

Scratching the surface: discoveries of a first field trip

Most linguists, especially Norwegian graduate students, are used to studying phenomena of well-known languages, often working at a quite fine-grained level. To give insight in what kind of linguistic problems we stumble upon when a language is studied for the first time, I show some results of my six weeks of field work on Kalamang, a Papuan language of Indonesia. This is the first linguistic study into the language, besides the gathering of some twenty words (first published in Anceaux 1958). I will discuss examples from phonology, morphology and syntax that show how exciting doing field work on a lesser known language is. In this abstract, I elaborate on two such examples.

The first example treats stress patterns. With a corpus of 800 words and some 150 phrases we can conclude that disyllabic words do not have predictable stress (Example (1)), and that longer words are stressed in the right periphery (Example (2)).

- (1) *'sontum* 'person' *tor'pes* 'type of shell'
 pitis 'money' *pa'rar* 'to wake up'
 'tiri 'to run' *ti'ri* 'drum'

- (2) *wa'lor teng* 'broom' *majil'man* 'to flip'
 pang'gala 'cassava' *sangga'ran* 'to search'
 ka'lifan 'mat' *kala'bet* 'land worm'

If we take into account words with morphology, such as reduplications and words with suffixes, we see some parallels with what was sketched above. However, no connections between syllable weight and stress can be drawn. From better-studied languages we know that stress rules can be quite complex. English stress patterns, for example, are still topic of research (Burzio 1994, Kelly 2004, Plag 2006). It can thus be expected that predictors of stress for Kalamang will be found when more data becomes available.

A second example comes from underlying verb forms. Suffixes *-kin* (volitional) and *-nin* (negative) seem to behave differently from *-te* (imperative) and *-i* (completive) when suffixed to verbs. Consider the following examples.

- (3) a. *natnin* drink.NEG
 b. *natkin* drink.VOL
- (4) a. *nanet* drink.IMP
 b. *nani* drink.CMPL

The examples in (3) seem to suggest that the underlying verb form ends in *-t*, whereas the examples in (4) make underlying *-n* more likely. Whatever we choose, we need to introduce morphophonemic rules just for certain suffixes. Another solution is proposing V-final verbs. This, however, leaves the following examples unexplained.

- (5) a. *nanan* drink.RED
 b. *nan* drink (unmarked verb form)

I will suggest several other possible analyses of Kalamang verbs, each with their own problems. Again, I suggest that there is probably more going on on the morphophonemic level than we can see with the currently available data.

This presentation gives first-hand examples of a Papuan language, demonstrates the kind of results that a first field trip yield, and gives insight in the first stages of analysis of completely novel data. This kind of research is like scratching the surface, giving glimpses of what lies ahead if Kalamang is being studied more.

Abbreviations

CMPL	completive
IMP	imperative
NEG	negative
RED	reduplication
VOL	volitional

References

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- Kelly, M. H. (2004). Word onset patterns and lexical stress in English. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 50(3), 231-244.
- Plag, I. (2006). The variability of compound stress in English: structural, semantic, and analogical factors. *English Language and Linguistics*, 10(01), 143-172.