

Labile verbs in Tagle (Kordofan Nubian)¹

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1. Introduction

Tagle is part of the Kordofan Nubian language cluster, a group of languages whose members are scattered over the northern Nuba Mountains. In the older linguistic literature (Stevenson 1956: 112-115, for instance), this language group is referred to as 'Hill Nubian' and the Tagle language as Kororo. Locally, the Nubian languages of the Nuba Mountains are often referred to as Ajang languages. Genetically, Kordofan Nubian represents a branch of the Nubian language family. According to Dimmendaal's typological classification (2007, 2014) and Rilly's (2010) historical-comparative study, Nubian, along with Taman, Nyimang/Ama, Nara and the extinct Meroitic language, forms northern East Sudanic, which is ultimately classified as a subgroup of Nilo-Saharan.

Tagle speakers refer to their language by the name [tāglēm̄m̄λ:] which is a genitive noun phrase composed of *tāglē*= GEN-*lāl* 'language of Tagle'. Tagle is spoken in Kororo. Its closest linguistic relatives are spoken in the neighboring villages, Kafeir, Dabatna, Kadaru, Koldeji and Kortala. Since they are mutually intelligible they are considered to be dialects of a single language. They are situated in an area known in Tagle as *kùlì kóccù* and by its corresponding Arabic name as *al-jibāl al-sitta*, both meaning 'the six mountains'.

This paper aims to investigate the morphological, morphosyntactic, syntactic and semantic properties of Tagle labile verbs. It is mainly inspired by two typological studies, Haspelmath's article 'More on the typology of inchoative/causative verb alternations' (1993) and Letuchiy's article 'Towards a typology of labile verbs: lability vs. derivation' (2009).

Labile verbs are often defined as verbs that can be used transitively or intransitively without any formal change. This transitivity alternation has two patterns, Agent-preserving lability and Patient-preserving lability, the latter

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being associated with a change in the semantic role of the subject. While, in Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving clauses, labile verbs are attested with a single argument, they are also attested with two arguments in experiencer expressions. Due to their transitive and intransitive properties it is difficult to identify these expressions as either transitive or intransitive constructions.

Our paper is arranged as follows. We first try to briefly elucidate the notion of lability and the rather confusing terminology that is associated with it (Section 2). In Section 3 we are concerned with Agent-preserving lability and in Section 4 with Patient-preserving lability. In both of these intransitive clause types the labile verbs are used with a single argument. The employment of labile verbs with two arguments is the focus of Section 5, which is concerned with experiencer constructions. In the final section we will summarize our findings.

2. Lability

In this paper we use the term “labile”. Other authors, Dixon (1994) and Næss (2007), for instance, use the synonymous term “ambitransitive”. A labile verb is commonly defined as a verb that can be used transitively or intransitively without any formal change.² This transitivity alternation typically occurs in Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving intransitive clauses,³ as illustrated by the following examples from English.

Example (1a) is a prototypical transitive clause with two arguments, an Agent (A) and a Patient (P). When the verb ‘sweep’ is used intransitively, as shown in (1b), P is unexpressed and interpreted as indefinite or non-specific. The semantic role and syntactic function of A, however, is preserved. Since the same verb form is used in the transitive and intransitive clause this alternation is known as “Agent-preserving lability”. Næss (2007: 124ff.) uses the term “indefinite object deletion”.

AGENT-PRESERVING LABILITY

(1) a. A V P
 John sweeps the room

 b. A V
 John sweeps

Example (2a) is another prototypical transitive clause. In English the transitive A occupies the syntactic position of the subject before the verb, and P occupies

² See also Letuchiy (2009: 247), for instance.

³ The terms “Agent-preserving” and “Patient-preserving” lability are adopted from Letuchiy (2009).

the position of the object after the verb. When the verb is used intransitively as in (2b), the verb form does not differ from the verb form in the transitive clause. However, in the intransitive clause A is suppressed. The former P argument shifts to the subject position before the verb, where P assumes the function of the syntactic subject but retains its semantic role as P. This transitivity alternation is known as 'Patient-preserving lability'.

- | PATIENT-PRESERVING LABILITY | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------|----------------|
| A | V | P | |
| (2) a. | <i>the child</i> | <i>broke</i> | <i>the pot</i> |
| | P | V | |
| b. | <i>the pot</i> | <i>broke</i> | |

The main difference between Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving lability is the semantic role of the syntactic subject. In Agent-preserving lability the semantic role of the subject A does not change, whereas in Patient-preserving lability the semantic role of the subject does change, since A is suppressed and P assumes the function of the syntactic subject of the intransitive clause.

In English, as attested in (1a) and (2a), the syntactic positions before and after the verb reflect the grammatical relations of subject and object. The subject occurs in preverbal position, the object in postverbal position. Subject agreement marking plays a marginal morphosyntactic role in English because only the third person singular subject of the present tense (as opposed to the past or future tense) is cross-referenced by *-s* on the verb, as seen in (1a) and (1b).

Tagle, by contrast, uses case-marking, constituent order, subject agreement marking and verbal number to reflect these relations. Tagle has two core cases: unmarked nominative and marked accusative. The subject is in the unmarked nominative case and can be either S, A or P (in the intransitive Patient-preserving clause only). The object is marked for accusative case. In experiencer expressions (Section 5), the Stimulus also appears in the unmarked nominative case, whereas the Experiencer is ACC-marked. Accusative marking is realized by the clitic *=gi* (or one of its allomorphs, which harmonize with the ATR feature of the preceding vowel). The clitic takes its tone from the preceding syllable whose tone spreads to *=gi*. The normal constituent order is APV in a transitive clause. In experiencer expressions, however, the ACC-marked Experiencer precedes the unmarked Stimulus, thus signalling a deviation from the normal transitive clause pattern. The person and number of the subject are cross-referenced by pronominal suffixes on the verb. In this way both case-marking and subject agreement marking express a system of grammatical relations known as accusative alignment.

The involvement of verbal number in the encoding of grammatical relations is expressed by singular and plural verb stems. The selection of such stems is sensitive to a singular or plural argument and to degree of transitivity.⁴ The number of an intransitive S or a transitive P triggers the selection of a singular or plural stem, as seen in (3a), (3b), (4a) and (4b), but the number of the A does not interact with verbal number, as attested by (4b) and (4c). The selection of singular and plural stems by S and P exhibits features of an ergative-like system of grammatical relations, $S = P \neq A$.

Both in intransitive and transitive clauses, 3rd person singular and plural subjects are cross-referenced on the verb by the suffix *-n* (allomorph [+ATR] *-in* or [-ATR] *-in*). In an intransitive clause, the constituent order is SV. When S is singular it selects the singular verb stem *ēkk-ū-n*, as shown in (3a); when S is plural it selects the plural stem *ēkk-ē-n* as in (3b).

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|-----|----|----------------------|----------------|
| (3) | a. | S | V |
| | | <i>îd</i> | <i>ēkk-ū-n</i> |
| | | person | urinate-SNG-3 |
| | | 'the man urinates' | |
| | b. | <i>înî</i> | <i>ēkk-ē-n</i> |
| | | people | urinate-PLR-3 |
| | | 'the people urinate' | |

The transitive clauses (4a) to (4d) illustrate the APV order. The singular P selects the (unextended) singular verb stem *túy*, the plural P selects the plural stem *túy-é*. The milking event semantically implies an A whose activity causes the event by which P is affected.

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|-----|----|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| (4) | a. | A | P | V |
| | | <i>íyé-tù</i> | <i>ōd-dū = gī</i> | <i>túy-ín</i> |
| | | shepherd-SG | goat-SG = ACC | milk-3 |
| | | 'the shepherd milks the goat' | | |
| | b. | <i>íyé-tù</i> | <i>ēg-ī = gī</i> | <i>túy-é-n</i> |
| | | shepherd-SG | goat-PL = ACC | milk-PLR-3 |
| | | 'the shepherd milks the goats' | | |
| | | 'the shepherd milks goats' | | |

⁴ Additionally, the selection of singular and plural stems is sensitive to event number, i.e. single, habitual, repetitive or distributed events. This issue is, however, not relevant in the present article.

When comparing (4a), which has a singular A, to (4c), which has a plural A, one realizes that the plural A does not interact with the singular or plural stem. Rather it is the singular P in (4a) and (4c) that selects the singular stem, while the plural P in (4b) and (4d) selects the plural stem.

	A	P	V
(4) c.	<i>íyé-lí</i> shepherd-PL 'the shepherds'	<i>ōd-dū = gī</i> goat-SG = ACC	<i>túy-ín</i> milk-3
			'the shepherds milk the goat'
d.	<i>íyé-lí</i> shepherd-PL 'the shepherds'	<i>ēg-ī = gī</i> goat-PL = ACC	<i>túy-é-n</i> milk-PLR-3
			'the shepherds milk the goats'

Whereas plural stems are required in transitive clauses when P is plural, as shown in (4b) and (4d), plural stems are also used in Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving clauses, as in (5a), (5b), (6a) and (6b). The fact that plural stems additionally have passive readings, as attested in two closely related languages, Uncu (Comfort 2014) and Karko (Jakobi 2017), suggests that these stems are associated with a low degree of transitivity – the notion of transitivity as a scalar value rather than as a dichotomy is adopted from Hopper & Thompson (1980).

The lability of the verb form *túy-é-n* is attested by its use both in the transitive clauses (4b) and (4d) and in the Agent-preserving intransitive clauses (5a) and (5b).

AGENT-PRESERVING CLAUSES

	A	V
(5) a.	<i>íyé-tù</i> shepherd-SG 'the shepherd'	<i>túy-é-n</i> milk-PLR-3
		'the shepherd milks'
b.	<i>íyé-lí</i> shepherd-PL 'the shepherds'	<i>túy-é-n</i> milk-PLR-3
		'the shepherds milk'

In addition to being used in the Agent-preserving clauses (5a) and (5b), the labile verb *túy-é-n* may be employed in Patient-preserving clauses, as illustrated in (6a) and (6b). Without an external A, the milking is not caused, as in the transitive clauses (4a) to (4d), but presented as a spontaneous event involving an agentive Patient. Example (6b) may even have a generic interpretation expressing that milking is a characteristic of goats.

PATIENT-PRESERVING CLAUSES

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|-----|----|---|----------------|
| | P | V | |
| (6) | a. | <i>ōd-dū</i> | <i>ʔúy-é-n</i> |
| | | goat-SG | milk-PLR-3 |
| | | 'the goat milks, i.e. produces milk' / 'a goat milks, i.e. produces milk' | |
| | b. | <i>ēg-ī</i> | <i>ʔúy-é-n</i> |
| | | goat-PL | milk-PLR-3 |
| | | 'the goats (produce) milk' / 'goats (produce) milk' | |

Other labile verbs attested both in Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving clauses are 'spread, scatter' and 'climb'. We first provide two transitive examples for 'spread, scatter', with a singular P in (7a) and a plural P in (7b). The singular P interacts with the singular verb stem *ʔēcc-ú*, and the plural P with the plural stem *ʔēcc-é*. Similar to milking, spreading or scattering implies a causing A and an affected P.

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|-----|----|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | A | P | V |
| (7) | a. | <i>ínì</i> | <i>íkà = à</i> <i>ʔēcc-ú-n</i> |
| | | people | fire.SG = ACC spread-SNG-3 |
| | | 'the people spread the fire' | |
| | b. | <i>ínì</i> | <i>íkání = í</i> <i>ʔēcc-é-n</i> |
| | | people | fire.PL = ACC spread-PLR-3 |
| | | 'the people spread the fires' | |

In (7c), P is suppressed; the resulting Agent-preserving clause requires the plural verb stem *ʔēcc-é*. Spreading or scattering is an event involving the repeated action of several participants. Therefore in an Agent-preserving clause the animate A calls for a plural referent.

AGENT-PRESERVING CLAUSE

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|-----|----|----------------------------|
| | A | V |
| (7) | c. | <i>ínì</i> <i>ʔēcc-é-n</i> |
| | | people spread-PLR-3 |
| | | 'the people scatter' |

In (7d) and (7e), P assumes the function of the syntactic subject but retains its P role. In this grammatical context the plural stem *ʔēcc-é* is required, irrespective of the number of P, which is singular in (7d) and plural in (7e). As A is excluded, the spreading is depicted as a spontaneous process implying the agentivity of the P.

PATIENT-PRESERVING CLAUSE

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|-----|--------------------|-----------------|
| | P | V |
| (7) | d. <i>íkà</i> | <i>ṭḗcc-é-n</i> |
| | fire.SG | spread-PLR-3 |
| | 'the fire spreads' | |
| | e. <i>íkájí</i> | <i>ṭḗcc-é-n</i> |
| | fire.PL | spread-PLR-3 |
| | 'the fires spread' | |

The manner of motion verb *dḗḗḗḗ* 'climb (with hands and feet)' designates an event that implies an A whose animate referent carries out an action on an inanimate P whose referent is a location.⁵ Unlike milking and spreading in transitive clauses, climbing is an activity which does not imply causation. The singular verb stem *dḗḗḗḗ-ū* is selected when P is singular, as seen in (8a). When P is plural it selects the plural verb stem *dḗḗḗḗ-ē* as in (8b).

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|-----|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | A | P | V |
| (8) | a. <i>ṭíḡí-dū</i> | <i>ì-tù=ù</i> | <i>dḗḗḗḗ-ū-n</i> |
| | baboon-PL | baobab-SG = ACC | climb-SNG-3 |
| | 'the baboons climb the baobab' | | |
| | b. <i>ṭíḡí-dū</i> | <i>ìn-ì=ì</i> | <i>dḗḗḗḗ-ē-n</i> |
| | baboon-PL | baobab-PL = ACC | climb-PLR-3 |
| | 'the baboons climb the baobabs' | | |

Implying an A with an animate referent, 'climb' can also be used in Agent-preserving clauses. In this context it expresses ongoing and generic events. The latter may even express a characteristic of the A referent.

AGENT-PRESERVING LABILITY

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|-----|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| | A | V |
| (8) | c. <i>ṭíḡí</i> | <i>dḗḗḗḗ-ē-n</i> |
| | baboon.SG | climb-PLR-3 |
| | 'the baboon climbs' | |
| | 'a baboon is an expert in climbing' | |

⁵ Note that the motion verbs 'climb' and 'wade' in (9a) to (9d) behave like transitive verbs in assigning the semantic role of P to the complement expressing a location. According to Dimmendaal (2003), this phenomenon is a typological feature shared by several Omotic, Cushitic and Nilo-Saharan languages.

- d. *t̪iŋi-dū* *d̪āŋŋ-ē-n*
 baboon-PL climb-PLR-3
 ‘the baboons climb’
 ‘baboons are experts in climbing’

Since the inanimate referent of P (here the baobab tree) cannot engage in an activity such as ‘climb’, the suppression of A in the Patient-preserving clauses (8e) and (8f) triggers a facilitative and passive interpretation.

- PATIENT-PRESERVING LABILITY
- | | P | V |
|--------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| (8) e. | <i>ì-tù</i> | <i>d̪āŋŋ-ē-n</i> |
| | baobab-SG | climb-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the baobab is easy to climb’ | |
| | ‘the baobab gets climbed’ | |
| f. | <i>ì-nì</i> | <i>d̪āŋŋ-ē-n</i> |
| | baobab-PL | climb-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the baobabs are easy to climb’ | |
| | ‘the baobabs get climbed’ | |

The lability of the verbs ‘milk’, ‘spread’ and ‘climb’ is attested in transitive and intransitive Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving clauses. Milking and spreading imply an animate and causing A and an agentive P. In the case of milking the referent of P is also required to be animate. These semantic properties are a prerequisite for the use of these verbs in Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving clauses. In Patient-preserving clauses these verbs render a spontaneous event reading. Unlike ‘milk’ and ‘spread’, the motion verb ‘climb’ does not imply a causing A and an agentive P. Rather, ‘climbing’ is semantically associated with an animate A and a motion event expressing a change of place. The place or location is assigned the semantic role of P. Although the animate A is not overtly expressed in the Patient-preserving clauses, climbing still implies some degree of agentivity, which triggers a facilitative or passive reading.

The preceding examples also show that the singular stems are either unextended, as attested by *t̪úy-ín* in (4a) and (4c), or, more often, extended by [-ATR] *-u* or [+ATR] *-u*, as attested by *t̪ēcc-ú-n* and *d̪āŋŋ-ū-n*. The plural stems are extended by [-ATR] *-e* or [+ATR] *-e*, as seen in *t̪úy-é-n*, *t̪ēcc-é-n*, and *d̪āŋŋ-ē-n*. Labile verbs used in intransitive clauses are based on these plural stems. The [-ATR] *-e* or [+ATR] *-e* suffixes are cognates of the *-er ~ -er* suffix, which is also attested in other Kordofan Nubian languages, e.g. Dilling (Kauczor 1920) and Uncu (Comfort 2014). In Karko this suffix is realized with an unspecified vowel as *-Vr*

(Jakobi 2017). The tones of the singular and plural stems depend on the tone class to which the verb is assigned.

Verbs that behave like ‘break’ in (2b) or ‘milk’ in (6a) and (6b) are known as “unaccusative”. This term was suggested by Perlmutter (1978) to capture the fact that although the single argument of these verbs is semantically a Patient it is not marked for accusative case. Their P subjects often have object-like behavior which differs from the behavior of “unergative” verbs. The single S argument of unergative verbs tends to have volitional properties, although it is also attested with verbs expressing involuntary bodily processes (Zaenen 2006). The Unaccusative Hypothesis says that the different syntactic and semantic properties of unaccusative and unergative verbs demonstrate that they constitute two distinct classes of intransitive verbs. This hypothesis can at least partly be corroborated by their distinct morphosyntactic behavior in Tagle.

It seems that unaccusative verbs, such as ‘milk’ in the Patient-preserving clauses (6a) and (6b), commonly require plural verb stems, no matter whether the number of the single argument P is singular or plural. Moreover, these verbs have a transitive counterpart. By contrast, unergative verbs such as ‘urinate’ in (3a) and (3b) appear to lack a transitive counterpart. They are sensitive to the number of S, i.e. they are realized by a singular verb stem when S is singular, and by a plural verb stem when S is plural. A detailed discussion of other features distinguishing unergative and unaccusative Tagle verbs is outside the scope of this paper.

Apart from the class of unaccusative and unergative verbs, there is also evidence of a third class of intransitive verbs. It comprises labile verbs used in Agent-preserving clauses, such as ‘milk’ in (5a) and (5b) or ‘climb’ in (8c) and (8d). These verbs resemble verbs used in Patient-preserving clauses because they also have transitive counterparts. However, unlike those verbs, whose subject is assigned the semantic role of P, the role of the single argument in Agent-preserving clauses does not change. Verbs in Agent-preserving clauses also differ from unergative verbs such as ‘urinate’ because they always require a plural stem.

Verbs like ‘milk’ and ‘spread’ that can be used both in transitive clauses and in Patient-preserving intransitive clauses are also known as inchoative/causative verb pairs. According to Haspelmath (1993: 90), “[a]n inchoative/causative verb pair is defined semantically: it is a pair of verbs which express the same basic situation (generally a change of state, more rarely a going-on) and differ only in that the causative verb meaning includes an A who causes the situation, whereas the inchoative verb meaning excludes a causing agent and presents the situation as occurring spontaneously.” These semantic properties are attested by several Tagle examples of Patient-preserving lability (see Section 4).

Although verbs like 'climb' in (8a) to (8f) and 'wade' in (9a) to (9f) can be used both in Patient-preserving and in transitive clauses, they do not represent inchoative/causative verb pairs. When used transitively they imply an animate A (but not a typically instigating A, as semantically causative verbs do). They refer to inanimate Ps, namely locations or paths, which do not have properties of typical Ps since the motion event does not affect the location or path. The motion is associated with a change of place but not a change of state. When used intransitively without the A being overtly expressed, these verbs give a facilitative (rather than a spontaneous) event interpretation, as seen in (8e), (8f), (16c) and (16d).

To distinguish the inchoative from the causative reading languages employ different strategies. Haspelmath (1993: 91-92) mentions five strategies: i) the causative alternation, in which the inchoative verb is basic whereas the causative verb is derived; ii) the anticausative alternation, in which the causative verb is basic whereas the inchoative verb is derived; iii) the non-directed alternation, in which neither the inchoative nor the causative verb is derived from the other – or, alternatively, the equipollent alternation in which both the inchoative verb and the causative verb are derived from the same stem; iv) the suppletive alternation, using lexically different verb roots; and v) the labile alternation, in which one form is used both in the inchoative and in the causative sense. Since Tagle employs the labile alternation, the verbs involved in it do not provide evidence of derivation nor of markedness.

To answer the question as to whether the inchoative or the causative member of a labile verb pair is basic, we resort to semantic criteria. According to Haspelmath (1993), events of sinking, extinguishing, drying, melting and freezing are typically conceived of as occurring spontaneously. Therefore these inchoative verbs are considered as basic, and their caused counterparts as non-basic. By contrast, "events such as splitting, breaking, closing, opening, gathering and connecting are typical of the kinds of things that human beings do" (Haspelmath 1993: 103). As these events are conceived of as implying an agentive instigator, the corresponding semantically causative verbs are considered as basic, and their inchoative counterparts as non-basic. Except for 'climb' and 'wade', the verb sample in the present article, particularly in Sections 4 and 5, comprises labile verbs conceived of as typically occurring with an instigator, e.g. 'milk', 'spread', 'shave', 'wash', 'wrap', 'connect', 'join', 'break', 'coil', 'thatch', 'close', 'spin, twist, whirl'. Therefore the semantically causative members of these verb pairs are assumed to be basic, and the semantically inchoative members to be non-basic.

Haspelmath (1993) does not consider any motion verbs. However, the verbs 'climb' and 'wade' in Tagle provide evidence for the fact that motion verbs, too, can be used in transitivity alternations, although they differ semantically from

those alternations in which inchoative/causative verbs are involved. In transitive clauses, these motion verbs imply an animate (rather than a causing or instigating) A. Their inanimate P refers to a path or location which is unaffected by the motion event. When used in Patient-preserving clauses, they have a facilitative (rather than spontaneous) event reading.

Apart from semantic criteria, a formal property of Tagle labile verb pairs may be considered, too, to answer the question of basicness. In Agent- and Patient-preserving constructions labile verbs always require a verbal plural stem. In transitive clauses, however, they are morphosyntactically less restricted, since both singular and plural verb stems are admitted. This is true both for inchoative/causative and motion verbs. It suggests that the less restricted transitive verbs are basic and that their counterparts in intransitive clauses are non-basic.

Patient-preserving constructions involving semantically causative verbs, as illustrated in (2b), (6a) and (6b), are also known by the terms “anticausative”, “middle” or even “mediopassive”, as Siewierska (2013) points out. She describes them as having “a subject which is semantically a patient rather than an agent. [...] The situation or event is depicted as being brought about spontaneously without the involvement of an agent.”

On the basis of his typological study of labile verbs, Letuchiy (2009: 264) tries to capture the syntactic and semantic differences in his definition of lability: “a labile verb is a verb with two uses, which differ in syntactic transitivity and in the semantic role of the subject.” However, as his definition requires that the semantic role of the subject changes with the transitivity alternation, it does not apply to Agent-preserving lability. For this reason, Letuchiy regards verbs used intransitively like ‘sweep’ in (1b), whose subject retains the A-role, as “quasi-labile” (Letuchiy 2009: 251).

Excluding these quasi-labile verbs that are associated with Agent-preserving lability, Letuchiy focuses on Patient-preserving lability. He classifies labile verb pairs “according to the type of semantic correlation that holds between their two uses” (Letuchiy 2009: 248) and distinguishes five semantic types of lability:

- i) Anticausative lability is realized in some languages by labile pairs such as ‘kill’/‘die’. Their intransitive members often designate spontaneous events without an external A, but also events in which the P is strongly affected.
- ii) Reflexive lability is often associated with body care activities such as ‘wash’ and ‘shave’.
- iii) Reciprocal lability is realized by inherently reciprocal verbs such as ‘meet’ and ‘kiss’.

- iv) Passive lability is realized in some languages by verbs such as ‘bury’/‘be buried’ and ‘return’/‘be returned’.
- v) Converse lability is realized by verb pairs such as ‘like’/‘please’ and ‘smell’. When the verb ‘smell’ is used transitively, it designates the active perception of a smell; when ‘smell’ is used intransitively, it expresses the emission of a smell.

Refining Letuchiy’s distinctions, Creissels (2014) points out that anticausative lability can also convey a facilitative or dispositional reading. In Tagle, except for reciprocal and converse lability, all these interpretations of lability are attested in Patient-preserving clauses. We will show that Agent-preserving clauses, too, can have reflexive and reciprocal readings. Additionally, as seen in Section 5, some labile verbs are attested in experiencer expressions.

3. Agent-preserving lability

Agent-preserving lability is realized by a change in syntactic transitivity, without changing the semantic role of A. To illustrate these transitivity alternations – in addition to (5a), (5b) and (7c) – we first provide four transitive clauses. We have already shown in (4a), (4b), (4c) and (4d) that the number of A in a transitive clause is irrelevant for the selection of the verb stem. Rather, the number of P interacts with verbal number, as attested by the singular P which selects the singular verb stem in (9a) and (9c), and by the plural P which triggers the selection of the plural verb stem in (9b) and (9d).

- | | A | P | V |
|--------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (9) a. | <i>òn-ù</i>
donkey-SG | <i>ʃír-gì</i>
stream = ACC | <i>kúŕ-ù-n</i>
wade-SNG-3 |
| | ‘the donkey wades in the stream’ | | |
| b. | <i>òn-ù</i>
donkey-SG | <i>ʃír-ì-gì</i>
stream-PLA = CC | <i>kúŕ-è-n</i>
wade-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the donkey wades in the streams’ | | |
| c. | <i>ón-íńí</i>
donkey-PL | <i>ʃír-gì</i>
stream = ACC | <i>kúŕ-ù-n</i>
wade-SNG-3 |
| | ‘the donkeys wade in the stream’ | | |
| d. | <i>ón-íńí</i>
donkey-PL | <i>ʃír-ì-gì</i>
stream-PL = ACC | <i>kúŕ-è-n</i>
wade-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the donkeys wade in the streams’ | | |

In the non-basic intransitive clauses, A is preserved, while P is not overtly expressed. In these Agent-preserving clauses, (9e) and (9f), the plural verb stem

kúr-è is required. This attests that plural verb stems are associated with reduced transitivity. The use of the same verb form, *kúr-è-n*, both in the transitive clauses (9b) and (9d) and in the intransitive clauses (9e) and (9f) attests its lability.

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------|----------------|
| | A | V |
| (9) | e. <i>òn-ù</i> | <i>kúr-è-n</i> |
| | donkey-SG | wade-PLR-3 |
| | 'the donkey wades' | |
| | f. <i>ón-íńí</i> | <i>kúr-è-n</i> |
| | donkey-PL | wade-PLR-3 |
| | 'the donkeys wade' | |

Lability in Tagle is most clearly seen in the imperfective verb forms, since they are morphologically unmarked, both in the basic transitive and in the non-basic intransitive clauses. The imperfective is associated with ongoing and generic event notions. Particularly in Agent-preserving clauses, the imperfective expresses generic characteristics of the A referent, which can be rendered in English by 'know how to' or 'be an expert in', as attested in (6a), (6b), (8c) and (8d). In the perfective, the transitive and intransitive labile verb pairs are morphologically distinct. In a transitive clause the verb requires the inflectional [+ATR] suffix *-nàl* (or its [-ATR] counterpart *-nλl* or one of its allomorphs, *-nâ* or *-nλ*), as seen in (10a) and (10b), the realization of the suffix vowel being determined by ATR harmony with the vowel(s) of the verb stem. In an intransitive clause, however, the verb requires the suffix *-bòl* (or its allomorph *-bò*) when the syntactic subject is singular. When the subject is plural the verb requires *-bèl*; see (10c) and (10d).⁶ These low tone suffixes, *-nàl* (*-nλl*), *-bòl* and *-bèl*, can therefore be considered as diagnostic features of transitive and intransitive verbs. They are particularly relevant for the interpretation of labile verbs used in experiencer expressions (see Section 5). The suffixes are portmanteau morphemes since they encode both (in)transitivity and aspect. Unlike *-nàl* and *-nλl*, whose vowels alternate due to vowel harmony, the vowel of the suffix *-bòl* is always [+ATR] and the vowel of *-bèl* is always [-ATR], i.e. vowel harmony does not apply to these suffix vowels; they are opaque. We gloss the transitive perfective suffix *-nàl* (*-nλl*) as TR.PFV, the intransitive perfective suffixes *-bòl* as ITR.PFV.SNG, and *-bèl* as ITR.PFV.PLR. The suffix *-m* is glossed as PST.3 because it is a realization of the past marker *-m* fused with the 3rd person pronominal suffix *-(i)n ~ -(i)n*.

⁶ The intransitive perfective suffixes *-bòl* and *-bèl* result from a grammaticalization process originating in the directed motion verb 'get out'. This verb exhibits singular and plural verb stems which differ due to vowel alternation.

- | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | A | P | V |
| (10) a. | <i>òn-ù</i> | <i>ʃír-gì</i> | <i>kúŕ-nà-m</i> |
| | donkey-SG | stream = ACC | wade-TR.PFV-PST.3 |
| | 'the donkey waded in the stream' | | |
| b. | <i>òn-ù</i> | <i>ʃír-ì-gì</i> | <i>kúŕ-è-nà-m</i> |
| | donkey-SG | stream-PL = ACC | wade-PLR-TR.PFV-PST.3 |
| | 'the donkey waded in the streams' | | |

In the transitive clause (10b) the plural P selects the plural verb stem *kúŕ-è*. In the Agent-preserving intransitive clauses (10c) and (10d) the plural stem *kúŕ-è* is required, too, but in this construction *kúŕ-è* is not selected by a plural argument but signals a low degree of transitivity. Unlike the plural verb stem, the selection of the intransitive perfective suffixes *-bò(l)* and *-bèl* does interact with the number of the syntactic subject; this is also attested in the bivalent experiencer expressions of Section 5.

- | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| | A | V |
| (10) c. | <i>òn-ù</i> | <i>kúŕ-è-bò-m</i> |
| | donkey-SG | wade-PLR-ITR.PFV.SNG-PST.3 |
| | 'the donkey waded' | |
| d. | <i>ón-íńí</i> | <i>kúŕ-è-bèl-à-m</i> |
| | donkey-PL | wade-PLR-ITR.PFV.PLR-PL-PST.3 |
| | 'the donkeys waded' | |

As labile verbs predictably take the transitive perfective marker *-nàl* (*-nəl*) in transitive clauses and the intransitive perfective markers *-bòl* (sg) and *-bèl* (pl) in intransitive clauses, we do not provide further examples of these forms in Sections 3 and 4.

3.1 Agent-preserving lability with a reflexive interpretation

An Agent-preserving intransitive clause has a reflexive interpretation when the verb describes a body care activity, such as 'shave' or 'wash', or a dressing event such as 'wrap'. Examples (11a) and (11b) are transitive clauses, with a singular P and a plural P, respectively, the singular P selecting the singular verb stem *kāŋ-ū* and the plural P selecting the plural stem *kāŋ-ē*.

- | | | | |
|---------|---|-----------|-----------------------|
| | A | P | V |
| (11) a. | <i>tī</i> | <i>îd</i> | <i>tùù-nú=ù</i> |
| | DEM | man | child.SG-DIM.SG = ACC |
| | <i>kāŋ-ū-n</i> | | |
| | shave-SNG-3 | | |
| | 'that man shaves the child (i.e. the child's head)' | | |

- d. *īl-ī* *ém-è-n*
 woman-PL wash-PLR-3
 ‘the women wash (themselves)’

A reflexive reading is also attested with the labile verb ‘wrap’ when it is used intransitively. Let us first look at its transitive use. The singular P triggers the selection of the singular verb stem *kāf-ū*; the plural P triggers the selection of the plural verb stem *kāf-ē*. In addition to A and P, the transitive clauses (13a) and (13b) are extended by an INS-marked noun phrase. This oblique phrase is absent in the transitive clauses (13c) and (13d) because it is not obligatory.

- | | | | | |
|---------|---|------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | A | P | INSTRUMENT | V |
| (13) a. | <i>kùt-tù</i> | <i>ūr=gī</i> | <i>kâfir=kò</i> | <i>kāf-ū-n</i> |
| | male-SG | head = ACC | turban = INS | wrap-SNG-3 |
| | ‘the man wraps [his] head with a turban’ | | | |
| | | | | |
| b. | <i>kūr-ū</i> | <i>ūr-ānī=gī</i> | <i>kâfir-ì=kò</i> | <i>kāf-ē-n</i> |
| | man-PL | head-PL = ACC | turban-PL = INS | wrap-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the men wrap [their] heads with turbans’ | | | |
| | | | | |
| | A | P | V | |
| c. | <i>kùt-tù</i> | <i>ūr=gī</i> | <i>kāf-ū-n</i> | |
| | male-SG | head = ACC | wrap-SNG-3 | |
| | ‘the man wraps [his] head’ | | | |
| | | | | |
| d. | <i>kūr-ū</i> | <i>ūr-ānī=gī</i> | <i>kāf-ē-n</i> | |
| | man-PL | head-PL = ACC | wrap-PLR-3 | |
| | ‘the men wrap [their] heads’ | | | |

The plural verb stem *kāf-ē* reflecting the plural P in the transitive clauses (13b) and (13d) is also used in the intransitive clauses (13e) and (13f), which have a reflexive interpretation. In these Agent-preserving constructions, the plural stems indicate low transitivity.

- | | | | |
|---------|--|-------------------|----------------|
| | A | INSTRUMENT | V |
| (13) e. | <i>kùt-tù</i> | <i>kâfir=kò</i> | <i>kāf-ē-n</i> |
| | male-SG | turban = INS | wrap-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the man wraps himself with a turban’ | | |
| | | | |
| f. | <i>kūr-ū</i> | <i>kâfir-ì=kò</i> | <i>kāf-ē-n</i> |
| | man-PL | turban-PL = INS | wrap-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the men wrap themselves with turbans’ | | |

3.2 Agent-preserving lability with a reciprocal interpretation

Reciprocal events in Tagle are usually morphologically encoded by the stem extension *-in*. However, a small group of verbs such as *kābīl* 'connect', 'meet', and *djigil* 'join' have a reciprocal event interpretation in Agent-preserving constructions. These verbs require a P with a plural referent when used transitively, as illustrated in (14a) and (15a), and an A with a plural referent when used intransitively, as in (14b) and (15b).

- (14) a. A P V
 ōū-nī *inì=ì* *kābīl-ē-n*
 road-PL people = ACC connect-PLR-3
 'the roads are connecting the people'⁷

- b. A V
 ōū-nī *kābīl-ē-n*
 road-PL connect-PLR-3
 'the roads meet'

- (15) a. A P V
 ōū-nī *inì=ì* *djigil-ē-n*
 road-PL people = ACC join-PLR-3
 'the roads are joining the people'

- b. A V
 ōū-nī *djigil-ē-n*
 road-PL join-PLR-3
 'the roads join'

Examples (14a) and (15a) attest an A with an atypical inanimate referent and a P with an atypical animate referent. This is apparently irrelevant for the use of the labile verbs in Agent-preserving clauses.

4. Patient-preserving lability

Patient-preserving lability is realized by a change in syntactic transitivity and the semantic role of the subject. In the intransitive clause, the A argument is suppressed. The P argument becomes the syntactic subject. Therefore – on first sight – these intransitive clauses look like passives. However, in a passive

⁷ The *-ē (-ē)* marked plural verb stems of 'connect' and 'join' express ongoing events. The expression of habitual events requires the plural suffix *-tīg (-tīg)*, which replaces *-ē (-ē)*.

construction, the situation is presented as being brought about by a demoted or covert A (Siewierska 2013). In Patient-preserving intransitive clauses, by contrast, the situation is depicted as being brought about spontaneously without the involvement of A. According to Haspelmath (1993: 92-93), the “basic situation must be a change of state or a going-on.” A going-on is conceived of as a non-agentive activity; it is associated with atelic verbs. A change of state reading, however, is produced by telic verbs. In the following we will discuss Patient-preserving lability without, however, considering the telicity of the verbs used, as we have not yet carried out the required tests to identify telic and atelic verbs.

4.1 Patient-preserving lability

In Section 3 we have provided examples of the transitive motion verb ‘wade’ used in transitive clauses with a P whose referent is a path or location; see (9a) to (9d). We have also shown its use in the Agent-preserving clauses (9e) and (9f). The transitive clauses (9a) and (9b) are repeated here as (16a) and (16b) to compare them to the Patient-preserving clauses (16c) and (16d).

- | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | A | P | V |
| (16) a. | <i>òn-ù</i> | <i>ʃír-gì</i> | <i>kúŕ-ù-n</i> |
| | donkey-SG | stream = ACC | wade-SNG-3 |
| | ‘the donkey wades in the stream’ | | |
| b. | <i>òn-ù</i> | <i>ʃír-ì-gì</i> | <i>kúŕ-è-n</i> |
| | donkey-SG | stream-PL = ACC | wade-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the donkey wades in the streams’ | | |

The plural verb stem *kúŕ-è* is required in the Patient-preserving clauses. Interacting with the inanimate P, these clauses have a facilitative interpretation.

- | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| | P | V |
| (16) c. | <i>ʃír</i> | <i>kúŕ-è-n</i> |
| | stream | wade-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the stream is easy to wade in’ | |
| d. | <i>ʃír-ì</i> | <i>kúŕ-è-n</i> |
| | stream-PL | wade-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the streams are easy to wade in’ | |

The verb ‘break’ differs from the labile verbs discussed so far, as it does not exhibit morphologically distinct singular and plural stems. That is, lability is realized by a single verb stem, *wé-è*, which is used in the basic transitive clauses

with a singular or plural P; see (17a) and (17b), and also the non-basic intransitive clauses (17c) and (17d).

- | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | A | P | V |
| (17) a. | <i>tī</i> | <i>līt-ē = gī</i> | <i>wé-è-n</i> |
| | s/he | pot-SG = ACC | break-PLR-3 |
| | 's/he breaks the pot' | | |
| b. | <i>tī</i> | <i>līt-īl = fī</i> | <i>wé-è-n</i> |
| | s/he | pot-PL = ACC | break-PLR-3 |
| | 's/he breaks the pots' | | |

In the context of Patient-preserving clauses the verb 'break' triggers both a spontaneous change of state and a facilitative interpretation. The spontaneous event interpretation requires that P – though it has an inanimate referent – is conceived of as having a certain degree of agentivity. Without this, spontaneous breaking cannot be conceived. The facilitative event interpretation requires an inanimate P.

- | | | |
|---------|---|---------------|
| | P | V |
| (17) c. | <i>līt-ē</i> | <i>wé-è-n</i> |
| | pot-SG | break-PLR-3 |
| | 'the pot breaks' | |
| | 'the pot is easy to break' / 'the pot is fragile' | |
| d. | <i>līt-īl</i> | <i>wé-è-n</i> |
| | pot-PL | break-PLR-3 |
| | 'the pots break' | |
| | 'the pots are easy to break' / 'the pots are fragile' | |

4.2 Patient-preserving lability with a reflexive interpretation

We have already provided examples of Agent-preserving lability with a reflexive reading. This interpretation occurs with verbs describing body-oriented activities such 'wash', 'shave' and 'wrap'. The following examples of Patient-preserving lability attest that 'coil' has a reflexive reading, too, when it is used intransitively.

- | | | | |
|---------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | A | P | V |
| (18) a. | <i>íd</i> | <i>bícc-è = è</i> | <i>kīy-ì-n</i> |
| | man | mat-SG = ACC | coil-SNG-3 |
| | 'the man coils the mat' | | |

- b. *íd* *bīcc-īl=jī* *kīy-ē-n*
 man mat-PL=ACC coil-PLR-3
 'the man coils the mats'

In the intransitive clauses in (18c) and (18d), the coiling of the mat is depicted as a spontaneous event without a typically animate A. The coiling is triggered by the physical tension in the fabric of the mat. The plural stem *kīy-ē* describes the quasi-agentive mat's movement into a coiled state, which gives rise to a reflexive interpretation. Unlike the verbs 'shave', 'wash' and 'wrap', which give reflexive readings in Agent-preserving clauses, 'coil' is used in a Patient-preserving construction with a subject P that has an inanimate referent ('mat'). This suggests that – at least in the case of 'coil' – the reflexive reading does not require a prototypical A with an animate referent as, for instance, in *kúmùl kīyèn* 'the snake coils up'.

- (18) c. P V
bīcc-è *kīy-ē-n*
 mat-SG coil-PLR-3
 'the mat coils up'
 'the mat is easy to coil'
- d. *bīcc-īl* *kīy-ē-n*
 mat-PL coil-PLR-3
 'the mats coil up'
 'the mats are easy to coil'

4.3 Patient-preserving lability with a passive interpretation

The verbs *tīmm-ē-n* 'thatch' and *dīlīl-ē-n* 'climb' are attested in basic transitive and non-basic intransitive clauses. Both verbs designate events semantically associated with an animate A performing an action on an inanimate P.

- (19) a. A P V
íd *kòtt-ú=ù* *tīmm-ū-n*
 man shelter-SG=ACC thatch-SNG-3
 'the man thatches the shelter'
- b. *íd* *kētt-īl=jī* *tīmm-ē-n*
 man shelter-PL=ACC thatch-PLR-3
 'the man thatches the shelters'

When *tīmm-ē-n* is used in intransitive clauses in which the animate A is suppressed, it has a passive and additionally a facilitative reading. A spontaneous event interpretation, however, is not conceivable.

- (19) c. P V
 kòtt-ú *timm-ē-n*
 shelter-SG thatch-PLR-3
 ‘the shelter gets thatched’
 ‘the shelter is easy to thatch’
- d. *kētt-īl* *timm-ē-n*
 shelter-PL thatch-PLR-3
 ‘the shelters get thatched’
 ‘the shelters are easy to thatch’

The Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving constructions discussed so far illustrate labile verbs used intransitively with a single argument. In the next section we are concerned with labile verbs used intransitively with two arguments.

5. Labile verbs used in experiencer expressions

In Sections 3 and 4 labile verbs are attested in transitivity alternations typically associated with two arguments, A and P, that are semantically clearly distinct from each other. One argument is in the unmarked nominative and is assigned the A-role. Additionally, A is cross-referenced on the verb by a pronominal suffix. Being marked for accusative case, the other argument is assigned the P-role. In basic verb-final transitive clauses A precedes P. In non-basic intransitive Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving constructions the number of arguments is reduced from two to one. The remaining single argument, either A or P, assumes the function of syntactic subject.

In addition to these constructions, some labile verbs, such as ‘close’ in (20) to (23) and ‘spin, twist, whirl’ in (24) to (29) are attested in unusual transitivity alternations showing that the arguments do not retain their semantic roles and that the number of arguments is not reduced. Rather, the two arguments assume roles that differ from the common A and P roles. These verbs assign to the former A the role of Stimulus and to the former P the role of Experiencer. While the Stimulus is in the unmarked nominative, the Experiencer is ACC-marked. Unlike the Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving clauses, which have a single argument, these experiencer expressions have two arguments; they are bivalent. They are additionally characterized by a change in the normal APV constituent order: the Experiencer constituent is shifted to clause-initial position and thus precedes the Stimulus constituent.

While the Experiencer has an animate referent, the Stimulus has a body part term as referent. Since the body part – ‘eyes’ in (21) and (22), ‘head’ in (28) and (29) – belongs to the animate referent of the Experiencer (‘man’), the

corresponding arguments have a semantically possessive relationship. The possessor-possessed relation is not encoded by a morphosyntactic construction such as a genitive noun phrase but rather by two core grammatical relations, the Possessor as direct object and the Possessed as subject. Since the Possessor is external to the constituent containing the possessed item, such constructions are known as “External Possessor Constructions” (Payne 1997).⁸

The semantically possessive relationship between ‘eyes’ or ‘head’ as possessed items and ‘man’ as possessor is conceived of as a part-whole relationship, which reduces the semantic distinctiveness of the two arguments and hence the degree of semantic transitivity. Additionally, the bivalent clauses are formally treated as intransitive, as attested by the selection of the intransitive perfective markers *-bêl* in (22) and *-bòl* in (29). These suffixes agree in number with the syntactic subjects, ‘eyes’ and ‘head’, respectively.

Example (20) represents a transitive clause, with an A and a P argument, A having an animate referent, P having a body part term as referent. The plural stem *t̥ɔgl-ē-n* is selected by the plural P.

TRANSITIVE CLAUSE			
	A	P	V
(20)	<i>íd</i>	<i>kál-é=è</i>	<i>t̥ɔgl-ē-n</i>
	man	eye-PL = ACC	close-PLR-3
	‘the man closes [his] eyes’		

The labile verb form, *t̥ɔgl-ē-n*, has an A and a P argument in the basic transitive clause (20). In the experiencer expression (21) *t̥ɔgl-ē-n* is used, too, but the semantic roles and the syntactic position of the former A and P are changed. The former unmarked A, *íd* ‘man’, receives ACC-marking and assumes an Experiencer role. The former ACC-marked P, by contrast, is now encoded in the unmarked nominative case and assumes a Stimulus role. Moreover, the constituent order is changed, the object preceding the subject. These changes indicate deviations from the normal transitive constructions.

Since the English translation lacks the grammatical means to mirror the Tagle experiencer expression, we have added the German translation, which resembles the Tagle construction in shifting the Experiencer to clause-initial topic position. Whereas the Experiencer in the Tagle examples (21) and (22) receive ACC-

⁸ Payne (1997: 395) defines “an External Possessor (EP) construction as any construction in which a semantic Possessor-possessed relation is expressed via coding the Possessor as a core grammatical relation of the verb, regardless of whether it is expressed as subject, direct object, or indirect object”. We are grateful to Gerrit J. Dimmendaal for calling our attention to Payne’s article.

marking, the Experiencer in the German examples get dative marking. According to Kittilä & Zúñiga (2010: 20), the affectedness of the Experiencer is considered to be less than the affectedness of a prototypical Patient. This is reflected by the German dative (rather than the accusative) which encodes the Experiencer. Tagle, by contrast, does not have a dative marker at its disposal; rather, it uses the accusative for marking both Patients and Experiencers. This shows that the accusative is a polysemous case. The reduction of transitivity in experiencer expressions in Tagle is achieved by employing intransitive perfective suffixes and plural verb stems. The choice of these grammatical means is semantically motivated.

In a semantically intransitive context, the verb ‘close’ conveys a spontaneous event reading associated with a change of state. The closing of the eyes happens without the volitional involvement of an external A.

EXPERIENCER EXPRESSION

- | | | | |
|------|--|--------------|------------------|
| | experiencer | stimulus | V |
| (21) | <i>íd = di</i> | <i>kál-é</i> | <i>[ɔ̃gl-ē-n</i> |
| | man = ACC | eye-PL | close-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the man falls asleep’ (<i>German</i> : ‘dem Mann fallen die Augen zu’) | | |

Further evidence of the low degree of transitivity in the bivalent experiencer expression is provided by the fact that it requires formal marking by the intransitive perfective suffix *-bèl*, which agrees with the plural number of the syntactic subject, *kálé* ‘eyes’.

EXPERIENCER EXPRESSION

- | | | | |
|------|---|--------------|--------------------------------|
| | experiencer | stimulus | V |
| (22) | <i>íd = di</i> | <i>kál-é</i> | <i>[ɔ̃gl-ē-bèl-à-m</i> |
| | man = ACC | eye-PL | close-PLR-ITR.PFV.PLR-PL-PST.3 |
| | ‘the man fell asleep’ (<i>German</i> : ‘dem Mann fielen die Augen zu’) | | |

The *-bèl* suffix used in the experiencer expression (22) contrasts with the transitive perfective suffix *-nà(l)* in the basic transitive clause (23).

BASIC TRANSITIVE CLAUSE

- | | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| | A | P | V |
| (23) | <i>íd</i> | <i>kál-é = è</i> | <i>[ɔ̃gl-ē-nà-m</i> |
| | man | eye-PL = ACC | close-PLR-TR.PFV-PST.3 |
| | ‘the man closed [his] eyes’ | | |

The verb *bìr* ‘spin, twist, whirl’ provides further insights into the morphosyntactic and valency-changing operations associated both with Agent-preserving constructions and with experiencer expressions. Examples (24) and (25) represent basic transitive clauses with the verb forms *bìr-é-n* in the

imperfective and *bîr-é-nà-m* in the perfective. Both verb forms have two arguments. P is represented by a genitive construction whose head noun *fūl-āpī* is plural. Therefore, it selects the plural verb stem *bîr-é*.

BASIC TRANSITIVE CLAUSE

- | | A | P | | V |
|------|--|-----------------|------------------|------------------------|
| (24) | <i>íccú</i> | <i>kēl-ì=nà</i> | <i>fūl-āpī=ī</i> | <i>bîr-é-n</i> |
| | wind | house-PL=GEN | roof-PL=ACC | whirl-PLR-3 |
| | 'the wind twists the roofs of the houses' | | | |
| (25) | <i>íccú</i> | <i>kēl-ì=nà</i> | <i>fūl-āpī=ī</i> | <i>bîr-é-nà-m</i> |
| | wind | house-PL=GEN | roof-PL=ACC | whirl-PLR-TR.PFV-PST.3 |
| | 'the wind twisted the roofs of the houses' | | | |

In the corresponding Agent-preserving intransitive clauses, the verb forms *bîr-é-n* and *bîr-é-bò-m* in (26) and (27) display a single argument, the plural verb stem *bîr-é* indicating reduced transitivity. When this verb is used in the perfective, the singular subject *íccú* selects the singular intransitive perfective marker *-bò(l)*, as seen in (27). Morphosyntactically, this suffix interacts both with intransitivity and the singular number of the syntactic subject ('wind'). These operations show that the reduction of transitivity is encoded by syntactic and morphosyntactic means comprising the unexpressed P, the intransitive perfective suffix, and the plural verb stem.

In the Agent-preserving clauses (26) and (27), and also in the experiencer expressions (28) and (29), the events are depicted as occurring spontaneously, without the involvement of an A. In this context the verb 'spin, twist, whirl' has an ongoing event reading.

AGENT-PRESERVING CLAUSES

- | | A | V |
|------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| (26) | <i>íccú</i> | <i>bîr-é-n</i> |
| | wind | whirl-PLR-3 |
| | 'the wind whirls' | |
| (27) | <i>íccú</i> | <i>bîr-é-bò-m</i> |
| | wind | whirl-PLR-ITR.PFV.SNG-PST3 |
| | 'the wind whirled' | |

The verb forms, *bîr-é-n* and *bîr-é-bò-m*, are attested with a single argument in the Agent-preserving clauses (26) and (27). The same forms are also attested with two arguments in the experiencer expressions (28) and (29). Due to their unusual syntactic, morphosyntactic and semantic properties, it is debatable whether these experiencer expressions should be considered as transitive or

intransitive constructions. One notable feature is their deviation from the normal APV order: the ACC-marked Experiencer takes the clause-initial position and precedes the unmarked Stimulus. Moreover, the two arguments have a semantically possessive relationship, i.e. the ‘head’ is a body part of the ‘man’. As the spinning event simultaneously affects the head and the man, the part-whole relationship reduces the semantic distinctiveness of the arguments. Hence the semantic transitivity of these clauses is reduced. Despite their bivalent structure, Experiencer expressions are required to be formally marked for intransitivity, as attested by the intransitive perfective marker *-bò(l)* in (29). The choice of the plural verb stems also signals reduced transitivity. The interacting grammatical properties of these two argument experiencer expressions suggest that they have a low degree of transitivity.

- | EXPERIENCER EXPRESSION | | | |
|------------------------|--|-----------|-----------------------------|
| | experiencer | stimulus | V |
| (28) | <i>íd=dì</i> | <i>ūr</i> | <i>bìr-é-n</i> |
| | man = ACC | head | whirl-PLR-3 |
| | ‘the man’s head is spinning’ (<i>German</i> : ‘dem Mann dreht sich der Kopf’) | | |
| | | | |
| (29) | <i>íd=dì</i> | <i>ūr</i> | <i>bìr-é-bò-m</i> |
| | man = ACC | head | whirl-PLR-ITR.PFV.SNG-PST.3 |
| | ‘the man’s head spun’ (<i>German</i> : ‘dem Mann drehte sich der Kopf’) | | |

6. Conclusions

Our paper shows that intransitively used labile verbs are based on plural verb stems which are characterized by the [-ATR] *-ε* or [+ATR] *-e* extension. It is a cognate of the *-εr ~ -er* suffix, which is also attested in other Kordofan Nubian languages. Depending on the grammatical context, plural stems can assume different morphosyntactic functions. In transitive clauses they interact with a plural P; in intransitive clauses (based on unergative verbs) they interact with a plural S. In Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving constructions, as well as in experiencer expressions, plural verb stems are used, too. In these constructions the use of the plural stem indicates reduced transitivity. This finding, the reduction of transitivity by means of plural stems, is corroborated in two closely related languages, Uncu (Comfort 2014) and Karko (Jakobi 2017), where plural verb stems are attested with passive readings, too.

Considering the question as to which of the two members of a labile verb pair is more likely to be basic, we adopt Haspelmath’s distinction between two semantically defined groups of inchoative/causative verbs: i) verbs expressing events which commonly occur through causation by an instigating A, and ii)

verbs expressing events that commonly occur spontaneously, without an instigating A. The second group comprises verbs like 'freeze', 'melt', 'dry'. In verb pairs of the first group the causative member tends to be basic, whereas the inchoative member tends to be non-basic. However, in verb pairs of the second group the inchoative member tends to be basic, whereas the causative member tends to be non-basic. Most of the labile verbs discussed in the present paper belong to the first group since they express agentive events likely to occur through causation. They include 'milk', 'spread', 'shave', 'wash', 'wrap', 'connect', 'join', 'break', 'coil', 'thatch', 'close', 'spin, twist, whirl'. Their causative meaning and transitive use is assumed to be basic, their inchoative meaning and intransitive use is assumed to be non-basic.

Manner of motion verbs such as 'climb' and 'wade' are attested in transitivity alternations as well, but they do not fit into the two groups of inchoative/causative verbs defined by Haspelmath (1993). Semantically these motion verbs imply an animate – although not a causing – A, and an inanimate and unaffected P referring to a location or path. These labile verbs are attested both in Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving clauses, the latter having a facilitative interpretation.

In Agent- and Patient-preserving constructions the labile verbs always require a plural verb stem. In transitive clauses, however, both singular and plural verb stems are admitted. Because of this formal property, the morphosyntactically less restricted transitive verbs are considered as basic, and their intransitive counterparts as non-basic.

The transitivity alternations in which labile verbs are involved are realized by Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving intransitive clauses where labile verbs are attested with a single argument. Agent-preserving constructions are associated with an unexpressed and semantically unspecific P. That is, in these constructions the indefinite object is deleted. Patient-preserving constructions, by contrast, involve a change in the syntactic subject: since A is suppressed, P assumes the function of the syntactic subject. At first sight this construction looks like a passive, but in passive constructions the event is conceived of as implying an external A. In Patient-preserving clauses, by contrast, the event is depicted as occurring spontaneously or as ongoing without the involvement of an external A.

Apart from being attested in single argument constructions, some labile verbs are attested with two arguments which are assigned the roles of an Experiencer and a Stimulus. In these constructions there is an obvious mismatch between typically transitive properties, such as the presence of two arguments, and typically intransitive properties, such as the selection of the intransitive perfective suffixes *-bəl* and *-bəl*, which agree in number with the syntactic subject.

This unusual coincidence can be explained by the fact that the Stimulus, whose referent is a body part, and the Experiencer, whose referent is a human being, have a semantically possessive relationship. The body parts belong to the human being. Due to their part-whole relationship, both the body parts and their owner are affected in events such as the spontaneous closing of the eyes or the spinning of the head. The reduced semantic distinctiveness of the two arguments results in a reduction in semantic transitivity. Thus these experiencer expressions are characterized by opposite transitivity properties. Typically transitive properties are expressed by a syntactically bivalent construction, the distinction of the two arguments by case marking and subject agreement marking on the verb. However, the part-whole relationship of the Stimulus and the Experiencer and the formal marking by the intransitive perfective suffixes *-bəl* and *-bəl* attest intransitive properties of experiencer constructions. The complex interaction between these transitive and intransitive properties means that experiencer expressions are low in transitivity.

Agent-preserving and Patient-preserving intransitive clauses can have various readings depending on the semantics of the verb and its arguments. Body care and dressing verbs used in non-basic intransitive clauses give a reflexive reading. Some verbs, such as 'connect, meet' and 'join', require a plural referent in Agent-preserving clauses which give rise to a reciprocal reading. Patient-preserving clauses can depict an event as occurring spontaneously: goats milk, fires spread, pots break, mats coil up, and eyes close when P is conceived of having some degree of agentivity. In Patient-preserving clauses verbs designating events with an inherent endpoint (e.g. 'break', 'close') produce a change of state interpretation. By contrast, process verbs designating events without an inherent endpoint ('spread', 'milk', 'spin, twist, whirl') give an ongoing reading. Passive readings are attested by verbs like 'thatch' and 'climb'. These verbs designate events that are conceived as requiring an animate A performing an action on an inanimate P. Since in Patient-preserving clauses the A is suppressed and since the inanimate P (here a roof or a tree) does not imply any agentivity, 'thatch' and 'climb' are incompatible with depicting an event as occurring spontaneously. These verbs convey a passive or facilitative interpretation.

The present article also provides first evidence of three intransitive verb classes: unaccusative verbs, unergative verbs, and verbs occurring in Agent-preserving clauses. In Tagle they are distinguished by their morphosyntactic behavior and syntactic properties. Unergative verbs have a single S. They are sensitive to the number of S. When S is singular it selects a singular verb stem; when S is plural, it selects a plural verb stem. Unaccusative verbs, by contrast, occur in Patient-preserving clauses; their single argument is semantically a P, although it is not ACC-marked. Unaccusative verbs do not interact with a singular or plural

argument. They always require plural stems which signal low transitivity. Finally, the third class of intransitive verbs is attested in Agent-preserving clauses. Like unaccusative verbs these verbs have a transitive counterpart, and they are also based on plural stems. But their single argument is semantically an A, rather than a P. They are distinct from unergative verbs, too, because the number of their single argument does not interact with verbal number.

Abbreviations

3 – 3rd person; A – Agent; ACC – accusative; GEN – genitive; INS – instrumental; ITR – intransitive; LOC – locative; P – Patient; PL – plural; PLR – plural verb stem; PFV – perfective; PST – past; S – Subject; SG – singular; SNG – singular verb stem; SR – social relationship marker; TR – transitive; V – verb.

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