

As is evident from (21) above, <= ‘i’ is not part of the same phonological word as the suffixed noun. Therefore, pitch accent does not shift onto the enclitic.

Further discussion of postpositional locative enclitics will proceed later (see §3.5.iii).

§3.3. Verbal Morphology

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As has been alluded to, verb morphology is distinct from nominal morphology due to its prefixing, agglutinative paradigm of conjugation. Verb inflection is templatic, meaning all prefixes occur in predictable, fixed positions relative to the verb root, which is a bound morpheme and is ungrammatical if left bare.

Verbs inflect for the following features: (i) proximity (‘spatial deixis’), (ii) valence, (iii) evidentiality, and (iv) modal aspect, optionally. The template for conjugation is thus:

PROXIMITY(S)- PROXIMITY(O)- VALENCE- MOOD- ASPECT- EVIDENTIALITY- ROOT

Verb roots are *all* inherently morphosemantically transitive, which means that intransitives are always derived in some way from transitives, whether through valence reduction or null subjects. A discussion of valence reduction will follow. An additional point of interest is that *laá siri* allows for the null derivation of causative predicates. This will also be discussed in the coming sections.

§3.3.i Proximity (Spatial Deixis)

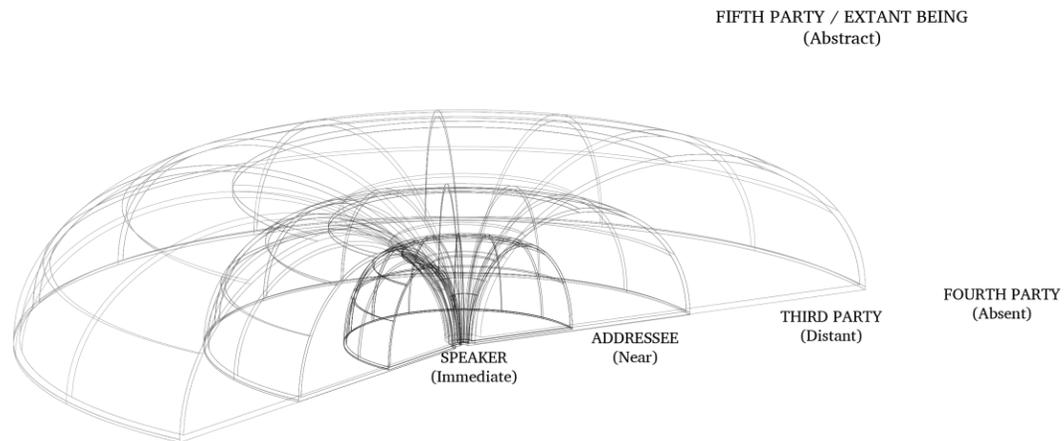
‘Proximity’ (or ‘morphological spatial deixis’) is as central a component of *laá siri*’s grammar as animacy (§3.2.i). ‘Proximity’ refers to morphologically encoded reference to the relative distances of the subject and object with the speaker as the locus. There are five proximities morphologically encoded in *laá siri*: (i) IMMEDIATE, (ii) NEAR, (iii) DISTANT, (iv) ABSENT, and (v) ABSTRACT.

As the origin, (i) makes reference to the speaker and the area immediately surrounding the speaker (‘here’); (ii) and (iii) to two different distances away (‘there’ and ‘over there’); (iv) makes reference to a subject or object which is extant, but outside of the speaker’s field of vision (‘elsewhere’); finally, (v) makes reference to incorporeal entities or things which are postulated to exist in an abstract sense (‘somewhere’), but are not specific speech-participants of the utterance.

This system of spatial deixis doubles as a system of demonstratives and a system of person-marking. It requires no large intellectual leap to envision how the five proximities map onto persons — first, second, third, and fourth (‘obviate’). A crucial difference between person and proximity is that proximity explicitly describes positions in *physical space* relative to the speaker. Second-person ‘you’ will normally

refer to the hearer, but in *taá siri* ‘you’ could be expressed in any of the proximities, provided the use is in accord with the hearer’s distance from the speaker.

The following diagram accounts for the facts about proximity discussed so far, and gives form to the abstract reference to ‘space’ and ‘deixis.’



It would be a misconception to believe that only animate beings behave as deictic centers (viz. as speakers). In fact, everything has its own deictic space, like in the diagram above, regardless of whether or not it is a speech participant.

For instance, if I am the speaker and a rock is located NEAR to me, it too has its own deictic space around it (and I am presumably NEAR to *it*). The deictic spaces of other bodies is rarely accessed, though it is possible via ‘Deictic Shift,’ which is explained in §3.4.iv.

Proximity is realized morphologically on verbs. There are also independent deictic pronouns, but discussion of these will be saved for the appropriate section (§3.4.i). Herein follows a discussion of deictic verbal morphology.

Proximity of Subject

Proximity of both the subject and object is obligatorily marked in nonfinite (i.e., conjugated) verbs. As has been said, this conjugation is reflective of a deictic space which has the speaker as its center. For example, if I were to say, “The cat is eating a mouse,” and the cat is in another room out of my sight, the verb would be conjugated with an ABSENT subject.

Inflection	Proximity	
<i>u-</i>	IMMEDIATE	(IMM)
<i>i-</i>	NEAR	(NEAR)
<i>ii-</i>	DISTANT	(DIST)
<i>a-</i>	ABSENT	(ABS)
<i>aa-</i>	ABSTRACT	(ABST)

Established conventions may complicate their use, but the prefixes for subject and object always occur as has been listed in the tables above.

Requisite addenda will be made in the coming sections because actual speech is much more complicated than simple subject-object sentences. Even sentences consisting of a subject and an object may not be as clear as they seem; in *laá siri*, there is frequent use of null subjects, which, in fact, make it so that the object prefix of the verb is actually indexing the subject.

Null Subject Morphemes

Several times, the issue of transitivity has been mentioned: All verbs are morphosemantically transitive to start; intransitives are derived in one of two ways. One particularly pervasive pattern is the use of a ‘null’ (or ‘empty’) subject morpheme — that is, ‘null’ in the sense that the subject does not correspond to any overt subject in an utterance.

The null subject is always in the form of the ABSTRACT, *l-*. The function of the null subject is one of *valence reduction*, and its use should be contrasted with the detransitivization prefix, which also reduces valence (§3.3.ii). There is no clear way of determining whether a verb reduces its valence via a null subject or a detransitivization affix, and the use of one or the other may even vary within a single verb root.

- (23) *sayuu yisasaá la’íi l-a-sár*
 S. SENT\father NEAR-ABS-POSS ABST-ABS-DIR\be.good
r-a-lu-sár.
 ABS-ABS-DETRANS-DIR\be.good
 ‘Sayuu’s father was successful in his endeavors and humble.’

The statement of (23) illustrates this variability quite nicely; *<sar>* ‘be good’ has evolved two different meanings: ‘be successful’ if a null subject is used and ‘be humble’ if the detransitive is used.

A guiding principle, though, is that the null subject morpheme is used with descriptive, stative (adjectival) verbs which express subjective qualities, ones which must be experienced and are not objectively

apparent to all, e.g., ‘cold,’ ‘heavy,’ ‘difficult.’

The use of the null subject is not restricted to only stative verbs, as many eventive verbs use it obligatorily. In these cases, we may also consider whether or not the verb expresses a permanent state or temporary, ephemeral condition. Verbs of the former kind usually take a null subject. And, of course, some verbs have simply become lexicalized and unpredictable in their use of the null subject.

Due to *laá siri*’s ability to derive causatives with no overt morphology, the null subject can also be thought of as ‘*empty causation*.’ Phrased another way, the expressed state of the verb is attributed to the cause of some abstract thing on the experiencer or patient. For example:

- (24) ᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲ ᑲᑲ
 yaá *l-ii-raa’-tar.*
 SENT\male ABSTR-DIST-RPRT-be.bad
 ‘I’ve heard that that man is bad.’ lit., ‘I’ve heard that (it) makes that man bad.’

When using a null subject, the patient prefix of the verb actually expresses the proximity of what we typically think of as the subject (or experiencer). Example (24) is a good example of this: the indexed proximity of ‘the man’ is DISTANT.