

**Documenting grammar through the lens of endangered languages:
Examples from Koromu (Kesawai), a Papuan language**

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1. Introduction

Aim: Investigate terminology, metalanguage, definitions and tools for describing grammatical category meanings using examples from tense, aspect and modality in the verbal morphology of an endangered language

Challenges:

- Kadanya's (2006: 256) call for "community-based grammars", representing worlds of knowledge, eg. 1986, SIL, Ukarumpa, PNG; 2002 Australian grammar writing postgraduates open letter in Austin (2003: 10, 13-14)
- Baraby (2012: 78): "Most of the work done in grammaticography, i.e. the business of writing grammars, aims the grammatical descriptions primarily at linguists, usually ignoring the minority language speakers, who have their own specific needs"
- Baraby (2012: 79): a specific concern "the language used in writing the grammar itself, including the grammatical terminology and metalanguage"
- Evans (2009: xxii): "A major cause of language loss is the belief that everything wise and important can be, and has been, said in English".

Some steps for description of grammatical category meanings in an endangered language

- Analyze the grammar and grammatical categories
- Investigate metalanguage (cf. Wierzbicka 1996, Goddard & Wierzbicka 2002, Goddard 2011)

E.g. **Austronesian**: Mbula (Bugenhagen 2002), Longgu (Hill 1994); **Algonquian**: East Cree (Junker 2008); **Pama-Nyungan**: Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara (Goddard 1994); **Non-Pama-Nyungan**: Bunuba (Knight 2008); **Trans New Guinea**: Koromu (Priestley 2012a, b). Cf. **Hawaii Creole English** (Stanwood 1997) etc.
- Describe grammatical category meanings using metalanguage in the described language

Strengths of this approach:

- outline concepts in the target language as well as the language of wider readership
- avoid English linguistic terminology that has no direct equivalent
- identify 'components of meaning' that are language-specific as well as some that may be cross-linguistic
- work with native speakers in their own language
- give outsiders a greater understanding of insider perspectives
- contribute to grammatical descriptions for native speakers, promote conservation and revitalization

2. The sample language: linguistic, geographic, demographic, sociolinguistic context; analysis and data

Linguistic context: Koromu (Kesawai), Rai Coast subgroup, one of about 100 languages in the Madang group, Trans New Guinea family (Pawley 2006: 429, cf. Z'graggen 1980, Ross 2005)¹

Demographic and geographic context: 600 to 700 Koromu speakers in small villages, middle Ramu Valley, north and south of the Ramu River, Madang Province, Papua New Guinea

Sociolinguistic context: Koromu, Dampu, Kou-Asas, Sausi/Wiya languages. Changes and vulnerability: the road, land-lease scheme and settlers from other parts of the country, a school with teachers from elsewhere

Speakers: men, women and children of different ages who live/lived in Koromu villages since the 1970s

Genres recorded: narratives, legends, personal histories, descriptions, procedural accounts, conversations, speeches

Insightful commentaries: word meanings, grammaticality, translations, examples (cf. Woodbury 2003: 39), transcription, conversation, canonical sentences: particularly Sairam Tomas, Winis Mutu, Arikao Awai, Nisom Manam, Itaniso Arinam, Airehena Sirin

When— while living-working there: 1975-1976, 1978-1980, 1986; during fieldwork: 2000, 2004, 2010, 2012

¹ These non-Austronesian languages are often called Papuan languages though this term does not reflect genealogical relationship.

Written analysis: Morphosyntax of verbs (Priestley 2003 - MA thesis)
 Reference grammar (Priestley 2008 - PhD thesis - and forthcoming)
 Publications: emotions, possessives, modality, time, body parts, polysemy etc. (Priestley)

3. Challenges, perspectives, and descriptive strategies (and revisions) that affect outsiders and possibly insiders

--**Hellwig** (2010: 803): "...it is intrinsically difficult to understand and describe the meaning of an expression"

Koptjevskaja-Tamm et al (2007: 176): "...it is far from obvious even for the researcher's native tongue; for other languages it easily gets insurmountable"

--**Hellwig** (2010: 802) "...the meaning of translation equivalents intruded into the semantic analysis, thus obscuring the meaning of the expressions under investigation"

Goddard & Wierzbicka (forthcoming) "How can I reduce the danger of imposing categories and meanings from my language onto the language I am describing?"

--**Hellwig** (2010: 802) "...we have to find appropriate glosses for both lexical and grammatical expressions, to group them into larger classes, and to compare these classes in terms of their meanings and functions"

Goddard & Wierzbicka (forthcoming): "How can I work out the meanings of unfamiliar words and grammatical elements? How can I tell when words are polysemous?"

--**Mithun** (2006: 286) terminological issues

- Although some suggest "that the actual technical terminology used in a grammar is insignificant, so long as all terms are defined...unnecessary technical terminology can be detrimental".
- Typologists look for cross-linguistic uniformity but "...if incommensurate categories are forced too quickly into a single terminological box, we can lose an important value of the grammar: the opportunity to appreciate the potential richness of language variation".
- For "the speech community maximal transparency of terminology is extremely important".

4. Methodology: using the language of speech communities to create 'maximal transparency'

Philosophers and a common core of language: **Descartes** (1931[1701]): "innate ideas"

Leibniz (in Couturat 1903): an "alphabet of human thoughts"

For over 40 years ongoing empirical research on natural semantic metalanguage primes and their combinatorial properties in diverse languages (e.g. Wierzbicka 1996, Goddard 2011, **Goddard & Wierzbicka** 2002, forthcoming, **Chappell** 2002, **Gladkova** 2012, **Peeters** 2006, **Wong** 2010, **Ye** 2010, **Yoon** 2006). Primes have been abandoned/added (Goddard 2011). Currently 65 primes are proposed (see Koromu and English in Appendix).

- A limited number of common concepts emphasises diversity.
- Exponents provide a way to express language and culture-specific meanings in different languages.
- Primes combined as components of meaning provide a tool to discover 'insider' meaning.

5. Investigation of grammatical meanings and metalanguage in a sample language²

Grammatical data (Priestley 2008 and forthcoming a, see above on written analysis)

Koromu exponents of natural semantic metalanguage primes (cf. Priestley 2012a, 2012b, forthcoming b, c).³

Time examples: *APU NOW, SURUMAPA BEFORE, EPONO AFTER, -APAI*E A LONG TIME, *SUHUPE* A SHORT TIME

Other useful exponents: *ATO* 'SOMEONE', *HARU/U* 'DO', *AIRE* 'HAPPEN', *ATEREI* 'THE SAME'

Explanations: Separate lines for separate components of meaning.

Indents for speech or thought

Commas, colons and quotes following *I say* and *I think*, no capitals, a distinct font

English speech act *I say* precedes quoted speech. Koromu non-object marked *u-i* 'I say' follows it.

² The metalanguage is a topic of ongoing research in Koromu.

³ Other aspects of a grammar project could also be framed in these terms.

Semantic molecules: “...complex meanings that are decomposable into combinations of semantic primes but that function as units within the structure of other, more complex concepts” (Goddard 2010, for example, ‘bird’ in explications for *sparrow* and *eagle* (2010: 124), cf. Wierzbicka 2006, 2007).

6. Tense, aspect and modality in independent verbs that:

- are the only verb in a clause or the final verb in a serial verb construction
- are fully inflected for tense-subject and modality (apart from *-apesi* ‘want’)
- have optional object, aspect, and/or reciprocity marking
- contrast with dependent verbs and dependent serial verb constructions that are partially inflected
- have the structure:⁴ V stem {(Object/Reciprocal)} (Habitual) (PRES) Tense-Subject (Intentive)

- 6.1 Tense-subject inflections:**
- situate the event in relation to the moment of speaking
 - indicate the active participant or experiencer
 - distinguish between non-future (NF) and future (F) tense

Me te ho-a? [Who chopped/bit it?] Tense-subject:person-number; *ho* ‘chop, bite’ (cf. Priestley 2008)

Number	Ato ‘someone’	Epono ia ‘not after’	Epono ‘after’
<i>Aterei</i> ₁ ‘one’	1 <i>i</i>	ho - i	ho - hi
	2 <i>ne</i>	ho - i	ho - amu
	3 <i>ni</i>	ho - a	ho - hora
<i>Nupu</i> ₁ ‘all’ / <i>Nupu</i> ₂ ‘many’ ⁵	X1 <i>sene, ne ia</i>	ho - ia/ie	ho - hia
	INC1 <i>sene</i>	ho - ia/ie	ho - aho/ho ⁶
	2 <i>te</i>	ho - ia/ie	ho - amua
	3 <i>nene</i>	ho - e	ho - hore

6.1.1 Future tense – locates an event *epono* ‘after’ the moment of speaking

In a detailed grammar there will be variations:

<i>epono ato na haruhera,</i>	‘someone will do something after’
<i>epono na airehera,</i>	‘something will happen after’
<i>epono na moapu mena, apu moapu ia</i>	‘something will be like this after, it is not like this now’

Example (1) *Eto yare -hia.*
 tomorrow go -F1p⁷
 ‘We will go tomorrow.’

In Koromu, Hong Kong Cantonese... exponents for BEFORE/AFTER and NOW cannot be combined in one phrase:

Tong *et al.* (1997: 250-251): Biclausal format for tense explications

Goddard & Wierzbicka (2002:69): One of the clauses has an implicit speech act (clause 2 in Koromu)

⁴ V: verb, curly brackets { }: 1 item can occur, plain brackets: optional, no plain brackets: 1 constituent for an independent verb.

⁵ *Nupu*₂ ‘all’: *Tamaite nupu imi-pu-r-e pao*. ‘All men die’ (CS.10: 7). *Sene nupu tapa men-ia=mo*. ‘We all stood outside.’ (They’d just escaped a burning house) (T6.4.26). *Nupu*₁ ‘many’: *Nupu yoroho pate ya-r-e-te asao araho pa ya-r-e*. ‘Many of them are going upstream, but some are going downstream’ (CS.11:5(34), canonical sentences, see Goddard and Wierzbicka forthcoming).

⁶ The inclusive suffix *-aho* has a variant *-ho* that can follow main verbs with final /e/ (Rule 3b, Priestley 2008)

⁷ Abbreviations: DES: desiderative; F: future; GRD: ground/topic-like; G/L: goal/locative; HAB: habitual; IMP: imperative; INC: inclusive; INT: intentive; p: plural; P: possessive/part of; POS: possibility; PRES: present; s: singular; S/L: source/locative; UNC: uncertainty. For sources, BF: Blue file (verb paradigms); CS: canonical sentences; D: Databook, T: texts.

Explication [A]: Future tense with *haru* ‘do’

With gloss and free translation “epono ato na haru -hera,” u -r -i, apu mo
after someone something do -F3s say-PRES-1s now this
“someone will do something after,” I say this now

Koromu: “epono ato na haru-hera,” <i>uri, apu mo</i>	English: I say this now: “someone will do something after”
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6.1.2 Non-future tense - with active independent verbs indicates time before the moment of speaking.

- (2) *Ea Meansa yar-ia.*
yesterday Meansa go -1p⁸
'We went to the Meansa yesterday.' T1.2a.1

- [B] “surumapa ato na haru -a,” u -r -i, apu mo
before someone something do -3s say-PRES -1s now this
“someone did something before,” I say this now

“surumapa ato na harua,” <i>uri, apu mo</i>	I say this now: “someone did something before”
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Non-future tense statives for the past or for ‘begun in the past continuing to the present’ are contextually resolved

- (3)a. *ani pa men -a?* b. *Takere warisesa men -a.*
where be -3s table underneath be -3s
'Where was/is it?' 'It was/is underneath the table.' D8.22.4, 5

Explication with non-future tense and ‘be’ locational

- [C] “na mare pa men -a, (apu mo na) mare aterei pa men- a) u -r -i, apu mo
something place G/L be -3s now this something place same G/L be -3s say-PRES-1s now this
“surumapa na mare pa mena,,
(apu mo na mare aterei pa mena)”
uri, apu mo

I say this now:
“something was in a place before”
(this something is in the same place now)

6.1.3 Present tense – V stem -- suffix **-r** -- non-future tense-subject suffix

Cross-linguistically: basically location of a situation at the moment of utterance

Characteristically: ongoing situations from before the present moment, continuing after it (Comrie 1985:37).

- (4) ...sa aterei u yare -r -ia.
road same that go -PRES -1p
'...we are going on the same road.' T1.15.82

- (5) *Apu₂ weti pa mene -r -i.*
today house G/L stay -PRES-1s
'I'm staying at the house today.'

- [D] “apu ato na haru -r -a,” u -r -i, apu mo
now someone something do -PRES-3 say-PRES-1s now this

“apu ato na harura,”
uri, apu mo

I say this now:
“someone is doing something now”

⁸ For simplicity the gloss for non-future tense suffixes is unmarked by any tense specification.

Situations that are true at all times include the present moment (cf. Comrie 1985: 37-39)

- (6) Koromu sa u sa -r -ia.

Koromu S/L that speak -PRES-1p

‘In Koromu we speak that (referring to the Koromu language).’ T2.33.3

- [E] “oto nupu ato na haru -r -a, haru -r -a nauto,” u -r -i, apu mo time many someone something do -PRES-3s do -PRES-3s can say-PRES-1s now this

“oto nupu ato na harura, harura nauto,”	I say this now:
uri, apu mo	“at many times someone is doing something, this someone can do this now”

Narrative present is used to describe something that happened earlier the same day

Apu can mean ‘now’ or ‘today’, as ‘today’ it can be used as a semantic molecule (Priestley 2012a).

- (7) Pia pa sorone me -r -i.

Pia G/L jump move.down -PRES -1s

‘Whatyamacallit I went here. I went and jumped down in the Pia.’ T2.14.1

- [F] “surumapa ato na haru -a apu_{2[m]} mo haru -a,” u -r -i, apu mo before someone something do -3s today this do -3s say-PRES1s now this

surumapa ato na harua, apu _{2[m]} mo ato harua	I say this now:
uri, apu mo	“someone did something before, this someone did this today _[m] ”

6.2 Aspect in verbal morphology (cf. phasal verbs, aspectual enclitics (Priestley 2008: 316-317, 346-383)

Habitual -pu follows the verb, or an optional object suffix. It can occur before non-future tense-subject.

- (8) ...usu yo -neka -pu -e.

pig call-O3p -HAB -3p

‘...they used to call the pigs.’ T1.25.6

- [G] '(surumapa) oto nupu aharopu mo-apu haru -e,’ u -r -i, apu mo before time many people this-like do -3p say-PRES-1s now this

'(surumapa) oto nupu aharopu moapu harue,'	I say this now:
uri, apu mo	‘people often did things like this (before)’

Habitual -pu and present tense -r together indicate events ‘occurring regularly’ in the present/general time.

- (9) Sene uo, usu oro na -pu -r -ia.

1p GRD pig pierce eat -HAB -PRES-1p

‘We, we (habitually) shoot pigs.’ T1.26.1

- [H]: ‘oto nupu aharopu mo-apu na haru -r -e,’ u -r -i, apu mo time many people this-like thing do -PRES-3p say -PRES-1s now this

'oto nupu aharopu moapu harure,'	I say this now:
uri, apu mo	‘people often do things like this’

6.3 Event modality - Palmer 2001: 70 (Cf. Priestley 2012b): “events that are not actualized, events that have not taken place but are merely potential”

6.3.1 Intentive

is expressed by a verb, a future tense-subject suffix and the suffix -mpe ‘intentive’.

- (10) ...sakin sa -hia -mpe yare -r -ia umo...

word speak -F1p -INT go -PRES -1p but

‘...we intended to speak and we went but...’ T1.20.57

[I] 'mo haru -apesi,' u -i, 'epono, oto ato pate mo haru -hi' u -i, mo moapu
 this do -want say-1s after some time it(this) do -1s think -1s it(this) like.this

"mo haruapesi," ui ₁ "epono, oto ato pate mo haruhi" ui ₂ , mo moapu	I say: "I want to do this" I think about it like this: "I will do it at some time a short time after"
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6.3.2 Imperative -ae 'IMP2s', -ahe 'IMP2p'; (in directions, commands, advice, instructions, suggestions, friendly salutations, cf. Priestley 2012:94, 95). Aspectual suffixes cannot co-occur.

(11) *Pene isi -ae!*

rope cut-IMP2s
 '(You) cut the rope!' BF

[J] "mo haru -ae," u -i
 this do -IMP1s say-1s

"mo haruae," ui	I say: "I want you to do this"
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6.3.3 Desiderative - ‘want’(Priestley 2008, 2012b): Verb{(Object) / (Reciprocal)} {-apesi Desiderative}

(12) *Poho n -e. "He k -apesi tauo," u -i.*
 sit STAY⁹ -3p return come -want UNC say-1s
 'They were sitting. "Do (they) want to come back, perhaps?" I said.' T1.15.23

[K]: "ato na haru -apesi," u -i
 someone something do -want say-1s

"ato na haruapesi," ui	I say: "someone wants to do something"
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7. Concluding remarks on examining grammar through the lens of the endangered language

Documentation and grammar research, terminology and metalanguage, semantic primes, polysemy...

Components of meaning reflect cross-linguistic traits (Tong *et al* 1997) and language specific data (narrative present)

Appendix: Semantic primes English and Koromu Exponents

- Primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not at the level of lexemes).
- Exponents may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes. They can be formally complex.
- They can have language-specific combinatorial variants (allolexes, indicated with ~).
- Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

In the table * indicates points of interest/investigation, e.g. A LONG TIME BEFORE = SU:RUMAPA, A LONG TIME AFTER = EPO:NO

⁹ CAPS: phasal/valency V, grammatical & lexical, ne STAY: durative, stative, valency decrease (Priestley 2008:341..).

ENGLISH	KOROMU (provisional)	
I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY	I, NE, ATO, NA, AHAROPU(HENATAMAITE), METE	substantives
KIND, PART	TOMTOM, MO~ASAO~NE	relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE	MO, ATEREI ₂ , TOMO	determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY, LITTLE~FEW	ATEREI ₁ , AERE, ASA, NUPU ₁ , NUPU ₂ , WERAI	quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	ETAMAU, WARIKAU	evaluators
BIG, SMALL	ARENE, WERAKAHUNO	descriptors
THINK, KNOW, WANT, NOT WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	U ₂ ~URUNU, SIPAMU, URUNU~APESI, MAIKOHU, ORU~URUNU, WERE, ESERE	mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	U ₁ ~SA, SAKINE, ITINI	speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	HARU, AIRI, MOTOMOTO, MOTO	action, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE(SOMEONE/SOMETHING), HAVE (SOMETHING)~BE SOMEONE'S	MENE, MENE, MENE MENE~NE*	location, existence, specification, possession
LIVE, DIE	ENE, EME	life death
WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME*, MOMENT	ENAPU~OTO ~SA, APU, SURUMAPA, EPONO, -APAIE, SUHUPE, OTO ATOPATE, APU MOREI	time
WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	ANI(PA)~SA, MO PA, NAUMPA, WARISESA, AIAKE, WAIMESA, MESA, ORU PA	space
NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	IA~TAI, TAUMO, NAUTO, U SEI, UO	logical concepts
VERY, MORE	HEREKANI, APAI	intensifier, augmentor
LIKE	UAPU	similarity

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