

“Picking up the pieces” - distributed morphology in Kómnzó

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The paper will address a particular morphological quirk in Kómnzó that has to do with verbal stems and their templates. Kómnzó is spoken by about 200 people in Rouku village, in the extreme South West of Papua New Guinea. Kómnzó belongs to the Tonda subgroup of the Yam family¹, compare the map below (figure 1). The Yam family is believed to be divided into three subgroups by Gordon (*Ethnologue* 2005): Yei in the West, Nambu in the East, and central Tonda. Tonda comprises about 10 varieties. With the exception of Wára (Sarsa 2001) and Arammba (Boevé and Boevé 2003) little has been published on the Tonda languages.

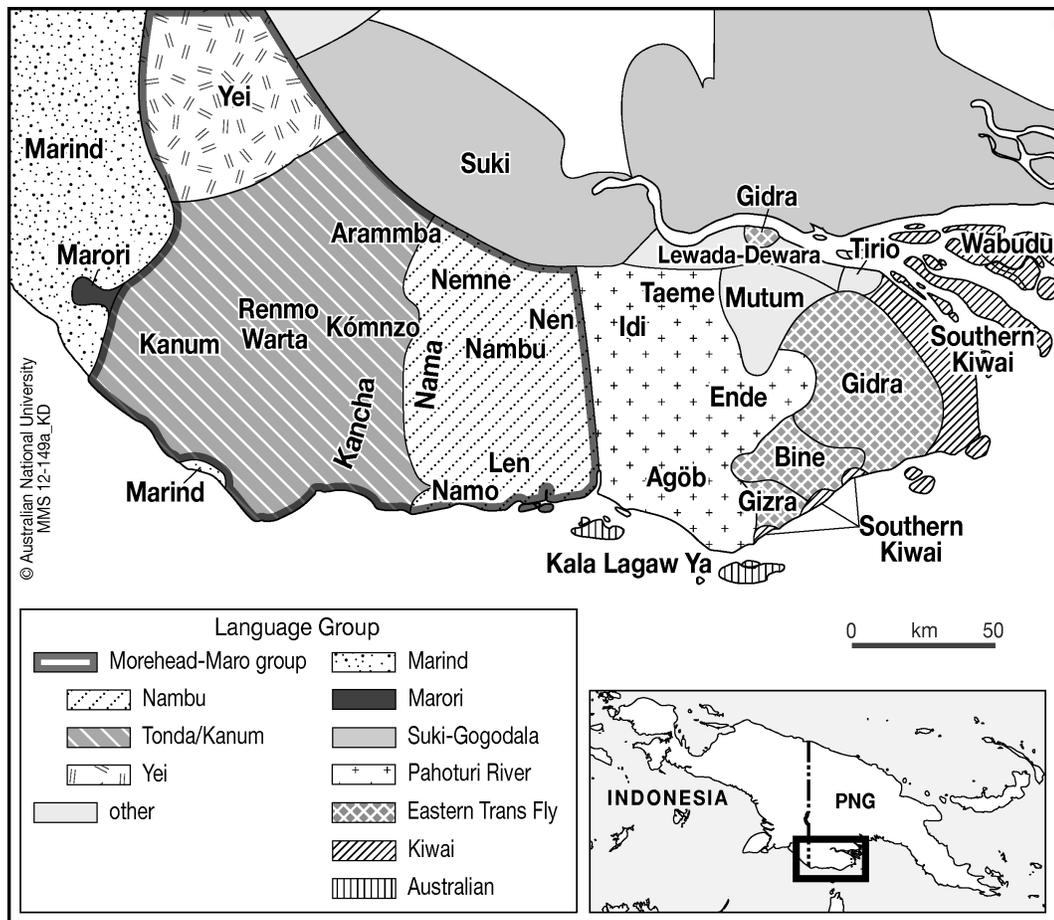


Figure 1 Map of the language area of Southern New Guinea

¹formerly known as Morehead Upper-Maró

One characteristic of the languages of the Yam family lies in the principle of morphological unification (Evans, forthcoming) or distributed morphology, whereby a grammatical category can only be ‘read off’ an inflected verb after integrating information from multiple exponents. Consequently single morphemes are underspecified in their value. Examples 1 - 3 illustrate the principle of distributed morphology with the number category in Kómnzo.

- (1) *fi yamnzer*
 fi ya-m-nzr
 3.ABS 3SG.MASC:U-sit.EXT-ND

‘He sits.’

- (2) *fi ämrén*
 fi ä-m-rn
 3.ABS 2|3NSG:U-sit.EXT-DU

‘They (2) sit.’

- (3) *fi ämnzer*
 fi ä-m-nzr
 3.ABS 2|3NSG:U-sit.EXT-ND

‘They (3+) sit.’

As becomes clear from the examples, the number category is distributed across a prefix and a suffix. The prefix encodes a distinction between singular and non-singular, while the suffix encodes dual versus non-dual. Only by integrating the information of both affixes, one can arrive at the correct number value. In this paper, I will focus on the dual marker and how it interacts with different verb template types.

Kómnzo verbs have two stem forms which have lexicalized aspectual properties, namely an extended stem (EXT) and a restricted stem (RS). Without going into the details of the aspectual differences, the main morphological difference between the two stems lies in their respective verb template types. In the extended form (see the above examples 1 - 3) the dual marker follows the stem, while it precedes the stem in the restricted forms. See examples 4 - 6 below.

- (4) *mbe samés*
 mbe s-a-ms-∅
 2SG.ERG 3SG.MASC:U-ND-sit.RS-2SG.IMP:A

‘You sit him down!’

- (5) *mbéné sémse*
 mbné s-∅-ms-e
 2NSG.ERG 3SG.MASC:U-DU-sit.RS-2NSG.IMP:A

‘You (2) sit him down!’

- (6) *mbéné samse*
 mbné s-a-ms-e
 2NSG.ERG 3SG.MASC:U-ND-sit.RS-2NSG.IMP:A

‘You (3+) sit him down!’

One could summarize the two stems in the following diagram:

EXTENDED STEM:	undergoer		stem	dual marker	(actor)
RESTRICTED STEM:	undergoer	dual marker	stem		(actor)

Amongst the Tonda languages, only Kómno and two close varieties (Wára to the West and Anta to the North) share this morphological quirk. In most of the other Tonda languages the dual marker always follows the stem in the verb template, regardless of aspectual value. These languages do not seem to have lexicalized aspectual values into the stem. The exact nature of the template in the other Tonda varieties will be investigated more thoroughly in my 2013 field trip.

Thus, the paper will address the puzzle of why Kómno, Wára and Anta have two stem forms and two verb templates. One possible explanation might be that Kómno lost a suffix which used to mark aspect as well as duality. This suffix got ‘baked-in’ the verb stem, thus creating two stem types which differ only in aspect. The dual/non-dual marking function was lost in this process. As a consequence the system of distributed morphology recruited another slot in the verb template to mark duality. The paper will present fresh data from other Tonda varieties and explore possible scenarios as to how this pattern might have arisen.

Abbreviations

2	second person
3	third person
A	agent
ABS	absolutive
DU	dual
ERG	ergative
EXT	extended verb stem
IMP	imperative
MASC	masculine
ND	non-dual
NSG	non-singular
RS	restricted verbstem
SG	singular
U	undergoer

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