Valence in a typological and theoretical perspective

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We juxtapose valence-related construction type inventories of the Kwa language Ga (spoken in Ghana) and the Germanic language Norwegian, with three aims: (i) to display how pervasively different these inventories are; (ii) to identify their main differentiating factors; and (iii) to illustrate a methodology for conducting (i) and (ii).

The methodology resides in the 'Construction Labeling' system, a notation system for verb constructions and verb valence, proposed in Hellan and Dakubu (2010) - see http://www.typecraft.org/w/images/d/db/1_Introlabels_SLAVOB-final.pdf, so far used in establishing fairly large-scale construction inventories for a few languages from Germanic, Niger-Congo and Ethio-Semitic. The system is based on a cross-linguistically grounded repertoire of *properties of linguistic constructions*, such as, e.g., 'has Valence Frame X', 'has Aspect Y', 'has a Subject with properties Z', 'expresses situation type S', etc. Each such property is packaged in the notational code as an atomic *element*, construction types are represented through combinations – called *templates* - of such elements, and lists of templates constitute *c(onstruction)-profiles* of a language. Below are two examples of the code applied to Ga constructions, (a) a ditransitive construction and (b) a serial verb construction, both with standard morphological glossing. In the former case, the element ***v*** indicates that the construction is headed by a verb, ***ditr*** indicates that the argument frame is syntactically ditransitive, ***suAg*** means that the subject has the semantic role of 'agent, and so on, ***COMMUNICATION*** finally indicating the situation type expressed. In the latter case both verbs occur with an expressed object; their subjects are identical, and likewise their aspects, expressed in the code element ***svSuAspIDALL***.

a. **v-ditr-suAg_iobTrgt_obThmover-COMMUNICATION**

E-fɔ	**mi**	**nine**	
3S.AOR-throw	1S	hand	
V	Pron	N	'She waved to me; invited me.'

b. **svSuAspIDALL-v1tr-v2tr**

Á-gbele	**gbɛ**	**á-ha**	**bo**	
3.PRF-open	road	3.PRF-give	2S	
V	N	V	Pron	'You have been granted permission.'

C-profiles of the two languages are to be found on the following sites:
http://www.typecraft.org/w/images/a/a0/2_Ga_appendix_SLAVOB-final.pdf,
http://www.typecraft.org/w/images/b/bd/3_Norwegian_Appendix_plus_3_SLAVOB-final.pdf

As can be verified, the number of shared templates constitutes less than 10% of either of the profiles.

The typological interest lies in identifying elements characteristic of those templates which are specific to either language, and in turn to their language types.

The methodology is innovative in enabling such an investigation in a more efficient way than has been so far possible.

The methodology offers a specification space within which 'alternation'-based approaches to valence can be grounded (cf. Levin (1993) and its computational extension *VerbNet* as regards single-language investigations, and the *Leipzig Valency Classes Project* as regards cross-linguistic investigations), but allows in principle for contrastive valence studies *not* based on frame alternations.

References

Hellan, L. and M. E. K. Dakubu. 2010: *Identifying verb constructions cross linguistically*. Studies in the Languages of the Volta Basin 6. 3. Accra.
Leipzig Valency Classes Project: http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/valency/index.php
Levin,B. 1993. *English Verb Classes and Alternations*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago IL
VerbNet: http://verbs.colorado.edu/~mpalmer/projects/verbnet/downloads.html