Sea Nomad Sketch Grammar

Miacomet (a.k.a. u/roipoiboy)

October 2021

Introduction

This is a sketch of a conlang I started for the 9th Speedlang Challenge in October 2021. As part of that challenge, it had to meet several criteria:

- There is **an asymmetrical set of plosives** since aspiration is only contrastive for labial and alveolar stops and ejectives for alveolar and velar stops.
- **Featural metathesis** occurs with aspiration in consonant clusters. You could also argue that the Ti- suffix undergoes featural metathesis with word-initial aspirates and ejectives.
- There is a **minimum size constraint** that content words can't consist only of a single light syllable, and I give examples of stems that have to lengthen to meet that constraint.
- There is a **symmetrical voice system** consisting of a basic active voice, an agent voice, and a patient voice, none of which change the verb's valence. Depending on how you count it, the causatives and applicatives might also be symmetrical voices, since they change the verb's argument structure but often turn transitive verbs into other transitive verbs.
- Negation on verbs is **marked by the absence** of other TAM marking.
- There are three **causative voices** which carry different meanings and can apply to different classes of verbs.

Among my examples, I used 5MOYD sentences 1265, 1284, 1540, 1544, and 1546.

I didn't do the non-human language DLC.

In addition to the speedlang requirements, I'm making this language for my friend Manticr0n. Although it's set in his world, he wanted another conlanger to create it, since the speakers are canonically from a different world. He asked that it include ejectives and word-initial consonant clusters with mixed places of articulation. He asked that it be 'fusional, but not in a Latin kind of way,' which is what inspired me to put together the irregular (or saturated) noun system. He also wanted me to include SVCs, which I've sketched out, but didn't get to discuss in this document.

Contents

Abbreviations

ACC	Accusative
APPL	Applicative voice
AV	Agent voice
CAUS	Causative voice
DEO	Deontic modal
DEP	Dependent
ERG	Ergative
FUT	Future
I	Causative I
II	Causative II
III	Causative III
NAME	Personal name
NDEP	Independent
NEG	Negative
PL	Plural
PLACE	Place name
PRS	Present
PST	Past
PV	Patient voice

1 Phonology

1.1 Inventory and Allophony

Sea Nomadic has twenty-nine consonant phonemes, shown in table 1.1. Stops contrast voicing at all places (except glottal). Additionally there are aspirated labial and alveolar stops as well as ejective alveolar and velar stops. I think all consonants can be geminated (but maybe not approximants).

	Labial	**Dental**	**Alveolar**	**Palatal**	**Velar**	**Glottal**
Stop	p b pʰ		t d tʰ t’	c ɟ	k g k’	ʔ
Nasal	m		n		ŋ	
Fricative		θ ð	s z sʰ	ʃ	x ɣ	
Approximant	w ɥ		l ɹ	j		

Table 1.1: Consonant inventory

Word-finally, velar stops and nasals become palatal after front high vowels. This means the velar and palatal stops merge (and are written as palatals)

Sea Nomadic has nine phonemic vowels. All of the vowels can be long or short. Vowels typically have their cardinal values with a few exceptions: some speakers relax short /y/ to [ʉ], short /i/ to [ɪ], and short /ʌ/ to [ə]. The vowel /ɑ/ floats around in the lower back part of the vowel space as [ɑ~ɒ~ɔ].

Vowels (or maybe whole syllables) can be modal or breathy. Voiced consonants before breathy vowels are also breathy. This has a pretty low functional load, but there are a few

The consonants /m n ŋ l/ can be syllabic. Like vowels, they can be long or short, and breathy or modal. I haven’t found any length minimal pairs for syllabic consonants, so it might not be contrastive here, but just a result of some other morphophonological processes.

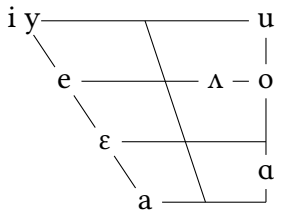


Table 1.2: Vowel inventory

From here on, I'm going to be using the Sea Nomadic practical orthography, which makes use of a lot of digraphs (and a few trigraphs).

The consonants ⟨p b t d c k g m n s z l⟩ all have their IPA values. The stops /ɟ ʔ/ are written as ⟨j q⟩. Aspiration is marked with ⟨h⟩ and ejectives are marked with ⟨q⟩, for example the alveolar stops /t^h t'/ are written as ⟨th tq⟩.

The dental fricatives /θ ð/ are written ⟨f v⟩. The other fricatives /ʃ x ɣ/ are written as ⟨x kh gh⟩ (⟨sh⟩ is already being used for /s^h/, but there's no /k^h/). The velar nasal is written with the digraph ⟨ng⟩. The approximants /w ɥ j ɹ/ are written ⟨v w y r⟩. Geminate consonants are written doubled.

The vowel letters ⟨a e i o⟩ all have their IPA values, but ⟨u⟩ represents /ʌ/. Then, /y u ɛ ɑ/ are written as digraphs ⟨ue ou ae au⟩. Long vowels are written by doubling the vowel letter, or in the case of digraphs, by doubling the first letter of the digraph.

Breathy vowels are marked with ⟨r⟩ after the vowel but before the syllable coda.

1.2 Suprasegmentals

Stress

I'm still figuring this out. I'm mainly including it so I have something to point to in the next section when I reference 'the first stressed syllable.' Here are the rules for stress assignment (I think):

- If either of the first two syllables is heavy, stress falls on it.

- Else, if the second syllable has a syllabic consonant, stress falls on the first syllable.
- Else, the second syllable is stressed.
- Subsequent heavy syllables are given secondary stress.
- Light syllables that aren't adjacent to any stressed syllables are given secondary stress (so you can get pairs of adjacent unstressed light syllables, but never three in a row).

What counts as 'heavy' or 'light' is discussed below in the Word Shape section.

Tone

Sea Nomadic has a tone system with a relatively low functional load. Some words have no change in pitch (maybe a plurality). Words that have unstressed initial syllables have a lower pitch on that initial syllable than the following syllable. Some words have a drop in pitch somewhere later in the word. There are a handful of words that don't have a drop in the stem, but any suffixes they take will be a lower pitch. There also seems to be a ban on the first low-pitch syllable having a syllabic consonant nucleus (although syllabic consonants can still bear tone).

Here are the phonetic forms of a couple words, one from each of the groups I mentioned above. I'll use them to give a pitch-accent analysis and an autosegmental tone analysis.

(1)

a.	**jemnsa**	[ˈʝémn̩ˌsá]	*'plan'*
b.	**bequesi**	[bèˈʔýsí]	*'ambition'*
c.	**mritàsi**	[ˈmɹítàsì]	*'spirit'*
d.	**croorù**	[ˈcɹóːɹʌ̀]	*'fill-PRS'*

The first analysis thinks of the tone in terms of upsteps and downsteps placed in a word. There's an upstep placed before the first stressed syllable of a word (if that's the first syllable, which I think it usually is, then the word just resets to a high tone). Then, somewhere in the word, there's an optional downstep. If there's no downstep, then you get no pitch contour. It's possible for a downstep to be specified at the end of a root, so that it only surfaces if there's a suffix after the root. That would give these phonemic forms:

(2)

a.	**jemnsa**	/ˈɟemn̩sa/	[ˈɟémn̥̩sá]
b.	**bequesi**	/beˈʔysi/	[bèˈʔýsí]
c.	**mritàsi**	/ˈmɹi↓tasi/	[ˈmɹítàsì]
d.	**croorù**	/ˈcɹo:↓-ɹʌ/	[ˈcɹó:ɹʌ̀]

Another way to think about it is in terms of underlying high and low tones, which spread to give the surface pattern. In this model, low tone is default. The first stressed syllable gets a high tone, then some later syllable can optionally get assigned a low tone. Tone spreads to the right until it hits another underlying assigned tone.

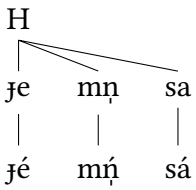
This model would give the following underlying forms. I'm marking high tone on stressed syllables for clarity, but since high tones are predictable from stress, they aren't phonemic. If stress is predictable based on word shape, I guess it's not phonemic either. Maybe nothing's phonemic. Anyway. Underlying forms.

(3)

a.	**jemnsa**	/ˈɟémn̩sa/	[ˈɟémn̥̩sá]
b.	**bequesi**	/beˈʔýsi/	[bèˈʔýsí]
c.	**mritàsi**	/ˈmɹítàsi/	[ˈmɹítàsì]
d.	**croorù**	/ˈcɹó:˴-ɹʌ/	[ˈcɹó:ɹʌ̀]

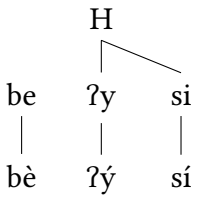
For **jemnsa**, the high tone assigned to the first syllable spreads to the right until it gets to the end of the word.

(4) **jemnsa**



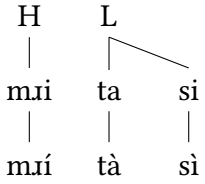
For **bequesi**, the first syllable is unspecified and defaults to low tone, then the high tone on the second syllable spreads to the right.

(5) **bequesi**



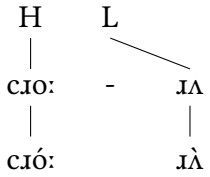
For **mritàsi**, there's a high tone on the first syllable and a low tone on the second syllable. The high tone can't spread at all, but the low tone can spread to the end of the word.

(6) **mritàsi**



For **croorù**, there's a high tone on the first syllable and a low tone after the first syllable.

(7) **croorù**



Since I don't think you can get a pitch drop on a syllable with a syllabic consonant, maybe it's really that *vowels* are getting assigned tone, so tone can spread to a syllabic consonant but never be directly assigned to one.

I don't really like the analysis for **croorù** where there's a low tone underlyingly assigned to nothing (that vanishes as opposed to giving a falling

tone or something). I think the downstep analysis is cleaner for that case.

1.3 Word shape

Heavy syllables have the maximal form CCGVVC and light syllables have the maximal form CCVC (where the coda can only be a voiceless stop).

Content words have to consist of at least one heavy syllable or two light syllables. If a content word would only consist of a light syllable, its vowel is lengthened. For example, the root of the word for *'egg'* is /dli/ as shown by its ergative form **dlisi**, accusative form **dling**, plural stem **dlija** *etc.* However, its oblique form requires its vowel to be lengthened to give **dlii**.

Two heavy syllables may not be adjacent to each other. When this would happen, vowels of unstressed syllables are shortened and sonorant codas are deleted. For example the underlying causative II form of **thkootsou** *'sweet'* would be ***thavkootsou**, but since **thav** and **koo** both have two-mora nuclei, they're both heavy and clash. The second syllable is shortened to give **thavkotsou**.

1.4 Morphophonology

Aspiration Metathesis

Aspirated consonants can't precede other consonants in clusters. When an aspirated consonant comes before a voiceless stop or sibilant in a cluster, then the first consonant becomes unaspirated and the second consonant becomes (or stays) aspirated. This happens even when there's no phonemic aspirated counterpart to the second consonant. For example **shcav** /sʰcaw/ *'to leave behind'* is pronounced as [scʰaw] even though there's no phoneme /cʰ/. Some speakers realize an aspirated /k/ as [x], for example for **thkovm** /tʰkowm/ *'wood'*, some speakers will say [tkʰowm] and others will say [txowm]. One side-effect of this is that there are no words whose surface forms have consecutive aspirates.

It might also be possible to analyze it in a way that includes /cʰ kʰ ʃʰ/ as independent phonemes along with a restriction that there can't be two consecutive aspirated consonants. There are several reasons why I don't think that's the right analysis. First, I don't think there are any places where you get [cʰ kʰ ʃʰ] outside of clusters, so they don't have the same distribution as the other aspirated sounds. Second, those three aspirated sounds *only* occur in clusters

after [p t s]. If all of the aspirated stops were phonemic, I'd expect all possible unaspirated/aspirated clusters to occur. Last, when an infix breaks up an unaspirated/aspirated cluster containing [cʰ kʰ ʃʰ], the first consonant always ends up aspirated and the second never does. For example the causative form of **shcav** is **shaycav** [sʰajcaw] rather than *[saycʰaw], which suggests that the underlying phonemic form has /sʰ/ rather than /cʰ/.

When an aspirated consonant comes before a voiced consonant, the first consonant is deaspirated and the following syllable is pronounced with breathy voice. For example **tloor** *'to shut'* is underlyingly /tʰlo:/ but the aspiration on the initial consonant is lost and the syllable becomes breathy to give [tl̤o:]. This becomes clear when the cluster is broken up in the causative form **thaylo** *'to make someone shut,'* which is /tʰajlo/, with aspiration on the first consonant but no breathy voice.

2 Nouns

2.1 Noun Declension

Nouns decline for two numbers–singular and plural–and for three cases–ergative, accusative, and oblique. The uses of the cases are outlined below, but broadly the ergative marks subjects of transitive clauses and possessors, the accusative marks objects of transitive clauses, possessees, and the objects of some prepositions, and the oblique marks subjects of intransitive clauses and the objects of other prepositions. The oblique is also the citation form.

There are no regular nouns in Sea Nomadic. There are several patterns that are used to form the ergative and accusative cases, but it is not predictable which of these patterns will apply to any particular word.

The ergative can be formed by adding the suffix **-si** to the oblique form.

(8)	**mvaanè**	/mwaː↓ne/	→	**mvaanèsi**	/mwaː↓nesi/	*'Mwane person'*
(9)	**dlii**	/dliː/	→	**dlisi**	/dlisi/	*'egg'*

(Note that in 9 the ergative form **dlisi** has a short vowel even though the oblique form **dlii** has a long vowel. This is because the stem is underlyingly **dli-** but is lengthened in the oblique to meet the bimoraic minimum word constraint.)

The ergative case can also be marked by fronting the last vowel in the root.

(10)	**ylassa**	/jlasːa/	→	**ylassae**	/jlasːɛ/	*'worker'*
(11)	**skqoung**	/skʼuŋ/	→	**skqueng**	/skʼyŋ/	*'coconut'*

The accusative can be marked with a nasal suffix, which can be realized in several different ways. The most common realization is as a suffix **-ng**. Coda stops can be replaced with a coda nasal at the same place of articulation. The

final vowel of open, light syllable can also be replaced with a syllabic velar nasal.

(12)	**mritè**	/mɹiˈta/	→	**mritèng**	/mɹiˈtaŋ/	*'spirit'*
(13)	**ktop**	/ktop/	→	**ktom**	/ktom/	*'mast, pole'*
(14)	**jemnsa**	/jemn̩sa/	→	**jemnsng**	/jemn̩sŋ/	*'supplies'*

The accusative can also be marked by making the final syllable of the word breathy.

(15)	**trafo**	/tɹaθo/	→	**trafor**	/tɹaθo̰/	*'beach'*
(16)	**lookrau**	/loːkɹɑ/	→	**lookraur**	/loːkɹɑ̰/	*'glove, wrapping'*

The ergative and accusative can both be marked by lengthening a vowel or consonant in the last syllable of the word. Sometimes this deletes the coda of the last syllable. If one form is marked with lengthening, then the other form will also always have lengthening.

(17)	**tkotu**	/tkotʌ/	→	**tkottu**	/tkotːʌ/	*'small boat'*
(18)	**mnellen**	/mnelːen/	→	**mnellee**	/mnelːeː/	*'young boy'*

It's also possible for ergative and accusative forms to be marked by several of these at once. Here are two extreme examples: an ergative form **dgheensi** marked with vowel fronting, lengthening, and the suffix **-si**, as well as an accusative form **vraddarng** marked with lengthening, breathy voice, and a nasal suffix.

(19)	**dghon**	/dɣon/	→	**dgheensi**	/dɣeːnsi/	*'tree'*
(20)	**vrada**	/ðɹada/	→	**vraddarng**	/ðɹadːa̰ŋ/	*'door'*

Some words have suppletive stems in the ergative and accusative. Similar to with lengthened stems, if one case uses a suppletive stem, then the other case will use it too.

Example 21 shows the ergative and accusative forms for **mnaa** *'water,'* which has the suppletive stem **shou**. The suppletive stem still gets marked with vowel-fronting in the ergative and a nasal suffix in the accusative. Both forms also undergo lengthening to meet the bimoraic word constraint.

(21) **mnaa** /mna:/ → **shuue** /s^{h}y:/
shnng /s^{h}ŋ/ *'water'*

'**Shou**' itself doesn't actually appear in either of the surface forms, but both of them are 'regularly' inflected forms of **shou**. Here's what happens if you first mark **shou** for case, then change its surface forms to match the bimoraic constraint.

	Stem		**Marked**		**Surface**
ERG	shou	→	shue	→	shuue
ACC	shou	→	shng	→	shnng

Even though both surface forms are long, the underlying form has to be short, because the nasal accusative suffix won't replace long vowels, only short vowels. An underlying long stem *__shoou__ would lead to the right ergative form but the wrong accusative form. Here are the same transformations but with a long stem. (The underlying marked forms are already both larger than a single mora, so they're identical to the surface forms).

	Stem		**Marked**		**Surface**
ERG	shoou	→	shuue	→	shuue
ACC	shoou	→	shooung	→	shooung

A nice adventure in morphophonology...anyway, back to the regularly scheduled programming.

When a count noun refers to more than one individual, it gets marked with the plural suffix **-ja**. A small number of nouns have suppletive plural forms, but all other plurals are formed regularly. Plural nouns always take the ergative suffix **-jasi** and the accusative suffix **-jang**. They don't undergo any kind of ablaut or stem change, regardless of what happens with their singular forms. For example, the singular forms of **dghon, dgheensi, dghoon** *'tree'* undergo stem lengthening and ablaut, but the accusative form doesn't get any suffix. On the other hand, the plural forms are predictably **dghonja, dghonjasi, dghonjang** *'trees.'*

I imagine that each of the different possible ways of marking case operate almost independently of each other. I think of there as being a feature that determines whether there is a stem change in the ergative and accusative forms (which is why words either have lengthening/suppletion in both or in neither), in addition to independent features for the **-si** suffix, ergative fronting, the nasal suffix, and ergative breathiness. These few parameters create 48 different declensions (although fronting and the nasal suffix are realized in context-dependent ways, maybe further complicating things). This is inspired by *'Paradigmatic saturation in Nuer'* (Baerman & Monich, 2021).

I think of both suffixes as being present by default and fronting, breathiness, lengthening, and suppletion to be absent by default. That's why loanwords tend to only get the suffixes. I also think of the plural suffix as erasing these features, which is why suffixed plurals always take only the two suffixes, but suppletive plurals can still be irregular.

2.2 Use of Cases

The oblique case marks the single argument of intransitive verbs and both arguments of nominal and adjectival predication. It's also used with a lot of simple prepositions.

(22) **Ylacuja metlorni fa Marba.**

ylacu	-ja	me-	tloor	-ni	fa	Marba
soldier	-PL	AV-	*leave*	-PST	*to*	PLACE

"The soldiers set out for Marba."

(23) **Tkullen malàen ylacuru.**

Tkullen	malàen	ylacu	-ru
NAME	*old*	*soldier*	-PRS

"Tkullen is an old soldier."

The ergative case is used to mark the 'subject,' of a transitive verb–the agent for active or agent voice verbs and the patient for patient voice verbs. This is usually (always?) the first/leftmost argument.

(24) **Mnellee maethaukru vraddarng.**

mnellee	mae-	thaauk	-ru	vraddarng
boy.ERG	AV-	*open*	-PRS	*door*.ACC

"The boy opens the door."

(25) **Ylaacrasi beqng ticroorù.**

ylaacra	-si	beqng	Ti-	croo'	-ru
NAME	-ERG	*ambition*.ACC	PV-	*fill*	-PRS

"Ylaacra is full of ambition."

The ergative case is also used as the complement of relational nouns.

The accusative case is used for the less subject-like argument of a transitive verb, usually the patient (except in patient-voice, where it's the agent).

(26) **Mnellee maekhwerjae lookraujang fa tee amng.**

mnellee	mae-	khwerjae	lookrau	-ja	-ng	fa	tee	amng
boy.ERG	AV-	*go.get*	*sock*	-PL	-ACC	*for*	3S.ERG	*mother*.ACC

"The boy didn't get any socks for his mother."

(It might help to think of the accusative case like an obviative marker and the ergative case like a proximate marker. That's usually their distribution, and I've seen similar-acting things called that. Maybe that's what the traditional descriptions of this speedlang call them!)

In possessive expressions, the possessor is marked with the ergative case and the possessee is marked with the accusative case. This happens even when the possessee is in a position to otherwise get assigned ergative case.

(27) **Zfalasi mnellee ghaesi tkottu bishcavni.**

Zfala	-si	mnellee	ghaesi	tkottu	bi-	shcav -ni
NAME	-ERG	*boy*.ACC	*yesterday*	*boat*.ACC	PV-	*let.go* -PST

"The boat left Zfala's son behind yesterday."

With nested possessives or possessives plus relational nouns, only the first noun in the phrase gets assigned ergative–the rest are nominative.

(28) **Metkhati skee vlawr sdeerk cayng.**

me -	tkhat -	i	skee	vlawr	sdeerk	cayng
AV -	*pray* -	APPL	2S.ERG	*head*.ACC	*inside*.ACC	*people*.ACC

"Pray for the people inside your head."

3 Verbs

3.1 Voice

Sea Nomadic verbs are rich in voice morphology. There is a basic unmarked active voice, but it's fairly rare in discourse. There are symmetrical agent and patient voices that are used when an agent or patient is promoted to subject, relativized, or questioned. There's also a true passive voice, which is the only real valency-reducing operation. There are a handful of causative voices for different sorts of causation as well as a single generic applicative.

Agent and Patient Voices

Agent and patient voices are used to promote the agent and patient to a privileged position at the beginning of the clause.

	Agent Voice	**Patient Voice**
ERG	mae-	ti-
not ERG	me-	bi-

Table 3.1: Agent and Patient Voice Prefixes

Each of the voice prefixes come in pairs: **mae-** and **ti-** are used when the subject is marked with the ergative case, as is most common for transitive verbs.

On the other hand, **me-** and **bi-** are used when the subject *isn't* marked with the ergative case. This is usually either when the verb is intransitive (so the subject is unmarked) or when the subject is possessed (so it's marked with the accusative case).

(29) **Ylacuja metlorni fa Marba.**

ylacu -ja me- tloor -ni fa Marba
soldier -PL AV- *leave* -PST *to* PLACE

"The soldiers set out for Marba."

(30) **Zfalasi mnellee ghaesi tkottu bishcavni.**

Zfala -si mnellee ghaesi tkottu bi- shcav -ni
NAME -ERG *boy*.ACC *yesterday* *boat*.ACC PV- *let.go* -PST

"The boat left Zfala's son behind yesterday."

One common use of these voices is to put topical, definite referents into the 'privileged' position. This means that indefinite arguments are usually not put in this position, but definite ones often are. Since there's only one slot there, it's possible for other things in the sentence to be definite (*e.g.* if the agent and patient are both definite, only one of them can get promoted). Compare the examples below, which differ by voice in Sea Nomadic and by definiteness in English.

(31) a. **Ghaesi caysi thaukni tkotujang.**

ghaesi caysi thauk -ni tkotu -ja -ng
yesterday *people*.ERG *break* -PST *boat* -PL -ACC

"People broke boats yesterday."

b. **Caysi ghaesi maethaukni tkotujang.**

caysi ghaesi mae- thauk -ni tkotu -ja -ng
people.ERG *yesterday* AV- *break* -PST *boat* -PL -ACC

"The people broke boats yesterday."

c. **Tkotujasi ghaesi cayng thitaukni.**

tkotu -ja -si ghaesi cayng Ti- thauk -ni
boat -PL -ERG *yesterday* *people*.ACC PV- *break* -PST

"People broke the boats yesterday."
Or: "The people broke the boats yesterday."

The 'privileged' position is also often the only spot available for certain syntactic operations. When an argument is questioned, it has to be in the subject position.

(32) **Yarii Ylaacrang thitaukni?**

yarii ylaacrang Ti-thauk-ni
what.ERG NAME.ACC PV-*open*-PST

"What did Ylaacra open?"

When something other than an argument of the verb is questioned, it blocks the use of agent or patient voice.

(33) a. **Vavsi tav skaa navkru ayng?**

vavsi tav skaa navk-ru ayng
when FUT 2S.ERG *eat* -PRS 3S

"When will you eat it?"

b. ***Vavsi skaa tav maenavkru ayng?**

vavsi skaa tav mae-navk-ru ayng
when 2S.ERG FUT AV-*eat* -PRS 3S

Intended: "When will you eat it?"

Passive Voice

Causative Voices

There are three causative voices in Sea Nomadic, which I'll number as I, II, and III.

Causative I is a generic causative that can take any verb and add a causer as subject and move the causee/agent to object. It's marked with an infix **-ay-** after the first consonant in the verb. Since Sea Nomadic doesn't have any ditransitives, the patient of the caused action gets marked with the preposition **fa**. Here are examples of an intransitive verb and a transitive verb with the causative I form.

(34) **Ylavinsi stqaa maekhayayo wiyevu tkotujang.**

Ylavin-si stqaa mae-kayayo wiya-vu tkotu-ja-ng
NAME-ERG DEO AV-CAUS*start* *sail* -PRS.DEP *boat* -PL-ACC

"Ylavin shouldn't make the boats start sailing."

(35) **Tee maethayleni naa mnellee fa vrada fa naa.**

tee	mae-	thaylo	-ni	naa	mnellee	fa	vrada	fa	naa
3S.ERG	AV-	CAUS*close*	-PST	1S.ERG	*boy*.ACC	*to*	*door*	*to*	1S

"He made my boy close the door for me." (5MOYD #1284)

The new causative subject and object are available for other voice operations. Here's an example with a causative, an applicative, and a patient voice used to construct a cleft.

(36) **Tkullen bithaylimi toor fa vrada swi mnellen.**

Tkullen	bi-	thaylo	-i	-mi	toor	swi	vrada
NAME	PV-	CAUS*close*	-APPL	-PST.DEP	3S.ACC	*to*	*door*

fa	mnellen
with	*boy*

"It's Tkullen who he made the boy close the door for."

The causative II derives verbs where the subject causes a state change in the object. It's marked with an infix **-av-**. It can take telic verbs that result in a state-change to make a verb where the subject causes the state change described by the verb, for example **ookh** *'to die, to go out'* can take the causative II form **avokh** *'to kill, to put out.'* It can also take adjectives and derive state-change verbs, for example, from **thkootsou** *'sweet'* you can get **thavkotsou** *'to sweeten.'* It can't take activity verbs.

(37) **Mekqasru ayng fa methavkotsouvu ayng!**

me-	kqas	-ru	ayng	fa	me-	thavkotsou	-vu	ayng
AV-	*stir*	--PRS	3S.ACC	*for*	AV-	*sweeten*	-PRS.DEP	3S.ACC

"Stir it in order to sweeten it!" (5MOYD #1265)

The causative I form requires the causer to have some amount of initiative or volition, and is usually only used with animate subjects, but the causative II form doesn't have that requirement. Sentences 38.a and 38.b are both fine since the agent, the soldier, can have volition (although 38.b wouldn't be appropriate if the killing was accidental). On the other hand, 38.d is bad, since the storm does not have volition.

(38) a. **Tkullensi diavekhni ylaccng.**
Tkullen-si Ti-avokh -ni ylaccng
NAME -ERG PV-CAUS.II*die*-PST *soldier*.ACC
"The soldier killed Tkullen."

b. **Tkullensi diayekhni ylaccng.**
Tkullen-si Ti-ayokh -ni ylaccng
NAME -ERG PV-CAUS.I*die*-PST *soldier*.ACC
"The soldier killed Tkullen."

c. **Tkullensi diavekhni plonàrng.**
Tkullen-si Ti-avokh -ni plonàrng
NAME -ERG PV-CAUS.II*die*-PST *storm*.ACC
"The storm killed Tkullen."

d. ***Tkullensi diayekhni plonàrng.**
Tkullen-si Ti-ayokh -ni plonàrng
NAME -ERG PV-CAUS.I*die*-PST *storm*.ACC
Intended: "The storm killed Tkullen."

The causative III (sometimes called the 'soft causative') makes verbs with the same argument structure as the causative I, but where the causer asks or requests that something is done, rather than forcing or directly causing it to be done. It's generally used with animate causers and agents only, but in some stories involving magic, it's used when a character acts on (instructs or persuades?) an inanimate object using magic. It is marked with an infix **-av-** and a suffix **-i**.

(39) **Amme maekhaverjini mnellee fa lookrauja.**
amme mae-khaverji -ni mnellee fa lookrau-ja
mother.ERG AV-CAUS.III*go.get*-PST *boy*.ACC *for* *sock* -PL
"The mother had the boy go get her socks."

Even though the form of the causative III is identical to the causative II plus the applicative, I think of it as a different form. First, the causative III can

apply to words like activity verbs, which the causative II can't. Second, if the **-i** really is an applicative, I'm not sure what the applied object would be.

The Applicative

There is a suffix **-i** that works as a sort of multi-purpose applicative. It most commonly promotes benefactors, malefactors, and locations to direct object.

(40) **Metkhati skee vlawr sdeerk cayng.**

me-	tkhat	-i	skee	vlawr	sdeerk	cayng
AV-	*pray*	-APPL	2S.ERG	*head*.ACC	*inside*.ACC	*people*.ACC

"Pray for the people inside your head."

Sea Nomadic doesn't allow double object constructions, so if the patient displaced from direct object position sticks around, it gets marked with the preposition **swi** *'with.'*

(41) **Tee maekhwerjini naa amng swi dghon.**

tee	mae-	khwerjae	-i	-ni	naa	amng	swi	dghon
3S.ERG	AV-	*go.get*	-APPL	-PST	1S.ERG	*mother*.ACC	*with*	*wood*

"She fetched the wood for my mother." (5MOYD #1540)

Applied objects are available to be promoted to subject by the passive and patient voices, just like regular direct objects are. Applicatives plus the patient voice are particularly common when forming questions or relative clauses involving locations.

(42) **Yarii vlawr sknng bipnaesini swi ayo?**

yarii	vlawr	sknng	bi-	pnaus	-i	-ni	swi	ayo
what.ERG	*head*.ACC	2S.ACC	PV-	*find*	-APPL	-PST	*with*	3S

"What did you see it from on top of?"

3.2 Tense, Mood, and Modality

There's a series of TAM affixes that mark past vs. present and independent vs. dependent. Negative verbs don't take any of these suffixes.

	NDEP	DEP
PRS	-ru	-vu
PST	-ni	-mi
NEG	—	

Table 3.2: TAM Suffixes

Tense

Tense is really past versus non-past. The **-ni** and **-mi** forms are used for anything that happened before the utterance time, while the **-ru** and **-vu** forms are used for anything that is happening or will happen at the utterance time. I don't have very much to say about tense right now.

(43) **Yarii vlawr sknng bipnaesini swi ayo?**

yarii	vlawr	sknng	bi-pnaus-i	-ni	swi	ayo
what.ERG	*head*.ACC	2S.ACC	PV-*find*	-APPL-PST	*with*	3S

"What did you see it from on top of?"

Negation

Negative verbs do not take any tense marking. Most of the time, that's the only marking for negation. Negative verbs are ambiguous for tense.

(44) **Mnellee maekhwerjae lookraujang fa tee amng.**

mnellee	mae-khwerjae	lookrau-ja-ng	fa	tee	amng
boy.ERG	AV-*go.get*	*sock*	-PL-ACC	*for*	3S.ERG	*mother*.ACC

"The boy didn't get any socks for his mother."
Or: "The boy isn't getting any socks for his mother."

Nonverbal predicates have to take an overt negator **kma**. These are also ambiguous for tense.

(45) **Tov kma psee istqe, kaesi skaa pavkvu**

tov	kma	psee	istqe	kaesi	skaa	pavk - vu
3PL	NEG	FUT	*present*	*when*	2S	*die* - PRS.DEP

"They won't be there when you die."
Or: "They weren't going to be there when you die."

This was inspired by the Dravidian zero negative, a phenomenon in some South Indian languages, where the negative form of the verb has person marking but no tense marking and is ambiguous for tense. I learned about it from Christiane Pilot-Raichoor's paper 'The Dravidian zero negative: diachronic context of its morphogenesis and conceptualisation' in *Rara Rarissima*.

Dependent Forms

The tense suffixes each have two forms: an independent form used in the main verb in independent clauses and a dependent form used everywhere else.

The dependent form is used for complements of verbs, such as in places where English would want an infinitive.

(46) **Naa maekhayoru maebzangàvu tkottu.**

naa	mae - khayo - ru	mae - bzangà - vu	tkottu
1S.ERG	AV - *start* - PRS	AV - *tie* - PRS.DEP	*boat*.ACC

"I'm starting to moor my boat."

(47) **Kuue auru stoyng kqari meylasvu.**

kuue	au - ru	stoyng	kqari	me - ylas - vu
1PL.ERG	*want* - PRS	3PL.ACC	*better*	AV - *work* - PRS.DEP

"We want them to do the work better." (5MOYD #1546)

The dependent form is also used in relative clauses.

(48) **Mnellee maenueni lookraujang bishcawmi toor.**

mnellee	mae-	nou	-ni	lookrau	-ja	-ng	bi- shcav
boy.ERG	AV-	*remember*	-PST	*glove*	-PL	-ACC	PV- *leave.behind*

-mi	toor
-PST.DEP	3S.ACC

"The boy remembered the gloves he had left behind" (5MOYD #1544)

Modality

There are a couple of modal particles. **Tav** is used to talk about the future.

(49) **Vavsi tav skaa navkru ayng?**

vavsi	tav	skaa	navk-	ru	ayng
when	FUT	2S.ERG	*eat*	-PRS	3S

"When will you eat it?"

Using **tav** with a past-tense verb can also be used to talk about the future-in-the-past. Future-in-the-past doesn't entail that the event talked about actually happened, just that at the time under discussion it was expected to happen.

(50) **Tov kma tav istqe, kaesi skaa pavkvu**

tov	kma	tav	istqe	kaesi	skaa	pavk-	vu
3PL	NEG	FUT	*present*	*when*	2S	*die*	-PRS.DEP

"They weren't going to be there when you die."

The deontic modal **stqaa** is used for things that should or must be according to some set of rules or expectations.

(51) **Sirennosjasi stqaa kuur dibzangàru.**

Sirennos-	ja	-si	stqaa	kuur	Ti-	bzangà-	ru
Agorite	-PL	-ERG	DEO	*12*	PV-	*tie.up*	-PRS

"We should take the Agorites as prisoners."

4 Wordlist

A

amma (amme, amng) *n.* mother

B

beqou (bequesi, beqng) *n.* ambition, desire to power, desire to conquer, **Ylacrasi beqng ticroorù.** *'Ylacra is full of ambition.'*
bzangà *v.* to tie up, to bind together; to moor a boat; to take someone prisoner

C

croo' *v.* to fill, to occupy; to crew a boat; to populate a city; to affect a person (of emotions)

D

dghon (dgheensi, dghoon) *n.* tree, trees; forest; wood in natural contexts
dlii (dlisi, dling) *n.* egg

F

fa *prep.* to, for (marking the recipient of a ditransitive); to, into (marking a goal state or final state of some state change) *(+ABS)*

G

ghaau (ghaesi, ghaung) *n.* night, evening; **si ~ + ACC** unknown to someone
ghaesi *adv.* yesterday, esp. last night

J

jemnsa (jemnsasi, jemnsng) *n.* supplies, resources; plan, plot

K

khayo *v.* to begin, to start; to make happen, to put into place, to found
khwerjae *v.* to acquire, to get, to go fetch; to come together (of rivers or waters)
ktop (ktep, ktom) *n.* pole, vertical support; ship's mast

L

lookrau (lookrasi, lookraur) *n..* glove, sock; wrapping; protective rope wrapped around the end of a beam

M

malàen *adj.* old, aged, elder; well-known, well-regarded
mnaa (shuue, shnng) *n.* water (natural and drinking); the ocean, the seas

mnellen (mnellee, mnellee) *n.* young boy
mritȁ (mritȁsi, mritȁng) *n.* spirit, non-human spirit of a particular natural feature or object
Mvaanè (Mvaanèsi, Mvaanèng) *n.* Mwane person

N

noou *v.* to remember
nayou *v.* to remind, to bring to mind

O

ookh *v.* to die; to go out, to be extinguished

P

plonàn, plonànsi, plonàrng *n.* storm at sea, hurricane at sea; extreme danger; tumultuous political times
pnaus *v.* to achieve a goal, to complete a task; to catch sight of, to notice; to find, to discover

S

sdeek (sdeksi, sdeerk) *n.* head; top *(relational noun)*
shcav *v.* to leave behind, to forget, to let go
    shaycav *v.* to make someone leave something behind; to get rid of
skqoung (skqueng, skqoung) *n.* coconut (object); coconut (as food); copra
stqaa *adv.* should, ought to, must *(adverb used to mark deontic modality)*
swi *prep.* with, using a tool; used to mark patients displaced by the applicative

T

thauk *v.* to break, to crack; to open; to injure a person
thkot (thkeet, thkoon) *n.* candy, sweets; a nickname for small children
    thkootsou *adj.* sweet
    thavkotsou *v.* to sweeten
thkovm (thkowmsi, thkovm) *n.* wood; timber, beams, structural wood
tkotu (tkottu, tkottu) *n.* small boat, rowboat, dinghy
tloor (thlo-) *v.* to shut, to close; to end; to set off, to leave a port
    thaylo *v.* to make someone close something; to make someone end something
trafo (trafe, trafor) *n.* beach, shore

V

vrada (vraddasi, vraddarng) *n.* door; portal between the original Sea Nomad home and their new world

W

wiye *v.* to travel (esp. by boat), to sail; to move (of boats or vessels)

Y

ylacu, ylaccue, ylaccng *n.* soldier; troops
ylassa (ylassae, ylassang) *n.* worker, manufacturer, laborer
yleqe *v.* to wage war against, to fight against, to try to suppress
youq *v.* to leak, to be taking on water (of a ship); to bleed
    yayouq *v.* to make leak, to punch a hole in, to breach; to stab, to draw blood