

A synchronic and diachronic view on animacy in the Tonda subgroup of the Yam language family in Southern New Guinea

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In this paper I shall argue for a diachronic pathway from encoding animacy to the development of possessive and dative case in Komnzo. I will draw on synchronic data from my own work on Komnzo and related languages, and descriptive work on languages of Southern New Guinea. Komnzo is a member of the Yam language family spoken by around 250 people in the village of Rouku.

In the first part of the paper, I will describe the heterogenous strategies to mark animacy. The most obvious difference between animate and inanimate referents is that only for the former there is a number distinction available, for example in the case markers, as can be seen in (1a-c).

- (1) a. *mnz=en*
house=LOC
'in the house' or 'in the houses'
- b. *mizi=dben*
pastor=ANIM.LOC.SG
'at the pastor's place' or 'with the pastor'
- c. *mizi=medben*
pastor=ANIM.LOC.NSG
'at the pastors' place' or 'with the pastors'

In some aspects, animacy is a covert category in Komnzo. For example, while the characteristic case¹ can attach directly to inanimate referents, animate referents have to be marked for possessive case first. This can be used for different interpretations of place names. Example (2) is the opening statement of a story about the place *Masu* ('about Masu'), while (3) is the closing statement of the same story (about 'the *Masu* ones').

- (2) *trika-si kwa w-thkär-wé masu=ma*
tell-NMLZ FUT 3SG.FEM-start-1SG masu=CHAR
'I will start the story about Masu.' (tci20120922-08 DAK #1)
- (3) *watik trika-si masu=ane=ma nima zf rä b=rä*
then tell-NMLZ masu=POSS=CHAR like.this IMM 3SG.FEM.be MED=3SG.FEM.be
'Well, that was the story about the Masu people right here.' (tci20120922-08 DAK #86)

In the second part of the paper, I start with the observation of formal similarities between the possessive case (POSS.NSG =*aneme*) and the dative case (DAT.NSG =*nm*). I will develop a historical argument to the effect that there used to be one form, which has undergone phonological and grammatical change to fulfil two separate functions. Formal similarity of possessive and dative case is one kind of evidence. I will draw on other parts of Komnzo morphology (e.g. possessive prefixes) and on evidence from related languages. For example, Ngkolmpu encodes the two grammatical categories in one form (POSS|DAT -*en*). I will argue that Komnzo and a few other varieties were more like Ngkolmpu at an earlier stage. Moreover, I will argue that the original function of this piece of morphology was to mark animacy.

¹This case covers a variety of semantic roles including source, reason, purpose, and aboutness.