DISTRIBUTED EXPONENCE OF TENSE, ASPECT AND MOOD IN NEME VERBS

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The Neme people and their language

- The Neme people live in three villages in the Morehead district, Western Province, Papua New Guinea.
- This area is also known as Southern New Guinea or Trans-Fly (Evans et al., 2017; Williams 1936; Ayres 1983).
- The Neme language is vigorous, used in all domains and is being passed on to the children.
- Neme is a Papuan language and belongs to the Nambo sub-group of the Yam family also known as the Morehead-Upper Maro family.
- The Yam languages are morphologically remarkable for their complex verbal inflection characterized by a tendency to distribute inflectional exponence across multiple sites on the verb (Carrol 2020, 1)

Basics of Neme morphosyntax

- Neme is a SOV language.
- It uses both case marking and indexing.
- The case marking of the pronominal arguments is organised in the ergative-absolutive frame. Consider examples (1) and (2):

(1)	*Yendon*	*te*	*éwiye*	*kazi*	*tègmeten*
	yend=**on**	te	éwiye	kazi	t-gme-ta-en
	1.**ERG:SG**	ALR	cassowary.**ABS**	±1.day	3SG.U:β-kill-IPFV.ND-1SG.A

'I killed a cassowary yesterday'

(2)	*yend*	*te*	*nafasnoman*	*begériyoba*
	yend	te	n-afasno-m-n	begéri=oba
	1.**ABS**	ALR	M.U:α-run-REM.DEL-1SG.A	arrow=COM

'I ran with an arrow'

Basics of Neme morphosyntax (cont'd)

- Verbs can index person and number of up to two arguments, using both prefixation and suffixation.
- On the grounds of morphological indexing, verbs are divided into **prefixing** and **ambifixing** verbs. The terminology has been first introduced by Evans (2012; Evans et al. 2017).
  - **Prefixing verbs** use the prefix to encode their single argument as in examples (3-4). They are always intransitive.

(3)

Yend	*yena*	*wakayong(an)*
yend	yena	w-akay-ng(an)
1ABS	DEM	1SG.U:α-be.standing-STAT

'I am standing here'

(4)

Bé	*yakayong(an)*
bé	y-akay-ng(an)
3ABS	3SG.U:α-be.standing-STAT

'He is standing'

Basics of Neme morphosyntax (cont'd)

- **Ambifixing** verbs encode their arguments using both prefixes and suffixes.

  The ambifixing verbs can be transitive and intransitive.

- Transitive ambifixing verbs encode the most actor-like argument in the suffix, called **the actor suffix** (glossed A) and the most patient-like argument (undergoer) in the prefix, called **the undergoer prefix** (glossed U).

(1)	*Yendon*	*te*	*éwiye*	*kazi*	*tègmeten*
	yend=on	te	éwiye	kazi	t-gme-ta-en
	1.ERG:SG	ALR	cassowary.ABS	±1.day	3SG.U:β-kill-IPFV.ND-1SG.A

'I killed a cassowary yesterday'

Basics of Neme morphosyntax (cont'd)

- **Intransitive** ambifixing verbs index their sole argument in the actor suffix while the prefix slot is filled with the person and number invariant middle prefix as in examples (5) and (6).

(5) *Yend* *nafasnomàn*
yend n-afasno-m-n
1ABS M:α -run-REM.DEL-1SG.A
'I ran (some time ago)'

(6) *Bàm* *nafasnomànge*
bàm n-afasno-m-nge
2ABS M:α -run-REM.DEL-2SG.A
'You (sg) ran (some time ago)'

Tense, Aspect, Mood (TAM): brief overview

- The fundamental contrast that lies at the core of TAM organisation in Neme is aspectual.
- All verbs display a distinction between **imperfective** and **perfective** aspects.
- Additionally, there is a third aspectual category that combines the features of both aspects: **imperfectivised perfective**.
- Each aspect "cuts up" time differently and it makes sense to discuss tense distinctions inside each aspectual paradigm.
- Thus, imperfective has the following tense distinctions: **non-past**, **recent past** and two aspectually different **remote pasts: delimited and durative**.
- The perfective and imperfectivised perfective express **recent past, remote past, habitual remote past, narrative past and future.**
- Mood is not morphologically marked but rather is expressed by the combination of fully inflected verbs and preverbal particles.

Distributed exponence

- Distributed exponence is characterised by the fact that morphemes are underspecified for a particular grammatical category. Therefore, morphological material from different sites has to be taken into account and unified to construe a grammatical meaning (Döhler 2018, 5).

- Thus, the grammatical categories of tense and aspect are spread across prefixes, suffixes and special TAM suffixes which are sensitive to dual versus non-dual contrast.

Distributed exponence of TAM: examples

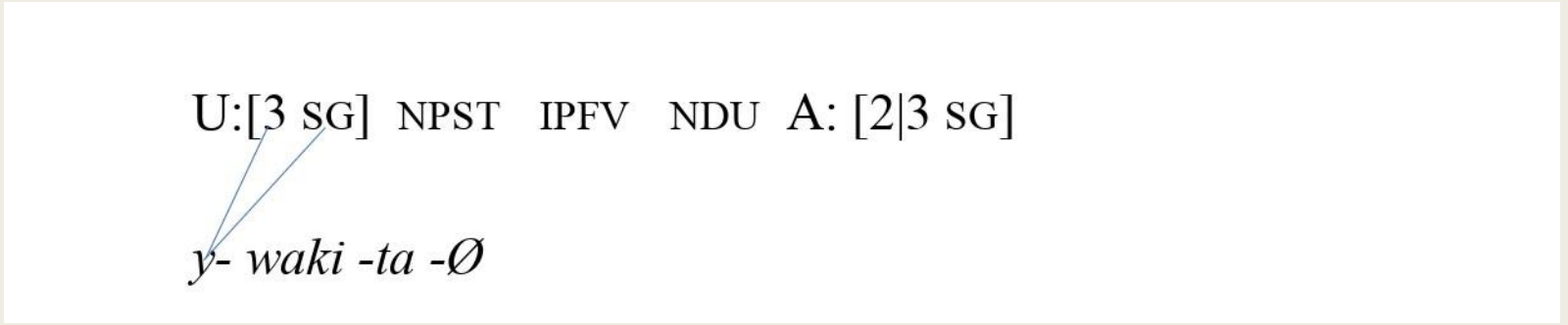
(7) *yakita*

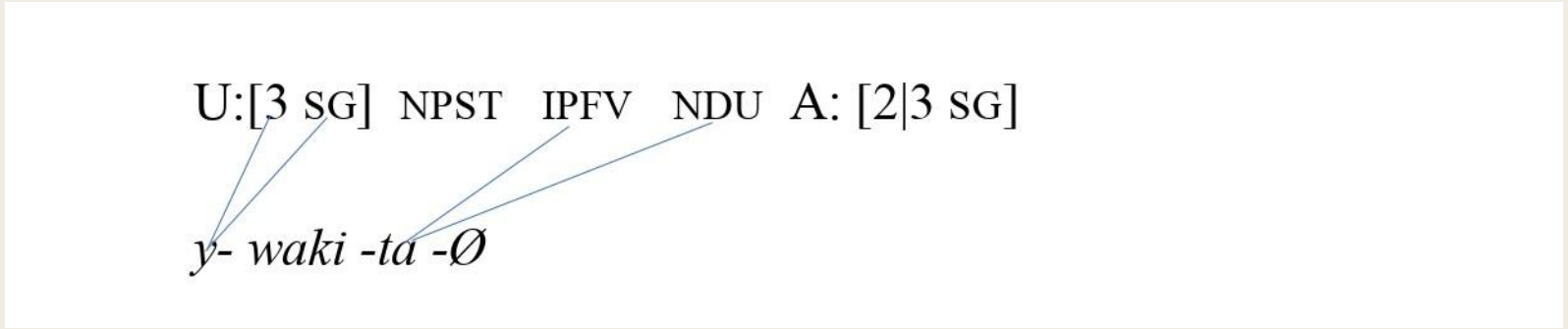
y-waki-ta-Ø

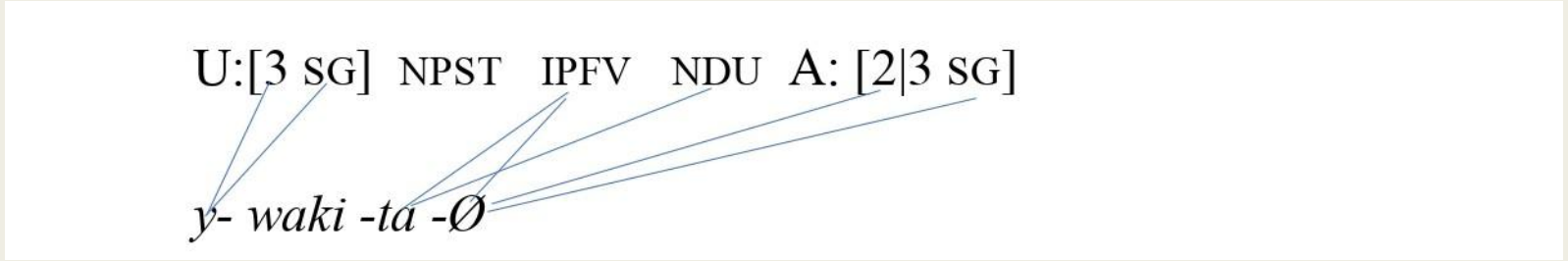
3SG.U:α-look-NDU:IPFV-2|3SG.A

‘Sh/he/it is looking at it/him/her’ or ‘You (sg) are looking at it/him/her’

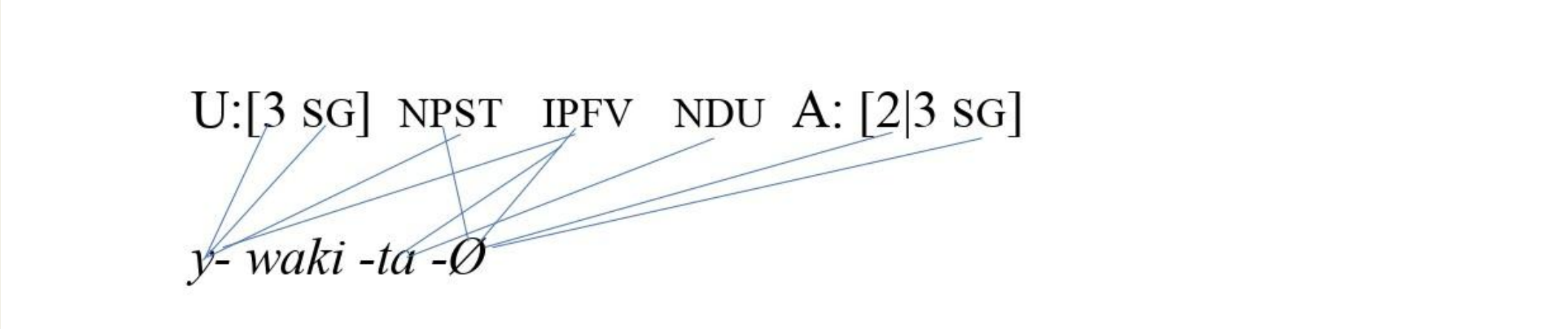
Distributed exponence of TAM: examples







Distributed exponence of TAM: examples



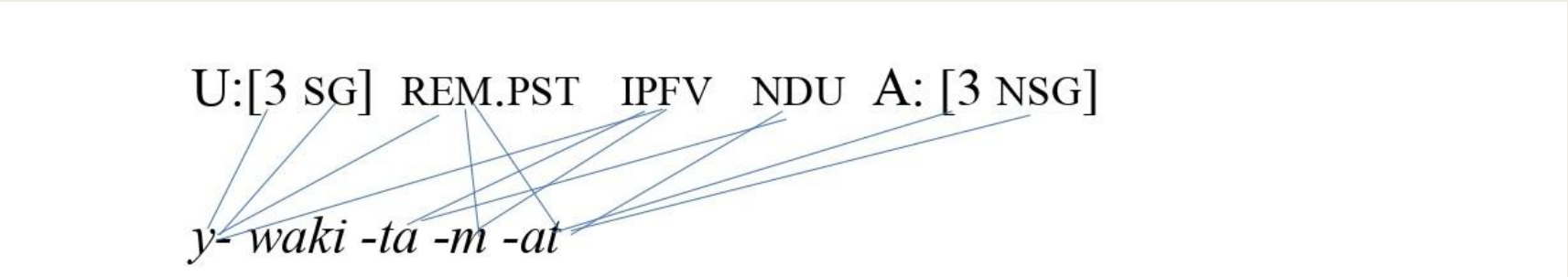
Distributed exponence of TAM: examples

(8) *yakitamàt*

y-waki-ta-m-t

3SG.U:α-look-NDU:IPFV-REM.DEL-3NSG.A

'They (3+) looked at it/him/her/it (some time ago)'



Distributed exponence of TAM: examples

A change in any of the slots in the prefix or suffix will lead, among other things, to a different TAM value:

(9) *takitawat*

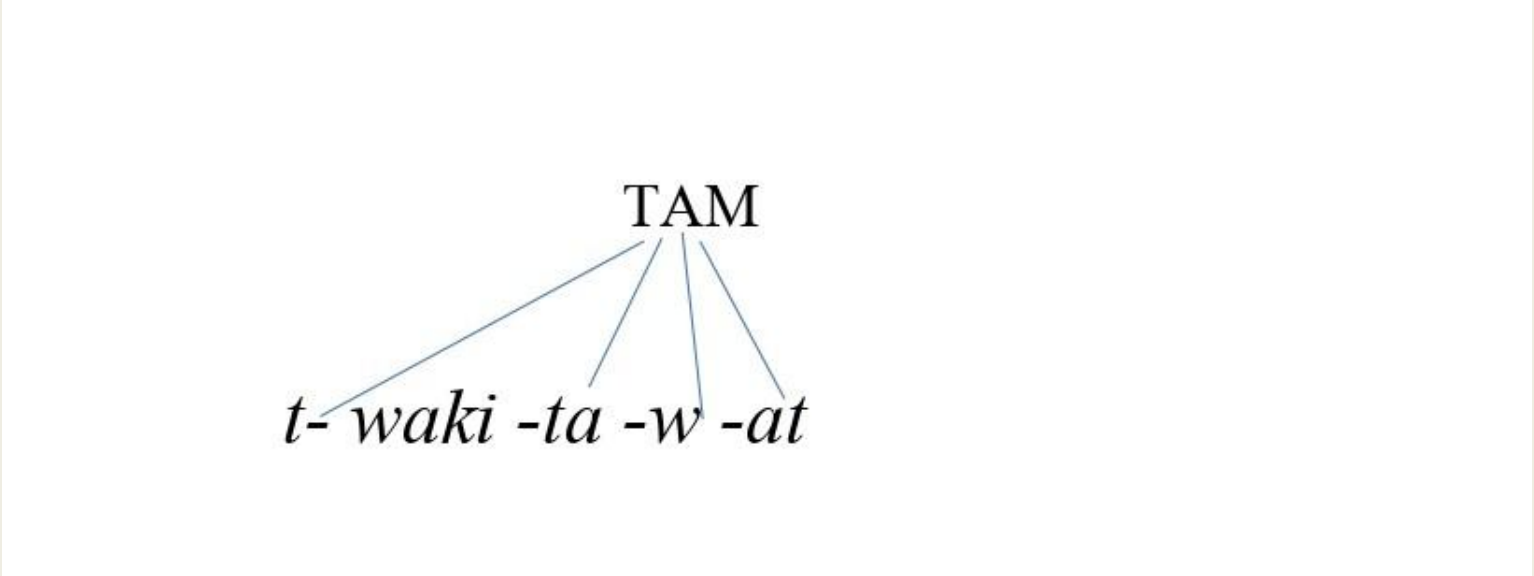
t-waki-ta-w-t

3SG.U:β-look-NDU:IPFV-REM.DUR-3NSG.A

'They (3+) looking/kept (on) looking at him/her/it'

Distributed exponence of TAM

(9) *takitawat*
t-waki-ta-w-t
3SG.U:β-look-NDU:IPFV-REM.DUR-3NSG.A
'They (3+) looking/kept (on) looking at him/her/it'



Circumfixal paradigm

- Döhler (2018, 178) argues that this phenomenon cannot be treated as a circumfix where separated formatives always occur together, but rather as a circumfixal paradigm where the formatives in the different slots are quite independent and can be manipulated independently.

Glossing conventions and undergoer prefix

- The high level of complexity and underspecification of meaning of affixes cause problems with glossing.
- Thus, the Yam languages conventions has been, following Evans (2012; Evans et al. 2017), to group prefixes into sets and to assign to each set a semantically neutral label expressed with Greek letters.
- Neme has two sets of prefixes labeled α and ß

Person/number	α	β
1SG	w-	kw-
1NSG	yàn-	tàn-
2SG	n-	kàn-
2|3NSG	e(w)-	ta/té-
3SG	y-	t-
‘Middle’	n-	k-

Undergoer prefix sets

- The α-set is used to express non-pst imperfective, imperfective remoted delimited past, perfective recent pst and remote perfective pst.
- The ß set is used to express recent imperfective pst, remote durative past, remote habitual perfective, perfective narrative pst, perfective future, irrealis and imperatives
- The number distinction is made on the singular versus non-singular basis

Actor suffixes: perfective and imperfective sets

person/number	non-past and recent past		remote
	imperfective	perfective	
1SG	-(e)n	-n	-(e)n
1NSG	-m	-m	-m
2SG	-e; Ø; re	-e	-nge
2NSG	-te	-o	-te
3SG	Ø	Ø	-ng
3NSG	-t	-o	-t

Dual versus non-dual contrast: imperfective

- The basic imperfective suffix *–ta* carries an additional meaning of non-duality and is only present when none of the verb's core arguments is dual and disappears when one of the arguments is dual.

(12) *Neméne wakitate?*

neméne w-waki-**ta**-te

why 1SG.U:α-look-**NDU:IPFV**-2NSG.A

'Why are **you (3+)** looking at me'

(13) *Yendbem* *nakim*

yend=bem n-waki-**Ø**-m

1=ERG:NSG 2SG.U:α-see-**IMPFV:DU**-1NSG.A

'We **two** see you (sg).

Dual versus non-dual contrast: imperfective (cont'd)

- When both the undergoer prefix and the actor suffix are non-singular and the nondual imperfective suffix –ta is absent it remains unclear without the context which of the arguments should be interpreted as dual.

(14)

Yendbem	*ewakim*
yend=bem	e-waki-**Ø**-m
1=ERG:NSG	2|3NSG.U:α-see-**IMPFV:DU**-1NSG.A

'We two see you/them (3+)'

'We (3+) see you/them two'

'We two see you/them two'

Conclusion

- Neme is a language with highly complex verbal inflection “characterized by a tendency to distribute inflectional exponence across multiple sites on the verb” (Carrol 2020, 1).
- Under this pattern of distributed exponence it is difficult to assign specific grammatical meaning to prefixes and suffixes.
- The grammatical meanings can only be determined once multiple formatives have been combined.
- The exponence of complex TAM values is distributed in a verb across prefixes, suffixes and dedicated TAM suffixes which are sensitive to dual versus non-dual contrast.

Thank you

References

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