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Abstract

The following is the (unedited) text of a so-called Student-Directed Assignment (SDA) devised whilst completing an MA in Medical Humanities at Durham University 2024-25. This assignment formed part of the module ‘Neurodiversity and the Humanities’, and, as per the module’s outline, ‘presents an opportunity for students to draw on their various strengths, backgrounds, and interests, to produce a piece of work that engages with an aspect of neurodiversity and its intersections with the humanities’. Structurally, an SDA comprises two parts: a creative component and a theoretical commentary.

This SDA here utilizes a **conlang as a research method** to demonstrate a central tenet of critical neurodiversity studies’ understanding of autism: that supposed autistic language deficits – pathologizing interpretations are unfortunately still part and parcel of autism discourse in media, medicine and academia – in reality constitute (language-dependent) **differences** from arbitrary normativity. The project’s creative component is a language guide titled ‘The Laut Language—a Beginner’s Guide’ (3000 words) that describes selected features from a conlang named *Laut*, developed specifically for this assignment. The guide is followed by a concise theoretical commentary (1000 words) that outlines why specific choices were made in the conlang, and how those relate to neurodiversity studies in general and the research question/aim in particular.

The research question/method’s location at the intersection of neurodiversity studies and linguistics together with the limited word count (4000 for both components combined) results in various limitations. The only limitations explicitly referenced in the theoretical commentary refer to conlangs as a research method *per se*, emphasizing that the conlang *Laut* is not necessarily intended to better reflect autistic experiences, but to make a point about the arbitrary nature of (neuro)normative language conventions. For space reasons, it was unfortunately not possible to elaborate on choices as regards the actual craft or art of conlanging in the theoretical commentary. Instead, the commentary briefly summarizes the areas where supposed autistic language deficits that the SDA challenges lie: echolalia, prosody, and pragmatics. It then also describes through which features the conlang addresses these deficits and how: firstly, reduplication as a feature mirrors (echoes..?) echolalia to show it cannot and should not be universally pathologized; secondly, eschewing prosody to convey information structure challenges the pathologization of atypical prosody; thirdly and finally, a grammaticalized way of expressing information structure as well as the explicit grammaticalization of specific implicatures of utterances is intended to interrogate the notion that autistics are ‘pragmatically impaired’.

(400 words)

Author/conlanger's note

While I hope the abstract gives a good enough idea of the general premise of this project, it likely also makes clear that – academically – this assignment focused on neurodiversity studies, not linguistics. This is reflected in the text by the fact that neurodiversity-studies concepts are often introduced more tersely, as the readers (or rather correctors!) could be assumed to be familiar with them, unlike concepts from linguistics, which I explained in more detail, assuming a reader that is a complete novice in linguistics. I also had to contend with a very limited word count, and thus ended up gradually reducing the complexity of the conlang to be able to sufficiently explain my chosen grammatical features. Even in the language guide, we see only brief glimpses of the actual conlang *Laut* by way of shortened and simplified examples and explanations. I'm certain some conlangers will shudder at how often I prioritized simplicity over naturalism; one could also take issue with the numerous times an explanation stays on the surface level for the sake of comprehensibility, while (regular or irregular) complexity might loom underneath, just out of sight! But who knows – I might receive funding someday to return to the lovely land of *Laut* and then provide a more profound analysis...¹

Author/conlanger's bio

Gideon (he/him) is a multiply neurodivergent/disabled translator and (somewhat) mature student of Medical Humanities originally from Germany, now living near Edinburgh, Scotland. His research interests focus on the intersection of neurodiversity and language(s) in the broadest sense, including literature, linguistics, translation studies and cross-cultural concepts, with his dissertation covering the topic 'Constructing Neurodivergence Through Language(s): Exploring Neurodivergence and Linguistics in Two Speculative Fiction Novels' based on the case studies *PET* by Akwaeke Emezi and *Native Tongue* by Suzette Haden Elgin. Gideon sometimes writes weird and/or speculative fiction under the pen name Gregory Lawrence, which – like his socials – can be found at: <https://linktr.ee/gregory.lawrence>

¹ Should any among you be vested with the power to allocate funding for PhD projects for the academic year 2026-27, I would be very pleased to hear from you by email!

The Laut Language—a Beginner's Guide

Introduction

So you've decided to tour the lovely land of *Laut*, and want to learn the language.

You've got the right book then!

Contrary to what our competitors' guidebooks would suggest, learning *Laut* is not possible using just a few select phrases. You need to learn the language in context and understand how words, phrases, sentences are formed. Luckily, once you know *Laut*, you won't need to make as many inferences from context—difficult at the best of times, more so in a different language/culture, and near-disastrous in *Laut*, where it's considered rude to expect a someone to read your mind about something you've not said!

A few words about this guide's structure:

Section I introduces how we'll present the language and some necessary basics. *Laut* writing is not explained here; we instead use transliterations in the Latin alphabet. If you're interested in reading/writing *Laut* script, please acquire the supplementary script guide—and godspeed! As in the other sections, we'll explain grammar with examples, so you can see the language correctly used in context.

Section II teaches you how to infuse sentences with your *intention*, the first of three crucial tenets of clarity of speech in *Laut*. You'll also learn the second clarity tenet—low hierarchies, reflected in an absence of different speech registers based on politeness.

Section III focuses on focus—pun intended—and information structure, the third and final tenet of *Laut* clarity.

Section IV is a recap, based on the multitude of meanings a single English sentence may have, and how each of the meanings must be made explicit in *Laut*.

Section V concludes this guide with useful tips.

Section I—Boring Essentials

Glossing

Since Laut is an agglutinative language², its words, especially verbs, can be long and comprise various *morphemes*³ (building blocks that each carry a specific meaning). So, in order to show you how to construct words, we gloss them: that means we split them into their respective morphemes, separated by hyphens. A period/full-stop between morphemes indicates multiple meanings are conveyed by a single morpheme.

Underneath, you'll find the sentence again, divided into the same sub-units of words, this time telling you the meaning of each. This line contains either translations of the morphemes into English or standardized abbreviations⁴ specifying the grammatical function. We will, however, explain any abbreviation used in this guide.

How Laut words work

Unfortunately, this isn't everything—there are some ground rules of grammar to cover, although we won't go into too much detail. We'll organize this short tour based on three basic parts of speech: nouns, adjectives and verbs.

Nouns

Let's start with the good news—nouns (words for things, people, concepts, etc.) are easy! They have only one form. For instance, <sa> means 'night'. But it can also mean 'nights' or 'the/a night's'—so you need to make even fewer changes to nouns than in English.

2. Keith Brown and Jim Miller, 'Agglutinative', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), doi:10.1017/CBO9781139049412.

3. Keith Brown and Jim Miller, 'Morpheme', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), doi:10.1017/CBO9781139049412.

4. 'The Leipzig Glossing Rules: Conventions for interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses', Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology—Department of Linguistics (2015), <<https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>> [accessed 14 January 2025].

Adjectives

Adjectives are similar to nouns, though there is one change they can undergo: so-called (*full*) *reduplication*⁵, which means the word is repeated in its entirety. This usually intensifies the adjective. An example: <tol> means ‘good’, <tol-tol> means ‘great’!

Verbs

Now for the bad news: verbs are tricky. But they allow you to express yourself with less ambiguity than English—a bold claim, but by the end of this guide you’ll likely agree! So how do we form a verb in Laut?

To begin with, things aren’t that different from English. First, we need a verb stem. For an English verb, we have e.g. the infinitive ‘to do’, and the verb stem ‘do’. This is the foundation for building the verb. We saw above how adjectives can reduplicate in Laut; verb stems can also do this, where it then indicates either also an intensification, or that the action took place continuously/repeatedly (e.g. <ba-ba> means ‘to be doing something’ or ‘to do something repeatedly or forcefully’).

In English, you also add things to the stem to produce forms such as ‘doing’ or ‘does’. And when talking about something in the past, you sometimes add something—such as ‘live’ => ‘lived’—and sometimes use a different stem, which is unpredictable and you have to just learn, as with our example ‘do’ => ‘did’.

In Laut, you also have two stems: one is called the *indicative* stem, the other is called the *subjunctive* stem. The latter is often unpredictable. We suggest learning both stems for each verb. With our example ‘do’, the indicative stem is <ba>, and the subjunctive stem is <bo>.

Why two stems? Laut verbs are divided into two different *moods*: yes, indicative and

5. Carl Rubino, ‘Chapter Reduplication’, in *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, ed. by Matthew Dryer and Martin Haspelmath, 2013 <<https://wals.info/chapter/27>> [accessed 12 January 2025]

subjunctive. Technically, this also holds true for English (there’s a subjunctive e.g. in ‘Wish you **were** here’), although it isn’t really common anymore. In Laut, however, this works quite differently.

You use the *indicative* mood when just relaying things without further implications or any other intention than to inform. You use the Laut subjunctive if you want to infuse the sentence with a so-called *intention*—this being the term used in the study of Laut language and culture (*Lautistics*). Its meaning is not much different from the common interpretation of the word *intention*—but here, it always refers to one of three specific grammatical forms, which you’ll learn in Section II.

Our first glossed mini-dialogue

For our first mini-dialogue, however, we’ll stay in the indicative. We already know <ba> (subjunctive: <bo>) means ‘to do’, but it’s also used in the expression ‘to have a good night’ in Laut: <sa tol ba>.

Mini-dialogue:

- <Bil baila sa tol vo?>
- <En bana sa tol-tol!>

Gloss:

Bil	ba-il-a	sa	tol	vo?
you	have-you*-PST**	night	good	?***

En	ba-n-a	sa	tol-tol!
I	have-I-PST	night	good-REDUP****

*The grammar of how persons (‘I’, ‘you’) are incorporated into the verb is complicated. Part of it is outlined later.

**Past tense.

*** A ? in glosses indicates the relevant word—here <vo>—conveys a question.

****Reduplication (see above).

Translation:

- 'Did you have a good night?'
- 'I had a great night!'

We hope you could follow along with the glosses. Don't worry about the word order for now; we'll get to that sooner than you'd like!

Section II—Intentions

By far the most common thing you'll want to express at first is that you haven't understood what someone has said. Laut doesn't use prosody⁶ or intonation as English does, which may make Laut sound flat to you, so you could find it harder to follow. One positive before we get into it: Laut society has flat hierarchies, reflected in there being no different speech registers based on politeness. You won't need to learn anything like *Duzen* versus *Siezen* in German or *tu* versus *vous* in French⁷!

Since there's no prosody, Laut expresses things conveyed by prosody in English—such as the sentence's focus (cf. following section), or the speaker's attitude/*intention*—in the form a word takes. This means there is no one way to say 'I don't understand!'—it depends on what you intend to achieve with it. Infuse the sentence with no or an inaccurate *intention*, and you may sound unnatural, incomprehensible or rude!

In Lautistics, these grammaticalized *intentions*—which, remember, use the subjunctive stem—are called the *(ego-)intensive* (not to be confused with the term *intention*, which covers all three), *hortative* and *mirative*, respectively. The *(ego-)intensive* conveys that the speaker themselves intends to do something about what they state in the sentence, the *hortative* expresses an expectation that the addressee will do something about it, and the *mirative*—the odd one out—just has the intention of telling the listener the speaker is surprised by the sentence contents or feels strongly about them.

Let's try it—our new word is <lal> 'to understand' (subjunctive: <lou>):

6 Keith Brown and Jim Miller, 'Prosody', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), doi:10.1017/CBO9781139049412.

7 Johannes Helmbrecht, 'Chapter Politeness Distinctions in Pronouns', in *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online* <<https://wals.info/chapter/45>> [accessed 11 January 2025]

Glossed sentence:

<En loukun!>

En	lou-ku-n!
I	understand.SBJV-not-I

Translation:

'I don't understand'

This sentence belongs to one of the subjunctive intentions, which can be recognized by the subjunctive (*SBJV*) stem <lou>.

If the subjunctive stem is used without either of the morphemes <u-> or <pi-> at the start of the word, this expresses the hortative. In this case, you're saying that you don't understand the other person, and they should do something about it—that is, repeat themselves, or speak more slowly. The other person may ask you what specifically it is you need, or just make an effort based on their best guess.

Let's just take a brief look at the two other intentions, formed by prefixing <u-> and <pi-> respectively (without glosses).

<En piloukun!>

This sentence using the (*ego-*)*intensive* prefix <pi-> means you will do something about it yourself—maybe getting a dictionary out, or an interpreter from somewhere. This isn't too likely to be useful on your travels. But if you're lucky enough to have a native Laut teacher, you might say that to tell them you don't understand the materials (yet), but will do more studying soon!

<En uloukun!>

The mirative uses the prefix <u-> (likely grammaticalized from an exclamation like 'ooh!') and expresses surprise/strong feeling. You would use this here if you'd strongly expected otherwise. Maybe you'd previously understood the person—but now they might be drunk, slurring their speech.

'Yes' in Laut

Saying 'yes' to something is a fair bit more difficult in Laut than in English and can further illustrate how Laut intentions work. The word for 'yes' is formed from the verb stem <ma> (SBJV: <mo>), meaning 'to be true'. It undergoes the same grammatical changes according to mood and intention as outlined above.

Let's look at the following dialogue (with new vocabulary):

Vocabulary:

<zig> (SBJV: <zub>) 'to be tired'

<ha> (SBJV: <hom>) 'to thank someone'

<tett> (SBJV: <bot>) 'to make'

Dialogue:

- <Pizubil vo?>
- <Mo.>
- (...)
- <Koffi botikka.>
- <Pihomen!>

Gloss:

Pi-zub-il	vo?
INT-be.tired.SBJV-you	?

Mo.
Be.true. HORT

(...)

Koffi	bot-ikk-a.
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Coffee	make. HORT -it-PST.
--------	----------------------------

Pi-hom-en.
INT -thank-I.

Translation:

‘Are you tired [and can I do something]?’

‘Yes [please do something].’

...

‘I’ve made coffee [take it].’

‘Thank you [I will].’

In this dialogue, all verb forms—including the words for ‘yes’ and ‘thank you’—express the speaker’s intentions/expectations with regards to their conversation partner. This is marked grammatically—the relevant glossing abbreviations, INT for (ego-)intentionive (‘I’ll do something about it!’) and HORT for hortative (‘Please do something!’) are highlighted in boldface above. In the English translation of the dialogue, potential translations/explanations of the implied meanings are added in square brackets. Please note this is just for clarity, and not how this should actually be translated—it might be unnatural or even rude in English, while in Laut the corresponding verb forms encoding intention/expectation are the natural way, even grammatically necessary. You’ll also notice Laut sentences can consist of only a verb, and nouns/pronouns may be dropped. As for the use of ‘it’ (referring to the coffee) in the gloss of the third sentence’s verb—we’ll look at this in the next section after a brief detour!

Section III—Focus

Above, you've learned that you need to infuse the Laut verb with an intention (if you have one) and how to do that. Now it's time to learn how to encode information structure.

This might be tricky, too, because in English we primarily do it by prosody, such as stress/intonation—in writing, a word can also be emphasized by underlining, which we'll do in this section for clarity.

Information structure refers to how a language handles the so-called common ground of the conversation—what is assumed to be known by all conversation partners⁸—and the new information, called the *focus*⁹. Often, a piece of common ground is introduced as the *topic* of the sentence—what the sentence is about. This can be the same as the sentence subject, but doesn't have to. However, in English, they're mostly the same, and speakers often resort to means such as intonation or a passive to shuffle things around. Let's look at some English examples to make this clearer!

'The dog bit that man.'

The topic as well as subject of the sentence is 'the dog'—we can see from use of the definite article (which may, however, also be used for other means!) that the addressee is assumed to know which dog this is; it's part of the common ground. The sentence may be neutral as to information structure if there is no particular intonation. Otherwise, intonation may highlight the new information, the focus: either the act of biting or the dog's victim, depending on whether 'bit' or 'that man' is stressed.

'The dog bit that man.'

'The dog bit that man.'

8. Manfred Krifka and Renate Musan, 'Information structure: Overview and linguistic issues', in *The Expression of Information Structure* (De Gruyter Mouton, 2012), ed. by Manfred Krifka and Renate Musan, pp. 1-44 (p. 1), doi:10.1515/9783110261608.1.

9. Georges Rebuschi and Laurice Tuller, *The Grammar of Focus* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), p. 9.

It would also be possible to stress ‘the dog’ to make it the focus, or to achieve a similar effect by using the passive, though intonation then allows different options again:

‘The man was bitten by that dog.’

‘The man was bitten by that dog.’

Naturally, this is far from a complete overview, and only serves the purpose of showing how Laut differs—similar to the *intentions*—in its encoding of this: it does so explicitly, contrary to English, where it may be difficult to deduce what exactly is emphasized in a sentence, especially if one has trouble hearing slight changes in prosody, or the sentence is only available in writing.

Luckily, the way Laut does so is very simple: the word order in a sentence is determined strictly by information structure. Regardless of what the subject or object of the sentence is—i.e. who does something to whom—the basic Laut word order is:

Topic—Verb—Focus*

*There is also a more complicated word order for more complex sentences, where e.g. the topic/focus is neither subject nor object and there are also a subject and object in the sentence; in that case, subjects generally come before objects, and an optional topic marker can be used before the topic. This is only mentioned for completeness, and too complex to cover here.

How do we know then who does something to whom—i.e. what the sentence’s subject/object is? The answer is the same as for encoding intentions: this is marked on the verb, which agrees in person with the sentence *topic*.

This means you have to look at whether there is a topic, and then select the relevant building block from Table 1. There’s one row for ‘default’, and one for ‘*DO*’, the abbreviation for ‘Direct Object’—the latter is used when the focus is the direct object of the sentence (e.g. ‘the man’ in ‘The dog bit the man.’), and the default otherwise.

Table 1: morphemes for marking the topic in a verb (singular only)

	Default	DO
1SG (I/me)	(e)n	(i)tt
2SG (you)	(b)il	la
3SG (he/she/it)	ek	(i)kk

Example sentence:

<Voavu saskeka nam.>

Gloss:

Voavu	sask-ek-a	nam.
dog.TOP*	bite-3SG.TOP*-PST	man

* Topic

Translation:

‘It was that/a man that got bitten by the dog!’

The topic of the sentence—assumed to be common ground—is ‘the dog’, and the focus/new information is ‘a/the man’. The topic marker in the verb is 3SG (he/she/it) and further makes clear that the dog bit the man and not the other way round (the topic marker from the DO columns would otherwise be used). For this example, it’s even possible to use a strategy in English that clarifies the sentence focus, though it is very marked and uses the passive (cf. Translation). The following section will hopefully help clarify how to use topic/focus correctly.

Section IV—Multitude of Meanings

Now we'll look at a single English sentence and the various ways it could be translated into Laut to practice the shades of meaning you've learned so far.

The English sentence is:

'It's getting a bit chilly...'

Vocabulary:

<qalet> 'cold'

<ni> (SBJV: <mu>) 'to get/become'

Translations plus glosses and explanations:

<*Nini qalet.*>

Ni-ni	qalet.
get-REDUP	cold.FOC

Indicative and neutral (i.e. no encoded) intention, but 'cold' is in the sentence's focus position; thus, it's new information that's emphasized. Also note how verb stem reduplication is used to mark a continuous action ('it's getting') here.

<*Qalet mumuek.*>

Qalet	mu-mu-ek.
Cold.TOP	get.HORT-REDUP-3SG

'It's getting cold', where 'cold' is the topic, so it's assumed the addressee also experiences it—and the hortative means the addressee should do something about it, e.g. shut the window or lend the speaker a jumper.

<Qalet pimumuek.>

Qalet	pi-mu-mu-ek.
Cold.TOP	INT-get-REDUP-3SG

This has the same meaning as above, but the (ego-)intensive expresses the speaker will do something about it—shut the window, get a jumper....

<Umumu qalet!>

U-mu-mu	qalet!
MIR-get-REDUP	cold.FOC

The speaker (or maybe addressee) didn't think it would be cold, but now it's getting cold! 'Cold' is marked by position as focus—new/surprising information—while, in the sentences above, 'cold' was the topic. In connection with the mirative, this implies the speaker might've expected it to get warmer, not colder.

Final Tips

This is the end of the first volume, but your journey's just begun! Here are some final tips:

- ✓ Always ask yourself what you intend to say with an English sentence before translating it!
- ✓ Never worry about repairing the sentence/communication by adding afterwards that you should have included an intention, and state that intention then—this isn't rude, but helpful!
- ✓ Feel free to ask what exactly you're supposed to do if a Laut speaker has used the hortative form in a sentence, but you don't know what they expect from you—Lautans love clarity!
- ✓ Don't forget to check out the supplements to this guide and buy the next volume asap!

Theoretical Commentary

Part I—Introduction

This SDA commentary comprises three parts. This introduction summarizes research question and aim, medium, methodology and research gap in individual sections. Part II explains how the guide contents relate to the research aim, followed by a conclusion.

Research Question

Difficulties in cross-neurotype communication (CNC) are often attributed to autistic people's communicative deficits¹⁰ in the pathology paradigm¹¹, whereas the neurodiversity paradigm sees the reason in a mismatch in dispositions, with blame usually assigned to the autistic conversation partner; this is called the double-empathy problem (DEP)¹².

This SDA aims to demonstrate how the DEP manifests in CNC from a linguistic viewpoint by reframing CNC as cross-cultural communication, using a constructed language (*conlang*) named *Laut*, presented based on a fictional language book (*guide*).

Methodology

The guide highlights differences between Laut and English, standing in for differences between autistic and neurotypical communication, thus portrayed as intercultural differences. It thereby refutes CNC difficulties are based on autistic deficits, showing they are instead due to language-use differences/norms, and accommodations are possible and helpful for both parties, as practised in cross-cultural communication, which is successful where it

10. American Psychiatric Association (APA), *Neurodevelopmental Disorders: DSM-5® Selections* (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2015), p. 23.

11. Nick Walker, *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities* (Autonomous Press, 2021), p. 18.

12. Damian Milton, 'On the ontological status of autism: the 'double empathy problem'', *Disability & Society*, 27.6 (2012), pp. 883-887, doi:/10.1080/09687599.2012.710008.

entails accommodations¹³.

Medium

A conlang is ideal to interrogate neuronormative communication because many normative preconceptions are built into language and thus invisible. Investigating CNC dynamics using a natural language¹⁴ (*natlang*) is stymied by the language’s cultural baggage, history and norms, an obstacle avoided by a conlang.

However, there are limitations. The creator’s background always colours the conlang, despite e.g. this conlang’s focus on non-Anglophone features. Furthermore, the SDA aspires not to create a language for autistics to use—such an attempt at a feminist conlang failed¹⁵—but to use the conlang to highlight real-world CNC dynamics. The understanding of these dynamics is based primarily on Gemma Williams’ 2024 book¹⁶, a well-researched, up-to-date, neurodiversity-affirming overview of CNC from a linguistic viewpoint.

Gap

While not much research is available on conlangs, the value of a conlang to convey lived experience has been documented, and conlangs incorporating marginalized people’s experience like Láadan (female experience)¹⁷ and Saandic (transmasculine experience)¹⁸ are known. However, no scholarly papers on conlangs and autism are available, nor do any of the conlang papers from the bibliography mention *autism* or *neurodiversity*. Likewise, neurodiversity studies have not yet considered conlangs, and there is a research gap regarding

13. Gemma Williams, *Understanding Others in a Neurodiverse World: A Radical Perspective on Communication and Shared Meaning* (Pavilion, 2024), pp. 111-116.

14. ‘Natural Language’, Cambridge Dictionary, [n. d.]

<<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/natural-language>> [accessed 14 January 2025]

15. Christine Schreyer, ‘Constructed Languages’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2021, pp. 327–44 (p. 337), doi:10.1146/annurev-anthro-101819-110152.

16. Williams, *Understanding Others in a Neurodiverse World*.

17. Schreyer, ‘Constructed Languages’, p. 332.

18. Schreyer, ‘Constructed Languages’, p. 332.

the intersection of neurodiversity and conlangs.

Part II—Guide Choices

Language differences

This section outlines autistic communication deficits cited in pathology-based research¹⁹ and how the guide reflects them as differences between *Laut* and English to demonstrate they are language-dependent and relative to (arbitrary) normativity.

The SDA is theory-agnostic as to the differences’ origins, and, for reasons of parsimony, does not elucidate other domains of *Laut*.

Echolalia

The pathology paradigm defines *echolalia*, a common feature of autistic speech, as meaningless repetition of another’s words requiring treatment²⁰. Neurodiversity-affirming research²¹ challenges this; a 2024 scoping review concludes echolalia is not meaningless and fulfils a communicative function²², confirmed by lived-experience-based research²³.

Laut echoes this by using *reduplication*—repetition—to convey meaning²⁴, which is not typologically unusual in languages worldwide²⁵. This constitutes a realistic incorporation

19. Kristen Schroeder, ‘Linguistic markers of autism spectrum conditions in narratives: A comprehensive analysis’, *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, 8 (2023), pp. 1-15 (pp. 5-6), doi:10.1177/23969415231168557.

20. Catherine Blackburn, ‘A systematic review of interventions for echolalia in autistic children’, *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 58 (2023), pp. 1977–1993, doi:10.1111/1460-6984.12931.

21. Eli Cohn and Matthew Harrison and Keith McVilly, ‘Let me tell you, I see echolalia as being a part of my son’s identity’: Exploring echolalia as an expression of neurodiversity from a parental perspective’, *Autism* 28.5 (2023), doi:10.1177/13623613231195795.

22. Sally Ryan and Jacqueline Roberts and Wendi Beamish, ‘Echolalia in Autism: A Scoping Review’, *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 71.5 (2024), pp. 831-846 (p. 842), doi:10.1080/1034912X.2022.2154324.

23. Eli Cohn and Matthew Harrison and Keith McVilly, ‘Let me tell you, I see echolalia as being a part of my son’s identity’: Exploring echolalia as an expression of neurodiversity from a parental perspective’, *Autism* 28.5 (2023), doi:10.1177/13623613231195795.

24. Sharon Inkelas and Laura Downing, ‘What is Reduplication? Typology and Analysis Part 1/2: The Typology of Reduplication’, *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 9.12 (2015), pp. 502-515 (p. 502), doi:10.1111/lnc3.12166.

25. Rubino, ‘Chapter Reduplication’.

of an autistic speech atypicality, demonstrating it not only can have meaning, but is similar to a widespread grammatical feature, underscoring the comparison between CNC and cross-cultural communication.

Prosody

A frequently-cited autistic characteristic is atypical prosody²⁶. Recent research, however, shows wide inter-autistic variation²⁷ contrary to²⁸ stereotypical monotone²⁹.

Given this variation, Laut reflects atypical prosody by eschewing use of prosody to express meaning, unlike English³⁰. Prosody-related misunderstandings are thus avoided regardless of how prosody manifests individually. This demonstrates prosody is not universally necessary to express meaning, and atypical prosody is not a universal communication deficiency.

Pragmatics

Laut differs most significantly from English in pragmatics, i.e. the meaning of language in context³¹. Three such differences are detailed in subsections below.

The prominence of pragmatics here echoes the importance afforded to autistics' supposed literalness in discourse, education³², and research^{33,34}, since pragmatics may refer

26. Joanne McCann and Sue Peppé, 'Prosody in autism spectrum disorders: a critical review', *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 38.4 (2003), pp. 325-350 (p. 325), doi:10.1080/1368282031000154204.

27. Megumi Hisaizumi and Digby Tantam, 'Enhanced sensitivity to pitch perception and its possible relation to language acquisition in autism', *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, 9 (2024), pp. 1-20, doi:10.1177/23969415241248618.

28. Williams, *Understanding Others in a Neurodiverse World*, p. 69.

29. Lisa Edelson-Fries, 'Monotone', in *Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, ed. by Fred Volkmar, (Springer Science+Business Media, 2024).

30. Susanne Winkler, 'The information structure of English', in *The Expression of Information Structure* (De Gruyter Mouton, 2012), ed. by Manfred Krifka and Renate Musan, pp. 71-94, doi:10.1515/9783110261608.71.

31. Williams, *Understanding Others in a Neurodiverse World*, p. 30.

32. 'Taking things literally', Open University, [n.d.]

<<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=66948§ion=2.3>> [accessed 11 January 2025]

33. Olga Bogdashina, *Communication issues in autism and Asperger syndrome: do we speak the same language?*, p. 112 (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005).

34. Agustín Vicente and Christian Michel and Valentina Petrolini, 'Literalism in Autistic People: a

to intentional meanings beyond the literal³⁵, called *implicatures*³⁶.

Registers

The first briefly-mentioned difference is that there are no hierarchy-based speech registers³⁷, in line with autistics' strong sense of fairness³⁸.

Implicatures

Laut encodes implicatures by requiring the verb to indicate the existence of a so-called *intention*—beyond the informative—and the intention's nature, expressed as one of three categories of *intentions* detailed in the guide. The terms *mirative*³⁹ and *hortative*⁴⁰ are taken from similar concepts in natlangs, though here, they—like intention—refer solely to the specific Laut concept; *ego-intentive* was specifically coined.

Requiring a speaker to indicate these implicatures highlights how language-dependent/arbitrary the expectation implicatures always be understood is, and the absurdity of diagnosing a communicative deficit if this fails; the conlang inverses this dynamic by considering not making explicit such implicatures inappropriate/ungrammatical.

Information structure

The guide details the concept, for the sake of comprehensibility simplifying somewhat⁴¹. English uses primarily prosody to express information structure, which may cause misunderstandings in CNC and generally, particularly where prosody is not

Predictive Processing Proposal', *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 2023, doi:10.1007/s13164-023-00704-x.

35. Chris Cummins, *Pragmatics*, p. 8 (Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

36. Williams, *Understanding Others in a Neurodiverse World*, p. 33.

37. Helmbrecht, 'Chapter Politeness Distinctions in Pronouns'.

38. Alicja Nocon, Amanda Roestorf and Luz Gutiérrez Menéndez, 'Positive psychology in neurodiversity: An investigation of character strengths in autistic adults in the United Kingdom in a community setting', *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 99 (2022), p. 1, doi:10.1016/j.rasd.2022.102071.

39. Alexandra Aikhenvald, 'The essence of mirativity', *Linguistic Typology*, 16.3 (2012), pp. 435-485, doi:10.1515/lity-2012-0017.

40. David Crystal, *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 232.

41. Manfred Krifka and Renate Musan, 'Information structure: Overview and linguistic issues', in *The Expression of Information Structure*, ed. by Krifka and Musan, pp. 1-44 (p. 5), doi:10.1515/9783110261608.1.

indicated/perceived.

In Laut, this barrier is removed by handling information structure exclusively through grammatical means, detailed in the guide.

Final sections

Two final guide sections synthesize the information. The first recap section is based on an English example from Williams' book⁴², illustrating one sentence's manifold interpretations that must be clarified in Laut. This demonstrates explicit clarity can be of general benefit, since neuronormative English communication is often rife with ambiguities.

Conclusion

The SDA aim is not showcasing a superior language, but rather demonstrating language is always a tool, and none can be perfect for all needs. Therefore, the SDA's crucial conclusion is reflected in two final tips from the guide: focussing on accommodations/repair strategies is essential wherever miscommunication is likely, be that in CNC or cross-cultural communication. To again use the cultural diversity metaphor, we should foster a *neurocosmopolitan*⁴³ attitude: openness towards divergent bodyminds, like towards other cultures.

42. Williams, *Understanding Others in a Neurodiverse World*, p. 37.

43. Walker, *Neuroqueer Heresies*, pp. 72-79.

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