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The Habitual Past in Amele, Papua New Guinea

Masahiko Nose

Shiga University, Japan

The Habitual Pastin Amele, Papua New Guinea

Masahiko Nose[a]
[a] *Shiga University, Japan*

Abstract

This study attempts to clarify the tense systems in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea; particularly, the past tense and habitual past forms in the sample three languages in the area: Amele, Waskia, and Kobon. This study thus investigates past tense and habitual features, and discusses how the people in the area interpret past events. The study then discusses how these people map their temporal frames in their grammars ("anthropology of time", Gell 1996).

To aid analysis, I collected data through observing descriptive grammars and fieldwork, finding that Amele exhibits three types of past tense and habitual tense forms, as in (1). Kobon has two distinct simple and remote past tenses, as in (2). Kobon has habitual aspect with the help of the verb "to be." Waskia, in contrast, has a distinction between realis and irrealis meanings, and the realis forms can indicate past and habitual meanings (two habitual forms: one is include in realis, another is with the help of the verb "stay"), as shown in (3).

(1) Amele: Today's past: Ija hu-ga. "I came (today)." Yesterday's past: Ija hu-gan. "I came (yesterday)." Remote past: Ija ho-om. "I came (before yesterday)." Habitual past (by adding the habitual form "l"): Ija ho-lig. "I used to come." (2) Kobon (Davies 1989): Simple past: Yad au-ɨn. "I have come." Remote past: Nöŋ-be. "You saw" Habitual aspect (by using the verb "mid" to be): Yad nel nipe pu-mid-in. "I used to break his firewood." (3) Waskia (Ross and Paol 1978): Realis: Ane ikelako yu naem. "I drank some water yesterday." (simple past) Realis: Ane girako yu no-kisam "In the past I used to drink water" (habitual past) Habitual (by using the verb "bager" (stay)): Ane girako yu nala bager-em. "In the past I used to drink water."

Finally, this study claims that Amele and Kobon have remoteness distinctions; near and remote past distinctions, but there is no such a distinction in Waskia. The observed habitual usages are different to each other. Nevertheless, the three languages have a grammatical viewpoint of habitual past mapping.

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Introduction

Past tense is a basic grammatical category. The habitual past tense form expresses habitual past activities, for example, "used to," in English. This study focuses on the habitual past usages in Amele, Papua New Guinea. Amele, a Trans-New Guinea language, has a complex tense system (Roberts, Nose). For example, it has several kinds of past tenses with remoteness distinctions; today's past, yesterday's past, and the remote past. Moreover, Amele has a habitual tense as well. Thus, this study tries to clarify the mechanism of habitual usage. Roberts (1987) presents a descriptive grammar of Amele and its habitual usages, but offers a few examples. Furthermore, this study has more examples of the habitual and will attempt a better description.

Section 2 provides an introduction to previous studies on habitual past and language descriptions in Papua New Guinea, and then sets out the aims of this study. Section 3 provides the data on the habitual past tense or related phenomena in Amele. Section 4 contains a discussion of habitual features, and section 5 concludes the study

General remarks in the habitual past

This section introduces the general remarks of the habitual aspect and gives basic information of the Amele grammar. There are several previous studies on the habitual aspect, Comrie (1976) and Bybee et al. (1994), and more recently, Carlson (2012) and Bertinetto and Lenci (2012). Overall, we review previous studies of the habitual aspect and we observe cross-linguistic perspectives, and we then claim that the basic meanings of the habitual aspect are describing past customs, but, more recently, verbal pluractionality and gnomic imperfectivity, as Bertinetto and Lenci (2012: 852) have argued.

Datain Amele

This section shows the habitual data and tries to describe the forms and the meanings of the habitual usages. First, we start with a small introduction of Amele and consider the habitual morphology and usages; constructions, other tenses and related adverbs.

Amele is one of the Trans-New Guinea languages, spoken in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea. Amele has been described by Roberts (1987). Amele has 5000 speakers, bilinguals with Tok Pisin, many grammatical characteristics of Highland languages, SOV word order and a complicated verb morphology.

Amele has the following markers (direct/indirect object marking, and tense and subject markings) on the verb, and markers sometimes construct portmanteau forms, which can be analyzed clearly. Amele has four dialects; Amele, Haia, Huar and Jagahala. While works by Roberts (1987) is based on the Haia dialect, my data emanates from the Huar dialect. The verb morphology of the two dialects are quite different from each other, as shown in the following table.

Table 1; Amele habitual tense; Hona "come" (Roberts 1989: 225; Haia dialect) and my data (Huar dialect)

1s	ho-l-om	Holig
1s	ho-l-om	Holog
3s	ho-l	holoi/holion

1d	ho-lo-h	Holob
2/3d	ho-lo-sin	Holoig
1p	ho-lo-m	
2/3p	ho-lo-in	Holoig

The element -l- inside the verb is common in Roberts' and my data and this -l- can be the habitual morpheme. It is remarkable that there are morphological differences of the habitual conjugation the verb "hona" (to come). Roberts (1989) pointed out that the habitual marker is -lo-, and my field data also shows the -l- element in the habitual conjugations. However, other verbs such as "sianiga" (to read) and "jiga" (to eat) emerge, as in Table 2. We will discuss these morphological differences in the discussion section.

Table 2 sianiga (to read) and jiga (to eat) habitual inflections

1s	sianiginaon	jiaginaon
2s	sianiginaon	jaganaon
3s	sianenaon	jenaon
1p	sianobonaon	jobonaon
2/3p	sianeginaon	jeginaon

In Table 2, there is no -lo- element in the habitual forms (There is no data of the verb (sianiga) in Roberts (1987). The element -on- is necessary for the habitual. These forms can be analyzed in [verb-person/number-present tense]+on. This is a combination of the present form and the element "on". In this case, the form "on" indicates "used to" meaning.

(3) More usages of the habitual past:
    a. Habitual Past: Ija ina book ihi-gina on. "I used to give a book to you."
    b. Habitual Present: Ija ina book gaid (always) ihi-gina on. "I always give a book to you."
    c. Negative habitual past: Ija ina book qee (not) ihi-rein. "I did not used to give a book to you."

This study found that the habitual past (3a) has another form "V-gina on" and this habitual verb form can be used in the habitual present (3b), too. This habitual form "V-gina on" is canceled in the negative habitual past in (3c), and instead, the negative past form "V-rein" is used. These facts indicate that the habitual forms can be used in the past and the present tense, and therefore, their forms can be regarded as the habitual aspect semantically.

(4) "Have" constructions:
    a. Ija jo ac. "I have a house / I had a house / I used have a house."
    b. Ija asac jo ac. "I used to have a house."
    c. *Ija asac ina book ihi-gina on (habitual past). "I used to give a book to you"

However, the construction with the verb "have ("ac" in Amele)" cannot take the habitual

form. For example, the sentence (4a) is the "have" construction, and the verb "ac" does not have a tense marker. The sentence (4a) can mean the present, past and habitual past without using tense markers. However, the habitual nuance can be added with the adverb "asac (long time ago)." as in (4b). The adverb "asac" cannot co-occur with the habitual verb form, as in (4c).

Conclusion

This study argues that Amele has a special habitual tense, and the habitual usage is incorporated in the verbal morphology. However, this study found two kinds of habitual constructions: One is the morphology using the "-l-" element and another is the periphrastic using the "on" element. The periphrastic habitual is more frequently used in my data, and this construction is not incorporated in the verbal morphology. Additionally, Amele has a means of lexical habitualization by using the adverb "gaid" (always). This adverb easily describes the habitual situations in past, present, and future tenses.

These findings indicate that the habitual element "-l-" is limited to several verbs, and it is not possible to inflect all verbs, and instead, the periphrastic construction and with the help of the adverb are used frequently, and their usage can include the habitual present as well. Therefore, the habitual forms cannot be considered to be a tense category. The newly grammaticalized habitual can be considered in terms of irrealis.

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