as in (475). Only when the subject is in focus does it occur in the position immediately after the verb complex (cf. §11.3.1 and references therein).

- (475) ní w-ō ɲwóm ɲām b-ó  
 CL1.mother CL1-DET stir(b) CL8a.fufu CL8a-DET

‘The mother stirred the fufu.’

When the object is defocalized, it precedes the verbal complex (476), which, in a subject focus sentence, results in O(X)VS order (477). For more on information structure and word order alternations, cf. §14.2. In clauses which are syntactically ambiguous and can be alternatively interpreted as SVO or OVS clauses, the structure is sometimes disambiguated by the presence of a tonal dummy subject (see §11.3.1).

- (476) ɲām b-ó yí mī  
 CL8a.fufu CL8a-DET eat(b) 1SG

◊‘I ate the fufu.’

- (477) [kpɔ̃ w-ɔ̃] [ĩ ntí lā] fɔ̃ fɔ̃ [ndè]  
 CL3/7a.money CL3-DET LOC N. DAT DS.P1 give(b) who

◊‘Who gave money to Ntie?’

The object of a verb is frequently omitted when it can be inferred from the context, cf. e.g. (478) and (479)). There are no known formal restrictions on the omission of an object.

- (478) yē gǎn tsē mī ā ntsɔ̃m mū-ŋ-gē-ŋ-gē, à  
 COMP go(a) search(a) 1SG COM CL6-soil 6-N-be\_red-N-be\_red 2SG  
 mī tʃí fɔ̃ ndá lā  
 CONSEC come(b) give(b) 1SG.DAT DAT

‘[She said]: go and search for some red soil for me, and then you come and give [it] to me!’

- (479) wù búŋ tē k-ɔ̃, wù yō tō  
 CL1 pick(b) CL7.walking\_stick CL7-DET CL1 throw(a) away(c)

‘She picked up the stick and threw [it] away [from herself].’

### 11.3.3 Comitative

The label “comitative” is chosen to indicate a constituent whose most common semantic interpretation is indeed comitative, but which may also have an instrumental function or may represent the theme in a transfer event. In the remainder of this section, a description of the structure of comitative constituents, illustrated mainly by examples with comitative semantics is followed by examples of the instrumental function and transfer events. Comitative phrases are headed by the preposition *ā*. The preposition can take either a full noun phrase (480) or a pronoun (481) as its object. Pronouns with a superhigh tone (i.e. non-preverbal pronouns of all noun classes other than Class 1 and 9) are realized with a low-high rising tone when they are the object of the comitative preposition,<sup>12</sup> like e.g. the Class 7 non-preverbal pronoun *kí* in (481).

These and other data suggest that pronouns participate in a kind of case system, see §11.4.1 for more on this. Unlike postpositions, the preposition *ā* never gets stranded (cf. §12.3 on adposition stranding in relative clauses).

- (480) wù tʃí [ā mbí], bɔ̃ mú  
 CL1 come(b) COM CL6.palm\_wine CL2 drink(b)

‘He brought wine [and] they drank.’

<sup>12</sup>This tone change is described in §6.1.3.

- (481) bā mī kwé ʃú [ā kǐ]  
 IMPERS CONSEC return\_from\_bush(c) come(b) COM CL7

‘They then returned home with it.’

The comitative constituent generally follows the verb and the object, occurring towards the end of the clause. Its position relative to other oblique constituents is not fixed. In (482), the comitative argument directly follows the verb, preceding the unmarked locative phrase **dʒwò** ‘water place’ (cf. §11.3.4 on unmarked locative phrases).

- (482) wù gān [ā bǝ] dʒwò  
 CL1 go(a) COM CL2 CL1/2.water\_place

‘He went with them to the stream.’

Comitative constituents can also have other semantic functions. They can represent an instrument, as in (483) and (484), or the theme in a transfer event, as in (485) and (486).

- (483) ʃī k-ɔ́ kò ʃú mī [ā kē]  
 CL3/7a.storm CL7a-DET catch(b).IPFV come(b) 1SG COM CL9/10.hand  
 ákó kò mbē  
 like catch(b).IPFV CL2.person

‘The storm was catching me with its hands as if it were people catching [me].’

- (484) n = dzé Pé lā yē wù ʃā dzē dzɔ̃ŋ, m̀ w-ɔ̃  
 1SG = say(b) P. DAT COMP CL1 PROHIB say(b) again CL1.man CL1-DET  
 kē twó kú wú f-án [ā  
 ABIL? pierce(a) CL3/7a.stomach CL3;3SG.POSS PROX-here COM  
 kǝ]  
 CL3/10.aku\_knife

‘I told Pe that he should not talk again, so that the man shouldn’t pierce his stomach with a knife.’

- (485) n = dzé mó the best níŋ dǝ mə́ ká à  
 1SG = say(b) CS.QUOT the best CL7.thing be(b) only COND 2SG  
 tʃũ gbá ká ndʒɔ̃mɲin ā dǝ wɔ̃ bā kán  
 come(b) house.LOC COND CL8.food NEG be(b) NEG IMPERS have(c)  
 yē bā tũ fā mə́ wà [ā ŋgĩ]  
 COMP IMPERS fetch\_water(b) give(b) only 2SG COM CL6.water

‘I said that the best thing can only be, if you come home, if there is no food, they have to carry water and give it to you.’

- (486) Pě bí yā tʃî, Pě tá kà bī yá tí tʃî  
 P. exit(b) go\_up(c) up P. VER.FOC P3 exit(b) go\_up(c) surprisingly up  
 ā, Pě fǎ kà mī [ā blô]  
 ?? P. give(b) catch(b) 1SG COM CL1/2.blow

‘Pe got up. As Pe got up, Pe gave me a punch.’

#### 11.3.4 Locative

Locative constituents combine the optional general locative preposition ǐ with either a noun phrase followed by a locative postposition,<sup>13</sup> as in (487-489), or a locative noun form, as in (490), which combines the function of a noun phrase and a postposition (cf. §10.2.2). While the optional particle ǐ is used only in (489), its use would be grammatical in all these examples.

- (487) à mī tén wú [kyà mī]  
 2SG CONSEC pour(c) CL3 CL9.basket in

‘And then you pour it into a flat basket.’<sup>14</sup>

- (488) wù kwó [mbāŋ mī]  
 CL1 enter(c) CL7/8.door in

‘She entered the space behind the door.’

- (489) wù dā bā kà gí tē [ǐ gbō  
 CL1 see(a) IMPERS P3 put(b) CL7/8.walking\_stick LOC CL3.house  
 sē]  
 house\_front.PP

‘She saw that someone had left a walking stick in front of the house.’

- (490) wù kwó [gbá]  
 CL1 enter(c) house.LOC

‘She entered the house.’

The main function of locative constituents is to create a locational setting, i.e. to represent the ground<sup>15</sup> in an event of motion or location. By extension, locative constituents are sometimes used to create a temporal setting (491).

<sup>13</sup>Refer to §10.2.2 for more on postpositions (including a list of locative postpositions) and locative noun forms.

<sup>14</sup>Early during the process of making corn beer, the corn is poured into a flat basket which functions as a strainer, in order to remove the water which the corn has soaked in for a couple days.

<sup>15</sup>The term ‘ground’ was first introduced by Talmy. It refers to “the entity which acts as a spatial reference point for the motion/location of [a] figure” (Talmy 1972), as critically revised in (Croft et al. 2010: 2).

- (491) mǎ wù kè dzé w-ṽ dʒí gbàm [tō  
 CL1.man CL1 P3 say(b) CL1-REL CL3/7a.word CL7a.God CL7/8.day  
 k-ṽ ɲgɔ̃] kà dī pǎ pítà kyǎ  
 CL7-DET upon P3 be(b) Pa P. K.

‘The person who was preaching on that day was Pa Peter Kia.’

Occasionally, locative constituents are attested which consist of a bare noun phrase, marked neither by the general locative preposition nor by a postposition, cf. e.g. (492) and (493). The relevant locative phrases in these examples are enclosed in square brackets. Example (493) contains two unflagged locatives: tʃɔ̃ɲ ‘fire place’ and sé ‘attic’.

- (492) tō dóm lā bòm dā wú lā, wù kè  
 CL7/8.day certain DAT CL9.antelope see(a) CL1PP DAT CL1 P3  
 gān [dʒwō]  
 go(a).IPFV? CL1/2.water\_place

‘One day, an antelope saw her. She was going to the stream.’

- (493) ká wù kpā ʃī gū w-ṽ [tʃɔ̃ɲ],  
 when CL1 light(a) go\_down(a) CL3/7a.fire CL3-DET CL1/2.fire\_place  
 ní wū tén bí ʃī  
 CL1.mother.3SG.POSS CL1;3SG.POSS drip(c) exit(b) go\_down(a)  
 fi-ɲgī [sé]  
 CL19-CL6.water CL3/7a.attic

‘When she lit the fire in the fire place, her mother let a little bit of water drop down from the attic.’

### 11.3.5 Dative

The dative constituent is followed by the dative postposition **lā** and can be preceded by the optional locative preposition **ĩ**. Thus, formally, the dative constituent is a special type of locative constituent. However, due to its special function, it is treated as a separate type of constituent and is dedicated a separate section.

The main semantic function of the dative is to indicate the recipient or beneficiary of an action, although it is also attested with other semantic functions. The dative adposition can take a full NP, as in (494) and (495), or a pronoun, as in (496) and (497), as its complement.

- (494) fǎ fǎ ndè kpǎ [ĩ ntí lā]  
 DS.P1 give(b) who CL3/7a.money LOC N. DAT

◊‘Who gave money to Ntie?’

- (495) wù fyá bí-lúŋ [ɲwóm b-ó lā] ǎ  
 CL1 give(b).IPFV CL8-suffering CL2.children CL2-DET DAT ADVLZ  
 mò~mò, gē ɲwóm ní kà wù ká tʃyé  
 very\_much be\_there<sup>16</sup> CL2.children CL1.mother ?? CL1 HAB know(c)  
 bò  
 FRUST

‘She made them suffer, not knowing that they were her siblings.’

- (496) nsōŋ wū dzé [wú lā] yē wà, à dĩ  
 CL1.friend CL1;3SG.POSS say(b) CL1PP DAT SUBORD 2SG, 2SG be(b)  
 kpé bǒ  
 CL1.woman CL1/9.bad

‘Her friend said to her: You, you are a bad woman!’

- (497) bǒ fò tʃú [bí lā] yē bǒ tsè  
 CL2 tell(a).IPFV come(b).IPFV 1PL.PP DAT COMP CL2 search(a).IPFV  
 dzí gàn kpǒ  
 travel(b).IPFV go(a).IPFV CL3/7a.money

‘They are telling us that they are searching for money.’

Examples (494)-(497) contain verbs which commonly take a dative complement, such as **fǒ** ‘give’ (494 and 495), **dzé** ‘say’ (496) and **fò** ‘report’ (497) (cf. §11.1). However, any active verb can take a dative complement in order to express the benefactor of the action, as in (498). This happens in a context where related Bantu languages would add a derivational applicative affix to the verb.

- (498) kpé w-ō dzýē ndzōmpyīn [í m̀ w-ō  
 CL1.woman CL1-DET cook(a) CL8.food LOC CL1.person CL1-DET  
 lā]  
 DAT

◊ ‘The woman prepares food for the man.’

The dative exhibits a case-like alternation in two pronouns. The 1SG pronoun **mī** and the interrogative pronoun **ndè** ‘who’ have special dative forms, namely **ndó** for the 1SG dative pronoun (499) and **ndyén** for the dative interrogative pronoun (500) (cf. §6.1.5 for details). These forms are only used in the dative. They cannot occur in (other) locative phrases.

The dative interrogative pronoun **ndyén** behaves differently from the dative 1SG pronoun in that it is obligatory in dative constituents and the postposition is absent when the dative interrogative pronoun is used. In (500), the

<sup>16</sup>A special section is devoted to the locative copula **gē**, cf. §13.2.5.4.



two forms of the interrogative pronoun, **ndè** (Subject) and **ndyén** (Dative) are contrasted.

- (499) gbàm ká mī tsò d̩zī dzón [ndé lā] *first*  
 CL7.God F2 CONSEC show(a) CL9.way be\_good(b) 1SG.DAT DAT first

‘First, God will show me the right way.’

- (500) fǎ ndè kī-mān [ĩ ndyén]  
 DS.give(b) who CL7-what LOC who.DAT

◊‘Who gave what to whom?’

While the use of the dative form **ndyén** is obligatory in dative contexts, the 1SG dative pronoun form is in free variation with the unmarked 1SG pronoun **mī**, cf. (501).

- (501) à mī tʃú fǎ [mī lā]  
 2SG CONSEC come(b) give(b) 1SG.PP DAT

‘[...] and then come and give it to me!’

## 11.4 Grammatical relations

Mundabli is a non-prototypical marked nominative language (cf. König (2006) for more on marked nominative languages). It has nominative-accusative alignment, but canonical subject pronouns are functionally more marked than object pronouns. Evidence for grammatical relations is relatively weak and evidence for the subject is stronger than for the object. The label “marked nominative” for Mundabli is based on the pronominal forms. While case is not marked in full NPs, the shapes of pronouns vary, depending on their syntactic function. The form used for out-of-focus preverbal subjects is used only in this function, while the form used for objects covers various functions, including postverbal in-focus subjects and elicitation forms. Overt coding properties for grammatical relations in Mundabli are word order and - in pronouns only - case morphology. Mundabli has no verb agreement. Noun phrases other than pronouns are not marked for case.

### 11.4.1 Case morphology in pronouns

Mundabli pronouns have various different case forms, including special dative forms for the 1SG pronoun **mī** and the interrogative pronoun **ndè** ‘who’. Mundabli makes a distinction between preverbal pronouns and non-preverbal pronouns. The preverbal pronoun forms directly precede the verb complex. These forms only refer to topical subjects. They have no other syntactic function. The non-preverbal forms are used elsewhere for pronouns which are not

the object of a pre- or postposition. When a pronoun is the object of a (locative or dative) postposition, or of the comitative preposition *ā*, respectively, it surfaces with the same segmental shape as the non-preverbal forms, but with alternated tonal patterns. For an overview of such forms, see Table 11.1.

person	gender	SG				PL			
		PVB	NPVB	LOC	COM	PVB	NPVB	LOC	COM
1st		N	mī	mí	mī	bī	bī	bí	bī
2nd		à	wà	wá	wà	bēn	bēn	bén	bēn
3rd	1/2	wù	wù	wú	wù	bǒ	bǒ	bǒ	bǒ
	3/10	wū	wú	wú	wǔ	yī	yí	yí	yǐ
	3/7a	wū	wú	wú	wǔ	kī	kí	kí	kǐ
	7/8	kī	kí	kí	kǐ	bī	bí	bí	bǐ
	9/10	yì	yì	yí	yì	yī	yí	yí	yǐ
	19/18	fī	fǐ	fí	fǐ	mū	mú	mú	mǔ
single genders		PVB	NPVB	LOC	COM				
	6a	mū	mú	mú	mǔ				
	3a	wū	wú	wú	wǔ				
	8a	bī	bí	bí	bǐ				
	10a	yī	yí	yí	yǐ				
	7b	kī	kí	kí	kǐ				

Table 11.1: Preverbal, non-preverbal, object of postposition and object of comitative preposition forms of all personal pronouns, adapted from Table 6.2

When a pronoun which would otherwise bear a superhigh tone in non-preverbal position, i.e. any third person pronoun of a noun class other than Class 1 and 9, is the object of the comitative preposition *ā*, it is realized with a LH rising tone; otherwise the tone is the same as that of the non-preverbal pronoun; see also §11.3.3.

When they are the object of a postposition, all pronouns except for the Class 2 (or third person plural) pronoun bear a high tone. The Class 2 (or third person plural) pronoun is realized **bǒ** (with a low-high rising tone). All other pronouns bear a high tone when headed by a postposition.

When they are the object of the dative postposition *lā*, pronouns generally take the same form as when they are the object of a locative postposition. Only the first person singular pronoun **mī** ‘1<sub>SG</sub>’ and the interrogative pronoun **ndè** ‘who’ also have special dative/benefactive forms; see Table 11.2.

While **ndyén** may occur on its own without a postposition, the 1<sub>SG</sub> benefactive pronoun **ndá** always co-occurs with the dative postposition *lā*. Whereas the 1<sub>SG</sub> benefactive pronoun **ndá** can always be replaced by the “object of postposition”-form of the 1<sub>SG</sub> pronoun **mí**, the dative form **ndyén** ‘to/for

	unmarked form	dative/benefactive form
1 <sub>SG</sub>	<b>mī</b>	<b>ndá</b>
1 <sub>SG</sub>	<b>ndè</b>	<b>ndyén</b>

Table 11.2: Special dative/benefactive pronoun forms

whom' must be used to express the dative/benefactive of the interrogative pronoun **ndè**.

