

## Puzzles of Aspect in Nen

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Nen is a language of the Morehead-Marô family (Nambu branch), spoken in just one village (Bimadbn) in the Trans-Fly Region of PNG. It is notable for the morphological and semantic complexity of its verbs, which exhibit extraordinarily intricate paradigms at both prefixal and suffixal ends of the verb, including information about actor, undergoer, direction, and a rich system of tense and aspect. These can best be modeled by building up two paradigms – one for the prefixes and the suffixes – which are largely but not completely independent of one another.

Central to understanding how these paradigms work is the system of aspect, which partitions most of the suffixal paradigms into a three-way set of perfective, imperfective and neutral series. The exponence of aspect is intertwined with number marking – itself organized into an opposition of dual (two entities) vs non-dual (one, or more than two). Some verbs can inflect for all three aspectual series, while others are limited to inflecting for either the perfective or the imperfective series (with the neutral available to all verbs). A few verbs allow aspectual coercion, which is achieved by adding a more specific set of inflection to the verb's basic series. Within the suffix paradigms, a large number of different syncretisms confirm this three-way grouping, so that the paradigmatic morphology reinforces the semantic categorisation.

The semantics of the aspectual opposition itself is unusual: it focuses consistently on the early phases of the event, so that the primary aspectual opposition is between 'ingressive' vs 'progressive'. Completion is not tracked by the inflectional aspect system: this is encoded by resultative constructions derived from infinitives, or periphrastically. A final twist is added by the fact that aspectual oppositions sometimes get 'borrowed' with ditransitive verbs to track the number of the theme (transferred object).

Investigating aspect is generally a tricky enterprise because of the semantic subtlety of the effects involved, and in this talk I will pay particular attention to how paradigmatic, semantic and discourse-based argumentation can be linked to achieve a more elegant analysis.