

Alabama Learning Hour

Agent Verbs, Past Tense, “I” sentences

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1 Agent Verbs

- Many sentences are formed with the help of **verbs**—*words that describe actions, events, situations*. Consider (1)-(2):

(1) Ava danced. (2) Ava saw a dog.

- There are some important phrases that verbs need to combine with in order to form sentences! We will call such phrases **arguments**.

- *Ava* in (1) is an argument of the verb *dance*.
- *Ava* in (2) is an argument of the verb *see*.
- *A dog* in (2) is an argument of the verb *see*.

- Verbs can’t live without their arguments!
- Just like in English, Alabama has verbs, and they take arguments:

(3) Avak bitliti. (4) Avak ifan hiichati.
Ava danced Ava dog saw

★Q: What are the verbs in (3)-(4)? What are their arguments?

★Q: What curious things can you notice about (3)-(4)?

- Verbs differ in how many arguments they take:
 - *danced* and *bitliti* want 1 argument—the one who’s dancing
 - *saw* and *hiichati* want 2 arguments—the seer and the one that’s seen

You might notice that there’s something similar about the phrases that are arguments of the verbs: all of them contain an element “a” (known in linguistics as *article*, or *determiner*), followed by a **noun** (*girl*, *dog*). These phrases are called **noun phrases**, or **nominal phrases**. Verbs take noun phrases as their arguments—phrases they can’t live without.

Verbs that take 1 argument are called **intransitive** verbs, verbs that take 2 arguments are called **transitive** verbs.

- Arguments differ in what role they play in the event described by the verb:

- (5) **Agents**
are arguments that describe individuals who are actively, volitionally, with intent perform in the action/event/situation.
- (6) **Patients**
are arguments that describe individuals that are passive undergoers—the action/event/situation just happens to them (*they don't have a say!*).
- (7) Ava danced.
AGENT
- (8) Ava saw a dog.
AGENT PATIENT

Linguists call roles like Agent and Patient **thematic roles**, or **theta-roles** (sometimes abbreviated as θ -roles). Agent and Patient are not the only roles that there are! We'll see some others later. Theta-roles is something that noun phrases have.

- We see Agents and Patients in Alabama too:

- (9) Avak bitliti.
Ava danced
AGENT
- (10) Avak ifan hiichati.
Ava dog saw
AGENT PATIENT

- What we'll discuss today is Agent Verbs:

- (11) **Agent Verbs**
are verbs that take 1 argument, and it is an Agent

<u>Examples of Alabama Agent Verbs</u>			
Verb	Translation	Verb	Translation
bitli	dance	ilakomayli	swim
afaaka	laugh, smile	chiyahli	walk
hompani	play	maawayali	wave at a distance

- When we list verbs, we use their **dictionary forms**—the forms you will find in the dictionary.

- (12) **Online Dictionary**
<https://alabamadictionary.github.io/>

- Let's circle back to the sentence with an Agent Verb we saw:

(13) **Avak** **bitliti**.
 Ava danced
 AGENT

★Q: What do you notice about the words in this sentence?

Agent Verb Sentence Easy Recipe

(14) [**Agent** + **k**] [**Verb** + **Tense**]
 [**Ava** + **k**] [**bitli** + **ti**]

- Add *-k* to the Agent argument.
- Add information about *when* the event/situation occurred: *-ti* for past.
- First put the Agent, then the Verb—and you're done!

Let's practice! How would you say this in Alabama?

- (15) a. Ava laughed.
 b. Ava played.
 c. Ava swam.
 d. Ava walked.
 e. Ava waved at a distance.

“Raccoon” in Alabama is *sawa*.

- (16) a. The raccoon laughed.
 b. The raccoon played.
 c. The raccoon swam.
 d. The raccoon walked.
 e. The raccoon waved at a distance.

“My friend” in Alabama is *amokla*.

- (17) a. My friend laughed.
 b. My friend played.
 c. My friend swam.
 d. My friend walked.
 e. My friend waved at a distance.

The recipe here is a simplification. More things might need to happen to the verb in many cases! But we will talk about this later.

Linguists call the small pieces that make up words (*Ava*, *k*, *bitli*, *ti*) **morphemes**. The morpheme that carries the core meaning of the word is called a **root**. In our example, *Ava* and *bitli* are roots. Morphemes that follow the root and supplement it with additional meaning are called **suffixes**.

You might wonder what is this “*k*” that we are attaching to *Ava*. This morpheme indicates that *Ava* is the subject of the sentence, the main figure. Morphemes like *k* that attach to nouns are called **cases**. Cases like *-k*, which indicate that noun phrases are subjects, are called **Nominative**.

2 Past Tense *-ti/hchõ*: What did she do yesterday?

- Many languages care a lot about whether something is a **statement** or a **question**! Consider English:

(18) Ava danceded. (19) Did Ava dance?

- When we talk about past in Alabama, we add different pieces to the verb depending on whether we are making a statement or asking a question.

Agent Verb Sentence in Past Tense *-ti/hchõ* Easy Recipe

(20) **Statement**

[**Agent** + **k**] [Verb + **-ti**].

Ava-k bitli-**ti**.
'Ava danced'.

Piyaaka Ava-k bitli-**ti**.
'Yesterday Ava danced'.

(21) **Question**

[**Agent** + **k**] [Verb + **-hchõ**]?

Ava-k bitli-**hchõ**?
'Did Ava dance?'

Piyaaka Ava-k bitli-**hchõ**?
'Did Ava dance yesterday?'

- Add *-k* to the Agent argument.
- If you're making a statement about the past, add *-ti* to the verb.
- If you're asking a question about the past, add *hchõ* to the verb.
- First put the Agent, then the Verb—and you're done!

- 'Yesterday' in Alabama is *piyaaka*.
- 'Yes' in Alabama is *ay* (pronounced as in: hey!).

Let's practice with a partner! *How would you say this in Alabama?*

- (22) Q: Did Ava laugh?
A: Yes, Ava laughed.
- (23) Q: Did the raccoon play yesterday?
A: Yes, the raccoon played yesterday.
- (24) Q: Did your friend (*chimokla*) wave at a distance?
A: Yes, my friend (*amokla*) waved at a distance.
- (25) Q: Did Ava swim yesterday?
A: Yes, Ava swam yesterday.
- (26) Q: Did the dog (*ifa*) run (*waliika*)?
A: Yes, the dog ran.
- (27) Q: Did Ava play yesterday?
A: Yes, Ava played yesterday.
- (28) Q: Did the child (*poskoosi*) laugh?
A: Yes, the child laughed.
- (29) Q: Did the dog (*ifa*) bark (*wohka*) yesterday?
A: Yes, the dog barked yesterday.
- (30) Q: Did the fish (*łalo*) swim?
A: Yes, the fish swam.
- (31) Q: Did your friend (*chimokla*) play yesterday?
A: Yes, my friend (*amokla*) played yesterday.
- (32) Q: Did the deer (*icho*) run (*waliika*) yesterday?
A: Yes, the deer ran yesterday.

Some New Alabama Nouns

Noun	Translation	Noun	Translation
sawa	raccoon	łalo	fish
okla	friend	icho	deer
ifa	dog	poskoosi	child

Some New Alabama Verbs

Verb	Translation	Verb	Translation
waliika	run	wohka	bark

3 Talking about myself: *What did I do yesterday?*

- In many languages, verbs tell us who their arguments are. Consider:

(33) I dance. I am happy. (34) Ava dances. Ava is happy.

- This process is called **agreement**. The verb *agrees* with its argument, and shows us what kind of an individual it refers to.

Agent Verb Sentence in Past Tense -ti/hchō Easy Recipe for “I”

(35) **Statement**

[(**anok**)] [Verb + **-li** + **-ti**].

(Anok) bitli-**li**-ti. Piyaaka (anok) bitli-**li**-ti.
'I danced'. 'Yesterday I danced'.

(36) **Question**

[(**anok**)] [Verb + **-li** + **-hchō**]?

(Anok) bitli-**li**-hchō? Piyaaka (anok) bitli-**li**-hchō?
'Did I dance?' 'Did I dance yesterday?'

- When the subject of a sentence is a speaker ('I'), we can use the word *anok*. As you might notice, there is a *-k* at the end of it.
- Unlike in English, using the subject is optional (*indicated by “()*”) in Alabama when it refers to the speaker—the verb will tell us who we’re talking about!
- **To speak about yourself ('I...'), add *-li* to the verb to mark that the sentence is about *the speaker*.**
- Then if you’re making a statement, add *-ti* to the verb to mark *past tense*.
- And if you’re asking a question, add *hchō* to the verb to mark *past tense*.
- You can optionally express the subject (*anok*), but you need to say the verb with the two pieces attached to it—and then you’re done!

Let's recall what 'T' did yesterday! *How would you say this in Alabama?*

- (37) Q: Did I laugh yesterday?
A: Yes, I laughed yesterday.
- (38) Q: Did I dance yesterday?
A: Yes, I danced yesterday.
- (39) Q: Did I walk yesterday?
A: Yes, I walked.
- (40) Q: Did I bark yesterday?
A: Yes, I barked.
- (41) Q: Did I play yesterday?
A: Yes, I played yesterday.
- (42) Q: Did I swim yesterday?
A: Yes, I swam yesterday.
- (43) Q: Did I run yesterday?
A: Yes, I ran yesterday.
- (44) Q: Did I wave at a distance yesterday?
A: Yes, I waved at a distance yesterday.

New Words

Verb	Translation	Verb	Translation
bitli	dance	ilakomayli	swim
afaaka	laugh, smile	chiyahli	walk
hompani	play	maawayaaali	wave at a distance
waliika	run	wohka	bark
Noun	Translation	Noun	Translation
sawa	raccoon	łato	fish
okla	friend	icho	deer
ifa	dog	poskoosi	child
Adverb	Translation	Particle	Translation
piyaaka	yesterday	ay	yes