

Contributions of phonology in understanding the morphology of verbs in Wooi

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Abstract

In Wooi, an Austronesian language of the South Halmahera-West New Guinea (SHWNG) group spoken on Yapen Island in West Papua, Indonesia, complex morpho-phonological processes play a significant role in verbal, nominal and demonstrative morphology. This talk focuses on verbal morphology, and explores the ways in which phonological features, such as the phonemic inventory, phonotactic constraints, and syllable structure, contribute to understanding the morphology of verbs.

Thus, verbal morphology in Wooi cannot be analysed as discrete morphological products – affixation processes – alone. Rather, phonological explanations are major factors shaping the surface realisations of morphologically-complex verbs, particularly with applicative derivations and subject inflection. For instance, phonological processes, such as metathesis, vowel deletion, palatalization, vowel merger, vowel retention, fortition, lenition, nasal assimilation and consonant insertion, are all relevant and often interrelated when explaining the outcomes of morphologically-complex verbs. As illustrated, these process range from simple, as in (1), to complex, as in (2).

- (1) *cutang* ‘3SG ask’
Underlying Form: ti- ‘3SG’ + utang ‘ask’
Palatalization: ti > c (alveolar and high vowel interaction)
Surface Form: *cutang* ‘she/she asked’
- (2) *kovio* ‘2SG talk’
Underlying Form: bu- ‘2SG’ + kavio ‘talk’
Metathesis: k<bu>avio
Consonant deletion: b > ∅ (constrained by the CC cluster)
Vowel merger: u+a > o
Surface Form: *kovio* ‘you talked’

Typologically, this importance of morpho-phonological processes in verbal morphology is also found in other Cenderawasih Bay languages of the SHWNG group, such as Ambai (Silzer, 1983), Biak (Heuvel, 2006) and Wandamen/Windesi (Gasser, 2014). In particular, some of the morpho-phonological processes that Gasser (2014) explores in Wandamen/Windesi are similar to those in Wooi.

To sum up, verbal morphology in Wooi goes beyond solely morphological processes, and details of phonological processes must be considered first in order to adequately describe Wooi

morphology. That these morpho-phonological processes also occur in other languages in the area suggests the processes may be considered areal features.

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