

Intransitive Verbs Classes in Shilluk: Morphophonology and Semantics

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Lexical verbs in Shilluk (a Western Nilotic language of the Luo subgroup) are categorized as either transitive or intransitive. Transitive verbs are minimally bivalent; intransitive verbs are monovalent. Transitive and intransitive verb stems are phonologically distinguished. This paper examines intransitive verbs in two respects. First, intransitive verbs are divided into classes based upon the morphophonological features (segments and tones) of the basic verbal conjugations. The classes tend to correlate with semantic categories of situation aspect (states, processes, activities, accomplishments, semelfactives). Second, attention is paid to those classes of intransitive verbs which may be modified to increase the number of arguments associated with them. Whereas transitive verbs in Shilluk may exhibit increased valency through the addition of a benefactive or instrumental argument and a corresponding modification of the verbal stem, intransitive verbs only rarely are associated with a benefactive or instrumental constituent and do not exhibit any morphological change in the verbal stem in such constructions. However, one important category of intransitives regularly and productively has a transitive counterpart; these derived transitives have distinctive morphological and semantic characteristics.

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