

Abstract – Verbal Morphology in Yelmek

This paper will present some unique characteristics of the verbal morphology of Wanam Yelmek, the northern-most variety of the Yelmek-Maklew family spoken on the Indonesian side of New Guinea.

Yelmek's verbal morphology shows distributed exponences, like many other Southern New Guinea languages (Evans et al. 2018: 647, Carroll 2017, Olsson 2017). The inflectional value of a given form is distributed over several markers and can only be determined if all the markers of an inflected form are taken into consideration. In addition Yelmek has a typologically very rare way of marking gender on the verb; the only agreement target for gender of both subject and object is the verb. Other agreement targets such as articles and pronouns agree in number but do not show any gender distinction. There is no overt marking of gender in nouns either. The exponence of gender agreement with the object is non-concatenative, and is expressed by stem changes or even full suppletion of the verb stem. Consider the elicited examples¹ in 1 and 2 for the verb 'to hit'.

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|-------|---|---------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| 1) a. | <i>omgo wut -nek</i> | <i>omgo baha -nek -i</i> | <i>ba</i> | <i>apnge</i> <i>-pn</i> |
| | person small -ATTR.SG | person big -ATTR.SG -ACC | FUT | hit.fOBJ -3SG.M.IRR |
| | 'The small man will hit the big woman.' | | | |
| b. | <i>omgo wut -nek</i> | <i>omgo baha -nek -i</i> | <i>ba</i> | <i>pliang</i> <i>-pn</i> |
| | person small -ATTR.SG | person big -ATTR.SG -ACC | FUT | hit.mOBJ -3SG.M.IRR |
| | 'The small man will hit the big man.' | | | |
| 2) a. | <i>omgo wut -nek</i> | <i>omgo baha -nek -i</i> | <i>ba</i> | <i>pliang</i> <i>-pa</i> |
| | person small -ATTR.SG | person big -ATTR.SG -ACC | FUT | hit.mOBJ -3SG.F.IRR |
| | 'The small woman will hit the big man.' | | | |
| b. | <i>omgo wut -nek</i> | <i>omgo baha -nek -i</i> | <i>ba</i> | <i>apnge</i> <i>-pa</i> |
| | person small -ATTR.SG | person big -ATTR(SG) -ACC | FUT | hit.fOBJ -3SG.F.IRR |
| | 'The small woman will hit the big woman.' | | | |

In examples 1a and 1b the subject is male. The gender of the subject is visible in the inflection ending on the verb /-pn/. The gender of the object however is only visible in the choice of stem form. In 1a the object is female, therefore the feminine form of the stem /apnge/ is used, whereas in 1b the masculine form is used. Examples 2a and 2b show the same pattern, just with a female subject.

The description provided in this talk will contribute to a fuller understanding of the intricacies of verbal morphology in Southern New Guinea in general, and more specifically it will contribute to the typology of gender systems of languages in New Guinea and the world.

¹ All examples are taken from my own fieldwork.

References

Carroll, Matthew J. 2017. *The Ngolmpu Language with special reference to distributed exponence*. PhD thesis. Australian National University, Canberra.

Evans, Nicholas, Wayan Arka, Matthew Carroll, Christian Döhler, Eri Kashima, Emil Mittag, Kyla Quinn, Jeff Siegel, Philip Tama & Charlotte van Tongeren. 2018. Languages of Southern New Guinea. In Bill Palmer (ed.), *The Languages and Linguistics of New Guinea: A Comprehensive Guide*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

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