

## Constituents Patterning And Thematic Roles Assignment In Dholuo Conditional Sentences

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### **Abstract**

*Constituents ordering, as a linguistic phenomenon, is largely underpinned by the word order typology. Languages from different families exhibit different word order typology in which the processes, participants, circumstances and attributes are patterned in given ways within their various categories of sentences. Dholuo, which belongs to the Western Nilo-Sahara family, is spoken not only in the Western part of Kenya by Joluo (the Luo) but also by the speakers of the language in other countries in parts of East Africa. The language has its unique configuration of constituents in its various categories of sentences which has not yet been conclusively studied. This paper sets out to describe, examine and explain the manifestation of constituent ordering and how the different constituents are assigned various thematic roles by the verbs. The theoretical framework for this paper is the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) while the research design adopted here is descriptive-analytic design. In this design it was possible to describe the constituent ordering and to examine thematic roles assignment. The data for this study was collected through elicitation using an elicitation frame administered on two native speakers of Dholuo from either gender. The data was then verified by the author using his native speaker competence. The data reveals that Dholuo has a unique constituent ordering pattern in which the modal auxiliary precedes the subject in declaratives and the past tense marker morpheme *ne*, precedes the subject and the main verb. And as is the case with all languages, verbs in Dholuo also assign different thematic roles to the different participants around them. The findings of this study generally make a contribution towards the deepening of the knowledge on Dholuo grammar and in particular, providing insight on constituents patterning in conditional sentences in Dholuo and the applicability and adequacy of SFG in the study of structure and meaning.*

**Keywords:** *Word order typology, constituent ordering, thematic roles.*

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Date of Submission: 11-04-2026

Date of Acceptance: 21-04-2026

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### **I. Introduction**

The completeness and meaningfulness of a sentence is largely dependent on constituents ordering and a language user's communicative intention. The constituents in a syntactic structure can be broadly mapped on the five cardinal components namely; participant, process, circumstance and attribute each of which bear position-determined features and functions. The participant can be a doer or a recipient of what is encoded by the process. The circumstance is the additional information that represent where and how an event occurred while the attribute characterizes the participant. Regardless of which configuration of constituents a language user adopts, it is only the participants that are assigned semantic roles by the main verbs in the sentences.

### **The Language**

Dholuo, is a Western Nilotic language from the Nilo-Sahara family of languages. It is spoken not only by *Joluo* (the Luo), an ethnic group in Kenya whose cradle, according to Stafford (1967), is believed to be Bahr-el -Ghazal in Southern Sudan, but also by the Allur, Padhola, Acholi and Lang'o of Eastern Uganda. Dholuo is also spoken by the Shilluk, Jur, Anuak, Bori, Thuri, Pari, Achuli, Lagoro and Nuer in the Upper Nile and Equatorial regions in the present-day South Sudan. (Madut, 2020; Ogot, 1967). Other speakers of Dholuo like the Luwo, Alur and Jo- Nam are also found in the Mara region in Tanzania, parts of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Eastern region of Congo Brazzaville respectively (Madut, 2020). Together, all these groups form the larger Lwo family of Nilotes.

In Kenya, according to Ochieng (1975) the Luos are mostly located on the Eastern shores of Lake Victoria previously known as Nyanza Province. Cohen (1974) and Madut (2020) document that the Luos, who migrated from Central Uganda, probably settled in this area around 1500 and 1800 AD in four groups namely: Joka Jok, Joka Owiny, Joka Omolo and Joka Wanga and occupied Sakwa, Asembo, Uyoma, parts of Alego, Ugenya, Gem, Nyakach, and Kisumu. Presently, the speakers of Dholuo, whose population is estimated at 5,066,966 by the 2019 Kenya Population and Household Census, are predominantly found in the four counties of

Nyanza Region namely: Migori, Homa Bay, Kisumu and Siaya. Still, due to reasons of marriage, migration and settlement speakers of Dholuo can also be found in other parts of the country and in the diaspora.

Stafford (1967) observes that Dholuo has two primary dialects- the Trans- Yala and Kisumu – South Nyanza (KSN). Trans- Yala dialect is spoken in Ugenya, Alego, Yimbo and Gem in the present day Siaya county while Kisumu- South Nyanza dialect is spoken in what is now known as Migori and Homa Bay counties as well as parts of Central Nyanza which are not part of the Trans- Yala areas. These two dialects according to Okombo (1997) have got high degree of mutual intelligibility even though they may exhibit some instances lexical and phonological differences. These dialectical variations, however, have no effect at all on the structure or meaning of any construction, and conditional sentences in Dholuo are no exceptions. That, therefore, is the reason this study did not focus on any of the two dialects. The other reason is that the dialects have no direct bearing on the two variables- syntax and semantics- which are the focus of this particular study of Dholuo conditional sentences. The findings that were drawn from this study, therefore, were generalizable to the two dialects.

## **II. Material And Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study used the descriptive-analytic research design. Descriptive analytic design describes a phenomenon and explains why and how it exhibits particular characteristics with a view to identifying and establishing trends, relationships and patterns in the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This study presented a systematic description of the data on different syntactic and semantic aspects in Dholuo conditional sentences. First, the study explained how the position occupied by the words and clauses in a conditional sentence affected its information structure. Moreover, the study also explained how Dholuo marks, realises and expresses the three grammatical paradigms- tense, aspect and modality- in the predicates of the conditional sentences. Finally, an examination and description of how the different constituents are positioned, relative to the position of the verbal constituent in the realization of the structure of Dholuo conditionals, is also presented. Further, a description of how the verbs in the different categories of conditional sentences assign their participants different thematic role followed.

### **Study Location**

The data that this study generated, with a view to achieving the set objectives and answering the research questions, only requires a native speaker with competence in Dholuo, his location notwithstanding. It is therefore possible that as long as competent speakers of Dholuo, who are available and are willing to participate in the study are found anywhere, data can still be adequately generated. The data collection for this study was done in Maranda Division, Bondo Sub County in Siaya county from among the native Dholuo speakers who inhabit the area. Their location did not only provide the accessible population from which the sample was drawn but it is also inhabited by native speakers of Dholuo who are within the researcher's reach. Thematically, this study is in the areas of syntax and semantics and the interplay between these two areas in the characterisation of conditional sentences in Dholuo.

**Study Duration:** December 2025- April 2026

### **Sample Size**

A sample, is usually drawn from the accessible population not only because it bears characteristics that are representative of the target population but also because of their readiness, acceptance and availability to participate in the research (Kothari, 2003; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). A sample of two competent native speakers of Dholuo; one male and one female, from Maranda Division of Bondo Sub County, Siaya County was purposively sampled for this study. The consideration that guided the choice of the respondents by the researcher was first and foremost, their native speaker competence in Dholuo; every native speaker of a language is deemed to possess the same linguistic competence in that language with other competent native speakers and that the number of respondents may not affect the substance of the data. However, it should be understood that using just one native speaker of Dholuo would still yield the same result one would get when working with more than one. The use of two native speakers from either gender helps in guarding against the study reporting on speech characteristics that are unique to one gender or one individual. Also, the smaller sample size will ensure that the study does not generate repetitive, replicated and superfluous data from many informants because the data collection tool seeks to generate the same data from the respondents. Thirdly, since it was not possible to reach the universal population of Dholuo speakers, it would be easy to work with two willing and available respondents to the completion of data collection in good time for its analysis and reporting on the findings.

### **Sample Selection Method**

A sample of two native speakers of Dholuo- one male, one female- was purposively sampled for this study. Their consent was sought and the dynamics and the ramifications of the research explained to them before

being. What the researcher considered was their native speaker competence. The size of the sample was also restricted to two to guard against two outcomes; reporting on speech characteristics of one gender and generating repetitive and superfluous data.

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

Different techniques and procedures can be employed in collecting data depending on whether the research method is quantitative or qualitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study largely generated qualitative data. The data for this study was collected through elicitation using an elicitation frame. An elicitation frame, Vaux and Cooper (2003) as well as Berthelin (2002) argue is a controlled set up that helps in the discovery and testing of particular linguistic phenomenon and its various patterns in an appropriate paradigm. In its structuring, it consists of a stimulus or a task and a target response which is largely left to the discretion, knowledge and creativity of the respondent.

In this study, elicitation frame was used to generate sentential data and was deemed the most appropriate instrument because the target in the research is native speaker competence. The elicitation frame contains sentence starters or fill-in-the blank activities, in the form of conditional clauses that prompt the respondents to complete the sentences with the remaining part of the sentence using their own knowledge, ideas, preferences of hypothetical scenarios. In the elicitation frame used in this study, the subordinate or the conditional clauses are already provided and the respondent was required to complete the remaining part by supplying the result clause or the consequent using hypothetical outcomes of their own.

The researcher allowed the respondents to familiarize themselves with the contents of the elicitation frame in order to stimulate their thought processes then read out each of the conditional clauses to each of the respondents. Each respondent was allowed up to a minute to come up with a possible response to each of the antecedent read out to them. The researcher noted down each of the responses in the spaces provided on the elicitation frame and the field note book. Also, the elicitation sessions were all audio recorded using a voice recorder to allow the researcher to go over the recordings with a view to cleaning up the data of any inconsistencies and inaccuracies.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

The analysis and presentation of the data was guided by the objectives that this study set out to achieve. Each objective is presented in a separate chapter with each chapter foregrounding what was revealed during the review of related literature, followed by the findings from data analysis and finally the relevant conclusions arising from observation of the patterns and trend in the data. The preliminary data analysis entailed data verification, and cleaning up by first replaying the voice recording of the elicitation sessions in order confirm what is useful data and to expunge whatever is repeated, inconsistent or inaccurate.

The data was later subjected to testing for purposes of establishing the consistency of the trends and features in them. Then sorting out of the conditional sentences into their broad categories of indicative and subjunctive categories followed. Thereafter, this was then followed by a further classification of the conditional sentences into their respective sub-categories in each of the categories. Each of the sub category of Dholuo conditional sentences was subjected to content, text as well as thematic analyses to find out the unique characteristics and patterns in them that relate to word and clause ordering, tense, aspect and modality marking and realisation as well as clause constituents positioning and patterning. These features were also used to establish and explain the syntactic and semantic characteristics of each category of conditional sentences in Dholuo.

The data presentation is largely by way of box diagrams to stake out the constituents' alignment and relationships within the structures in keeping with the theoretical analysis of the clause complex and the three different clause configurations in the SFG theory. Each of the meanings of the clause presented the different constituent ordering in Dholuo conditional sentences. Other than the explanation of the structures, there was a chapter-by-chapter account of how the different grammatical systems that underlie the concept of the three clause configurations in SFG, contribute to the typological grouping and the semantic properties uniquely associated with each of the categories of Dholuo conditional sentences.

## **III. Results And Discussion**

In the sections that follow, a discussion of ordering and patterning of transitivity components- participants, process and circumstances- in different categories of conditional sentences in Dholuo is presented. In the sections, a discussion on how the ordering of these components in these sentences contribute to their syntactic and semantic features is also presented.

### **Constituents Patterning in Zero Conditionals**

Zero conditionals by their very nature, regardless of context, are meant to convey factual and habitual events. Their unique lexical configuration enables them to do this effectively. (Fintel, 2011; Kartunen & Peters,

1979; Khoo, 2015). The data in (1a) and (1b) are typical examples of zero conditional sentences in Dholuo that express facts and habitual happenings:

a) *Ka koth o-chwe matek, to piny timo chuodho*

If rain it-rain heavily, then earth become muddy

If it rains heavily, it gets muddy

The data in example (1a) expresses a known environmental fact. The verbs in the two clauses, *chwe*, 'rain' in the antecedent and *timo*, 'gets' express the simple present tense though with no overt marking on the verbs. The verbs are evidently intransitive action verbs which represent material processes that subcategorize for different types of participants and circumstances. The participant in the antecedent *koth*, 'rain', is coreferential with the pronominal prefix *o-*, 'it'. Since the verb in this clause is intransitive, the post verbal position is occupied by an adverbial, *matek*, 'heavily' and not an object. The adverbial represents the circumstances that denote the manner in which it rained. A similar scenario is replicated in the consequent. The intransitive verb, *timo*, 'gets', encodes an existential process denoting an existing state or condition. *piny*, 'the earth', is its subject, and the only participant while *chuodho*, 'muddy', is the attribute and a description of the state. The two verbs, *chwe*, 'rain' and *timo*, 'gets', in the data in example (1a), are therefore regarded as intransitive because they do not select objects for their completeness and meaningfulness of the clauses. The data in example (1b) is yet another zero conditional that is an expression of a habitual fact:

b) *Ka gi-mer-ga, to gi-goyo-n-wa koko e aluora-wa*

If 3Pl-drunk-IND, then 3Pl-make-APPL noise in neighborhood-POSS

If/When they are drunk, then they make noise for us in our neighbourhood

In example (1b), the antecedent has a behavioural process, *mer*, 'drunk', which apart from denoting a psychological state, only selects one participant, *gi-*, 'they', in the subject position and no other constituent after the verb. It is therefore an intransitive verb. *ga*, which is affixed to the verb *mer*, 'drunk', is a marker of habituality. In the result clause, the material process, *goyo*, 'make', has three participants- the subject and two objects. The first participant and which occurs preverbally is *gi-*, 'they', the subject marking prefix denoting the actor, the others which occur post verbally are: *koko*, 'noise', the direct object and theme and *wa*, 'us', the recipients of the action and the indirect object. The verb in the consequent, owing to its selection of two objects, is ditransitive. The circumstance of the actions is expressed by the adverbial phrase, *e aluorawa*, 'in our neighbourhood', which is a locative.

### Constituent Patterning in First Conditionals

A certain configuration of lexical items around the verbal element is necessary for this category of conditionals to aptly express future possibilities that are likely or unlikely to happen and their likely results. This is attributable to the verb forms in the antecedent and the consequent (Murphy, 2019; Parrott, 2010; Quirk et al, 1985; Swan, 2016). The data in example (2) talks of the speaker's futuristic anticipation of the failure of their journey in the event that he does not secure money the following day.

*Ka a-yud-o omenda kiny, to wa-biro dhi wuoth*

If 1Sg-get-IND money tomorrow, then 1Pl-will travel

If I get money tomorrow, then we will travel.

The conditional clause in (2) bears a transitive verb, *yudo*, 'to get' which expresses a material process which the speaker anticipates to undertake. It is preceded by an agentive pronominal prefix, *a-*, 'I', that is the first participant and its subject and then it is followed by another participant, *omenda*, 'money', in the post verbal slot which is the object of the verb that is affected by the action. Located in the same space after the second participant, is the circumstance expressed by the adverbial, *kiny*, 'tomorrow' to situate the expected action in some time frame in the future. The result clause is anchored on a material process expressed in the intransitive verb phrase *biro dhi wuoth*, 'will travel', comprising of a main verb, *dhi wuoth*, 'travel' and the modal auxiliary, *biro*, 'will', and a participant, *wa-*, 'we', in the preverbal position. The verb does not take an object. The participant in this clause, *wa*, 'we', is its subject which looks forward to executing the action denoted by the verb, *dhi wuoth*, 'travelling'. Note, however, that while the data in example (2) presents a scenario where the clauses have verbs of different transitivity, it is also possible to have another where both clauses could have verbs of similar transitivity as is the case in the data in example (3a) and (3b).

a) *Ka a-yud-o mer-u e ot, to ok a-bi-kaw-o pesa-no*

If 1Sg-get-IND mother-POSS in house, then not 1Sg-will-take-IND money-APPL

If I get your mother in the house, then I will not take the money

The two verbs in the sentence *yudo*, 'to get', in the antecedent and *ok... bikawo*, 'will not take', are both transitive and represent material processes. *Yudo*, 'to get', is preceded by a participant that realizes the subject role, *a-*, 'I', the doer and is followed by another participant, *meru*, 'your mother', the object of the verb. After the object is the circumstances, *e ot*, 'in the house', that locate the action in a given location and completes the clause. The verb in the result clause, *ok...bikawo*, 'will not take', has the participant that realizes the subject, *a-*, 'I', which occurs between the negative marker, *ok*, and the verb phrase, *bikawo*, 'will take'. The clause is completed by another post verbal participant, *pesano*, 'that money', realizing the role of an object of the verb. The action verbs in both clauses therefore demand the obligatory presence of participants on either side, ordered in an SVO pattern. The data in (3b) illustrates yet another scenario of verbs in a sentence bearing the same transitivity characteristics:

b) *Ka hap-wa ber; to wa-bo-dhi wuoth*  
If luck-POSS good, then 1Pl-will-travel  
If we are lucky, then we will travel

The data in (3b), shows that in the antecedent, *Ka hapwa ber*, 'If we are lucky', has a participant, *wa*, 'we' that is the subject, the process realized by the copula 'are'. The copula is not overtly marked in Dholuo but is intrinsically ingrained and expressed by the whole structure, *hapwa ber*, 'we are lucky', that has different markers for different grammatical functions. In the first-tier translation the clause, *Ka hapwa ber*, may translate into 'If our luck is good'. Where *ka*, marks the connective, 'if', *hapwa*, 'our luck' and *ber*, the attribute, 'good'. Even at this level, the copula is not marked by any constituent but is recovered from the whole clause for it to make sense. In the consequent, the verb phrase is *bodhi*, 'will go' is preceded in the preverbal slot by the participant, *wa*, 'we', which is its subject. The two verbs in this example are both intransitive because they have one argument each; the subjects and no objects.

### Constituents Patterning in Second Conditionals

In order to express the hypothetical and unreal situations and events as well as wishes and desires in the future or present that second conditional sentences are known for, the antecedent must have a past tense form of the verb while the consequent must have a modal auxiliary alongside a base form of a verb in their predicates. (Murphy, 2019; Parrott, 2010; Quirk et al, 1985; Swan, 2016). The data in example (4a) is an illustration of a second conditional sentence in Dholuo.

a) *Ka ne a-yud omenda ma-oromo, de-a-nyiew-o nyamburko*  
If Pst 1Sg-get money REL-enough, would-1Sg-buy-IND vehicle  
If I got enough money, I would buy a vehicle

In (4a), the verbs in the two clauses are both transitive verbs. In the antecedent, the verb, *ne...yud*, 'got', which represents a hypothetical material process, comes after the participant that realizes the subject, *a-*, 'I', then it is followed by the participant, *omenda*, 'money' which is the target of the action and therefore the object. The circumstance of the action is realized by an adverbial, *moromo*, 'enough', which provides a basis for the process in the result clause. The verb, *de... nyiewo*, 'would buy', which makes the clause imaginary, has the subject, *a-*, 'I' occurring between the modal auxiliary, *de*, 'would', and the main verb, *nyiewo*, 'buy'. The object, *nyamburko*, 'vehicle' follows the verb. It is also possible that the verb in the consequent can also be ditransitive as the data in example (4b) shows:

b) *Ka ne a-yud omenda ma-oromo, de a-nyiew-o ne Atieno nyamburko*  
If Pst 1Sg-get money REL-enough, would 1Sg-buy-APPL for Atieno vehicle  
If I got enough money, I would buy Atieno a vehicle

The data in example (4b), shows that the process in the consequent, *de...nyiewo*, 'would buy', subcategorizes for a participant, *a*, 'I', that realizes the subject in the preverbal slot, and two other participants in the post verbal position; one a direct object, *nyamburko*, 'vehicle' and the other, *Atieno*, an indirect object. While the verb in the antecedent, *ne...yud*, 'got', is transitive since it still has a subject, *a-*, 'I' before it and an object, *omenda moromo*, 'enough money', the one in the consequent, *de...nyiewo*, 'would buy' is ditransitive since it selects two objects, *nyamburko*, 'vehicle' and *Atieno*.

### Constituents Patterning in Third Conditionals

The cause-and-effect relationship that obtains between the clauses in a third conditional is one that is purely hypothetical. They express scenarios in the past that did not materialize and whose effects are still felt in the present. The verb phrases configurations in the two clauses are responsible for this interpretation. (Biber,

Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan, 1999; Leech, 2016; Murphy, 2019; Swan, 2016; Thompson & Martinet, 1986). The data in (5a) is an example of a third conditional sentence:

a) *Ka ne a-som matek ka jo-moko, de koro a-dak maber ka gin*  
If Pst 1Sg-study hard like people-some, would 1Sg-live well like them  
If I studied hard like some people, I would now live well like them

Example (5a), a typical third conditional sentence, has an intransitive verb in each of its clauses that denote different kinds of processes. *Ne...som*, 'studied', in the antecedent, denotes a material process; an action that ought to have been accomplished in the past by a participant *a-*, 'I', which serves as its subject. What follows after the verb is a post verbal participant, *jomoko*, 'some people', and then the circumstance, *matek*, 'hard', an adverb which characterizes the manner in which the action should have been undertaken. Similarly, the consequent also has an identical constituent ordering as in the conditional clause. The process, realized in the verb phrase, *de...dak*, 'would live', is a hypothetical existential process denoting the state the speaker would be in had the process in the antecedent been actualized. It subcategorizes for a participant, *a-*, 'I', in the pre verbal slot that realizes the subject. In the post verbal position, is another participant *gin*, 'them', and an attribute, *maber* 'well', which functions to describe the process. It is also possible that these two verbs can also be used transitively with the inclusion of objects after them as the data in (5b) shows:

b) *Ka ne a-som bug-e mang'eny ka jo-moko, de koro a-dak Nairobi ka gin*  
If Pst 1Sg-read book-Pl many like people-some, would now 1Sg-live Nairobi like them  
If I read many books like some people, I would live in Nairobi like them

Unlike in (5a), the data in (5b) indicates that the two verbs in the sentence are transitive since they all have direct objects post verbally. In the conditional clause, the verb, *ne...som*, 'read' selects a subject participant, *a-*, 'I', in the preverbal position and a post verbal participant, *bug-e mang'eny*, 'many books', which is its direct object. After the object is the comparative phrase, *ka jomoko*, 'like some people' which denotes the circumstance for the action. In the result clause, the verb, *de...dak*, 'would live' is immediately followed by a locative 'in Nairobi', as its direct object. Note that the preposition, 'in', is marked by an empty category in Dholuo especially in cases where a proper name of a place is concerned. Just like in the conditional clause, the result clause also has a comparative phrase, *ka gin*, 'like them', which also denotes the circumstance for the action.

### **Constituents Patterning in Mixed Conditionals**

These conditionals derive their name from the fact that the if-clause and the result clause refer to different times thus creating a mix between timeframes. However, transitivity relationships ensure that there are logical flow and connection between the two parts of the sentences, the tense difference notwithstanding. (Leech, 2016; Murphy, 2019; Swan, 2016; Thompson & Martinet, 1986). The logical coherence is achieved through the arrangement of the clauses which have the latitude to switch positions while the connection is attained through the conditional connective. These sentences can manifest in two cases; where a conditional sentence has a past conditional clause and a present result clause on the one hand and a present condition and a past result on the other. The data in example (6a) is used to illustrate one such scenario:

a) *Ka ne a-purchon ma-oromo, de a-yud-o cham maber higa-ni*  
If Pst 1Sg-plough early REL-enough, would 1Sg-get-IND harvest well year-IND  
If I had ploughed early enough, I would have a good harvest this year

In the data in example (6a), the verb in the antecedent, *ne...pur*, 'ploughed' is intransitive since no object follows it while the one in the consequent, *de...yudo*, 'would get' is transitive taking the noun phrase, *cham maber*, 'good harvest', as its object. Notably, the verb in the antecedent can have a change in its transitivity if an object is included in the clause. That would result in the data in (6b):

b) *Ka ne a-pur puodho-nochon ma-oromo, de a-yud-o cham maber higa-ni*  
If Pst 1Sg-plough farm-IND early REL-enough, would 1Sg-get-IND a good harvest year-IND  
If I ploughed that farm early enough, I would get a good harvest this year

The verb, *ne...pur*, 'ploughed', which denotes a material process, takes an object, *puodhono*, 'that farm', to make it transitive. The verb in the consequent remains transitive as well. The data in example (6c) is yet another manifestation of a mixed conditional sentence:

c) *Ka a-yud namba-ne mar simo, de a-gocho-ne*  
 If 1Sg-get number-POSS for phone, would 1Sg-call-APPL  
 If I got his phone number, I would call him

The data in example (6c) is configured to have a present condition, *Ka ayud nambane mar simo*, ‘If I got his phone number’, and a past outcome, *de agochone*, ‘I would call him’. The two verbs in the sentence are both transitive because they take direct objects. The verb in the conditional clause, *yud*, ‘get’, takes the noun phrase, *nambane mar simo*, ‘his phone number’ as its direct object. On the other hand, the verb in the consequent, *gocho*, ‘call’ has a pronominal suffix, *ne*, ‘him’ as its direct object. Notably, these two verbs, which encode material processes, may not be used intransitively because the actions must be targeted at an entity and thus the omission of their objects would render the clauses incomplete and ungrammatical.

**Thematic Roles Assignment in Dholuo Conditional Sentences.**

Language is primarily used in the expression of a speaker’s condition and world view, a function it achieves through well-formed clauses and sentences. The meaningfulness and the well-formedness of syntactic structures is anchored generally on the proper ordering of sentential constituents, taking into account the combinatorial possibilities around the verbal elements. (Borik, 2014; Bresnan, 1995; Hale & Keyser, 1998; Ondondo, 2024). The main verb, which is the most important cog of the sentence heads the predicate and also determines the number and which kind of nominal constituents occupy the preverbal and post verbal slots around it. This selection, other than assigning roles to the different nominal elements, is critical in not only ensuring the completeness of sentences but also their grammaticality and meaningfulness.

The different role players around the verb are the arguments of the verb and together they constitute the argument structure. Trask (1993) affirms that these role players, mainly noun phrases, bear specific semantic or grammatical characteristics that place them in some kind of relations with the verb. The relations can either be overt or implied and are a requisite for the realization of the well-formedness of structures. An argument, Muhammad (2023), explains, may have more than one thematic role in different clausal environments. Other than the unique features that each nominal element may carry, the assignment of roles is also dependent on the kind of situation, event or state of affairs as encoded in the main verb. In other words, what comes before and after the verb, is purely dependent on the valency attributable to the verb, a feature that determines the number and the kind of arguments a verb can select.

Depending on the number of arguments, a verb can be characterized as avalent; requiring no argument, monovalent; selecting one argument, divalent; selecting two arguments or polyvalent; requiring three or more arguments. The configuration of these arguments, therefore, must essentially conform to the syntactic as well as the semantic demands of the verb (Grishaw,1990; Gruber,1976; Jackendoff, 1990; Ondondo,2024). Therefore, the arrangement of constituents, specifically noun phrases, around the main verb is what Andrews (2007) and Dixon & Aikhenvald (2000) refer to as the argument structure. The number and type of argument a verb may take results in different argument structure typology namely; monadic selects one argument; dyadic selects two arguments; triadic, selects three arguments and polyadic which selects more than three arguments. These arguments by virtue of their positions in the clauses, are further assigned thematic as well as syntactic roles by the main verb.

Dholuo, as a natural language, has argument structure as one of its language universal properties. The argument structure of Dholuo has its uniqueness as is the case with every other language. This study noted that Dholuo has its own specific way of presenting and realizing language universal property such as the one under discussion in this section. In the sections that follow, a discussion of how argument structure is realized and organized in the different categories of Dholuo conditional sentences as well as the different thematic roles assigned to different arguments by the main verb is presented. The arrangement of the arguments takes into account the different grammatical roles that they establish with the other constituents (Hassan, 2023; Levin & Rappaport, 2005; Dowty, 1991). The thematic role that are discussed in this study and what they mean are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Thematic Roles Adopted in this paper.**

S/No.	Thematic Role	Meaning
1	Agent	The entity that performs, effects, instigates or controls volitionally the situation denoted by the predicate
2	Patient	The entity which undergoes the effect of some action or even a change in state
3	Theme	The entity that is moved by an action, or whose location is described
4	Experiencer	The entity which is aware of the action or state described by the predicate but which is not in control of the action or state
5	Beneficiary	The entity for whose benefit the action was performed
6	Goal	The entity towards which something moves, either literally or metaphorically

### Thematic Roles Assignment in Zero Conditionals

The data in example (7a) is a zero conditional sentence in Dholuo that is used to express a known fact:

a) *Ka i-madh-o kwiri to i-tho*  
If 2Sg-take-IND, kwiri, then 2Sg-die  
If you take poison, you die

The verbs in (7a), *madho*, ‘take’, and *tho*, ‘die’, exhibit different valency in the sense that they require different number of arguments. In the antecedent, the verb *madho*, ‘take’, is divalent since it requires two arguments- a subject argument marked by the prefix *i-*, ‘I’ and an object argument, *kwiri*, ‘poison’. Owing to their relative positions to the verb, they are assigned different thematic roles. *I-*, by virtue of its position and function is the agent whose action affects, *kwiri*, ‘poison’, which is the theme. The two arguments- *i-*, ‘I’ and *kwiri*, ‘poison’, have specific grammatical functions as subject and object respectively. The argument structure in the conditional clause is therefore dyadic because of its selection of two arguments. The verb in the consequent on the other hand is monovalent since it only selects one argument; the subject argument, *i-*, ‘I’, in the preverbal position. Such verbs and the one argument they subcategorize for, make up a monadic argument structure. Even though the prefix *i-*, ‘I’, which marks the subject appears in the clause-initial position, it is not an agent as was the case in the conditional clause but an experiencer because ‘dying’, happens to it. In some other cases, as that in example (7b), the verb, *tho*, ‘die’, may also have an optional element like *tikli*, ‘instantly’, which is an adjunct.

b) *Ka i-madh-o kwiri to i-tho tikli*  
If 2Sg-take-IND poison then 2Sg-die instantly  
If you take poison, then you die

Note, also, that the subject position in the first clause of example (19a) can also be realized by an overt nominal element as example (19c) illustrates:

(c) *Ka Ochieng’ o-madh-o kwiri, to o-tho.*  
If Ochieng’ 3Sg-take-IND poison, then 3Sg-die  
If Ochieng’ takes poison, he dies

The verb in the antecedent in example (7c) remains divalent even though the subject slot has two elements, *Ochieng’*, a nominal element and *O-* ‘he’, a subject and agreement prefix, both of which are coreferential. The situation in the consequent remains the same as in (7a) with a change only in the subject marker from *i-*, ‘you’ to *o-*, ‘he’. The pronominal element is anaphoric to the subject, *Ochieng’*, in the antecedent. The thematic roles assigned by the respective verbs in the examples remain the same in 7 (b) and 7 (c) as they were in 7(a)

### Thematic Roles Assignment in First Conditionals

The data in example (8a) presents a first conditional sentence that has verbs in its clauses whose valencies and argument structures are different:

a) *Ka ok a-yud-o omenda kiny to wuodh-wa biro bare*  
If not 1Sg-get-IND money tomorrow, then journey-POSS will not materialize  
If I do not get money tomorrow, our journey will not materialize

The divalent main verb in the conditional clause, *ok...yudo*, ‘not get’ assigns the pronominal element, *a-*, ‘I’, the thematic role of an agent that intentionally initiates or performs an action which is realized syntactically as a subject. In the post verbal position is the noun phrase, *omenda moromo*, ‘enough money’ whose theta role is that of a theme or a goal because it is the object of the agent’s intention, one that would be affected directly by the action of the agent. In the clause-final position is the temporal adjunct, *kiny*, ‘tomorrow’, which is not assigned any thematic role but serves to modify the time of action. In the result clause, the inchoative verb *biro bare*, ‘will not materialize’, which expresses a state of non-existence of a situation, selects one argument, *wuodhwa*, ‘our journey’ in the preverbal slot and to which it assigns the thematic role of theme. The verb is thus monovalent. Also, note that the verb may not take another argument after it but can be followed by an adjunct like *kendo*, ‘again’ just to modify it as the data in example (8b) illustrates:

b) *Ka ok a-yud-o omenda kiny to wuodh-wa biro bare kendo*  
If not 1Sg-get-IND money tomorrow, then journey-POSS will not materialize again  
If I do not get money tomorrow, our journey will not materialize again



### Thematic Roles Assignment in Second Conditionals

The data in example (9a) is a second conditional sentence in which the two verbs in the two clauses share valency and argument structure; they are both divalent verbs with a dyadic argument structure.

a) *Ka ne a-yud omenda ma-oromo, de-a-nyiew-o nyamburko maber*  
If Pst 1Sg-get money REL-enough, would-1Sg-buy-IND vehicle good  
If I got enough money, I would buy a good vehicle

*Ne...yud*, 'got', the verb in the if-clause assigns the two arguments different thematic roles. The subject *a-*, 'I', which initiates the anticipated action of getting the money, is the agent. This is because in the event that the subject comes by money, then he is sure likely to execute the action in the result clause. The noun phrase, *Omenda moromo*, 'enough money' which is the object of the action in the clause is both a theme and a goal because it is what is wished for and what is talked about. Implicitly, *omenda moromo*, 'enough money', can also be considered an instrument by dint of which the intention of *nyiewo nyamburko maber*, 'buying a good vehicle', in the result clause can be achieved. The result clause also presents a unique assignment of theta roles. The subject prefix *a-*, 'I', apart from being an agent that would be the source of the action of *nyiewo*, 'buying', is also an implicit beneficiary of its own action; the acquisition of a good vehicle for himself. In the post verbal position is *nyamburko maber*, 'a good vehicle' which is assigned the role of a theme. Since *nyamburko maber*, 'a good vehicle' is the object of the speaker's desire, it can also be considered as a target or a goal that the speaker intends to achieve. The two verbs in the sentence make up a dyadic argument structure because they each select two arguments; the subject argument and the object argument. It is also possible to have a triadic argument structure in the consequent by adding a second object as is illustrated in (9b):

(b) *Ka ne a-yud omenda ma-oromo, de-a-nyiew-o ne Anyango nyamburko maber*  
If Pst 1Sg-get money REL-enough, would-1Sg-buy-APPL Anyango vehicle good  
If I got enough money, I would buy a good vehicle for Anyango

While the constituent ordering and the theta roles assignment in the antecedent in (9b) remains the same as in (9a), the verb in the consequent, *de...nyiewo*, 'would buy', takes three arguments; *a-*, 'I', the subject argument and two object arguments namely; *Anyango* and *nyamburko maber*, 'a good vehicle', to which it assigns different theta roles. In the context of the data in example (9b), the subject argument *a-*, 'I', is assigned the role of an agent, whose action is transferrable to the direct object in the post verbal slot. The argument that realizes the direct object is *nyamburko maber*, 'a good vehicle' functions as a theme since it is the item being acquired or transferred to yet another object. *Anyango*, which is the object that is indirectly affected by the agent's action is assigned the role of a goal or recipient because it is the constituent that would finally receive the 'good vehicle'.

### Thematic Roles Assignment in Third Conditionals

The data in example (10) presents a case where the two verbs in the two clauses in a third conditional sentence have a common valency.

*Ka ne a-bed in, de a-tim-o gino mopogre*  
If Pst 1Sg-be 2Sg, would 1Sg-do-IND that thing differently.  
If I were you, I would do that thing differently

The conditional clause, *Ka ne abed in*, 'If I were you', presents what would be termed as an imaginary identity substitution in which the subject makes a hypothetical comparison and imagines that he could be someone else. In that context, both the subject, *a-*, 'I', and the object, *in*, 'you', are assigned the thematic role of being the experiencers because the subject hypothetically imagines being someone else while the object is also hypothetically substituted. The result clause, *de atimo gino mopogore*, 'I would do that thing differently', on the other hand has a different constituent configuration. In the preverbal position, is a subject, *a-*, 'I', which is assigned the role of an agent by the action verb, *timo*, 'do'. This action, is targeted at the object, *gino*, 'that thing', which is the patient or the theme of the clause. At the end of the clause is an adverbial modifier, an oblique element, which is not assigned any thematic role by the verb since it only expresses the manner of the action. Both verbs in the sentence select two arguments- the subject and the object arguments- with which they form dyadic argument structure.

### Thematic Roles Assignment in Mixed Conditionals

The data in examples (11a) and (11b) present the two clausal configurations that are possible with mixed conditionals and which arise from the variation in the temporal reference within the clauses: a past condition with a present result and a present condition with a past result.

a) *Ka ne a-som matek ka jo-moko, de koro a-dak maber ka gin*

If Pst 1Sg-study hard like people-some, would now 1Sg-live well like them

If I had studied hard like some people, I would be living well like them

Each of the verbs in each of the clauses in the data in example (11a) selects one obligatory argument and an oblique one. In the antecedent, the verb *ne...som*, 'studied', selects *a-* 'I', its subject and assigns it the thematic role of an agent because it is the intentional doer of the missed action. Immediately after the verb, is the word, *matek*, 'hard', an adverbial that describes the manner in which the action ought to have been executed. The remaining constituent, *ka jomoko*, 'like some people', a comparative phrase, is an oblique argument which is not assigned any thematic role. However, if it is assumed that these people did what the speaker wishes to have done, then it can be considered an agent. This is the implicit interpretation that is associated with the phrase, *ka jomoko*, 'like some people'. In the consequent the verb *de... dak*, 'would live', assigns the subject marker, *a-*, 'I', two thematic roles, depending on two possible interpretations. If *dak maber*, 'living well', is considered a change in one's living condition, then the role of *a-*, 'I', is an experiencer, the speaker expresses what, in his opinion, is the desirable living condition. On the other hand, if *dak maber*, 'living well', is perceived as the speaker's deliberate effort to live a good life then, the subject marker becomes an agent. In the post verbal position is the adjunct *maber*, 'well', whose function is to give a description of the kind of lifestyle wished for by the speaker. The pronominal element, *gin*, 'them', can also be assigned two thematic roles; an agent and an experiencer. As an agent, they are perceived to have done something that led to their living well while as an experiencer, they would be considered as enjoying or experiencing 'good life'. The data in (11b), is a second manifestation of a mixed conditional sentence:

b) *Ka a-ng'e namba-ne mar simo, de a-gocho-ne*

If 1Sg-know number-POSS for phone, would 1Sg-call-APPL

If I knew his phone number, I would call him

In (11b), the verb, *ng'e*, 'knew', encodes a mental process of 'knowing' which then assigns the subject of the sentence, *a-*, 'I', the role of an experiencer because it is the state of 'knowing'. The verb also assigns the role of a theme to clause-final constituent, *nambane mar simo*, 'his phone number' as the entity that is affected by the 'knowing'. The verb, *gocho*, 'call', denotes an action and therefore leads to the assignment of roles different from those in the conditional clause. The subject argument, *a-*, 'I', is an agent while *ne*, 'him', the one that would receive the effects of the action can be assigned the role of a patient and a recipient because it is both a receiver and a target of the intended communication.

#### IV. Conclusion

Owing to its agglutinative nature, Dholuo has a unique constituent patterning. Some of these constituents are marked by morpheme while some by lexemes. The lexemes and the morphemes may occur together in a larger word complex with each of them performing a distinct grammatical role. In the antecedents the SVO ordering of constituents is noted. The past tense marker, however, precedes the subject, and the main verb. Similarly, in the consequents of all the conditional sentences in Dholuo, except in the zero conditionals, the modal auxiliary marker precedes the subject marker and the main verb.

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