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:
- 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
  E.g. **Austronesian**: Mbula (Bugenhagen 2002), Longgu (Hill 1994); **Alqonquian**: 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, Dumpu, 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


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”
- 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)
Time examples: APU NOW, SURUMAPA BEFORE, EPONO AFTER, -APAIE A LONG TIME, SUUPE A SHORT TIME
Explications: 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.
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 (Intensive)

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


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Ato ‘someone’</th>
<th>Epono ia ‘not after’</th>
<th>Epono ‘after’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aterei, ‘one’</td>
<td>1 i</td>
<td>ho - i</td>
<td>ho - hi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ne</td>
<td>ho - i</td>
<td>ho - amu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ni</td>
<td>ho - a</td>
<td>ho - hora</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nupu, ‘all’ / Nupu2, ‘many’⁵</td>
<td>X1: sene, ne ia</td>
<td>ho - ia/ie</td>
<td>ho - hia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 te</td>
<td>ho -ia/ie</td>
<td>ho - amua</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 nene</td>
<td>ho -e</td>
<td>ho - hore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

In a detailed grammar there will be variations:

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

Example (1)  
Eto yare -hia.  
tomorrow go -F1p ⁷  
“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)

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

⁵ Nupu ‘all’: Tamaiti 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 ‘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 3h, Priestley 2008)

⁷ Abbreviations: DES: desiderative; F: future; GRD: ground/topic-like; G/L: goal/locative; HAB: habitual; IMP: imperative; INC: inclusive; INT: intensive; 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
“someone will do something after,” I say this now

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Koromu:</th>
<th>English:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“epono ato na haru-hera,”</td>
<td>I say this now:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ur, apu mo</td>
<td>“someone will do something after”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 -1p
    ‘We went to the Meansa yesterday.’ T1.2a.1

[8] 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,”
    ur, apu mo
    I say this now:
    “someone did something before”

Non-future tense statives for the past or for ‘begun in the past continuing to the present’ are contextually resolved
    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)”
    ur, 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,”
    ur, apu mo
    I say this now:
    “someone is doing something now”

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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) Korumu sa u sa -r -ia.
   Korumu S/L that speak -PRES-1p
   ‘In Korumu we speak that (referring to the Korumu 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:
   ‘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
   ‘They used to call the pigs.’ T2.14.1

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

   surumapa ato na harua, apu mo ato harua
   I say this now:
   ‘someone did something before, this someone did this today’

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 many people this-like do -3p say-PRES-1s now this

   ‘(surumapa) oto nupu aharopu moapu harue,’ I say this now:
   ‘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 wo, 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 harue,’ I say this now:
   ‘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 Intenitive is expressed by a verb, a future tense-subject suffix and the suffix -mpe “intenitive”.

(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
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[ICLDC3, Priestley]


(11)  Pene isi -ae!
- rope  cut-IMP2s
    ‘(You) cut the rope!’ BF

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 -5p  return come -want UNC  say-1s
    ‘They were sitting. “Do (they) want to come back, perhaps?” I said.’ T1.15.23

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 Koromo 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..).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Koromu (provisional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY</td>
<td>I, NE, ATO, NA, Aharopu(Henatamaite), Mete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIND, PART</td>
<td>Tomtom, Mo<del>Asao</del>Ne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE</td>
<td>Mo, Atereh2, Tomo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH<del>MANY, LITTLE</del>FEW</td>
<td>Atereh1, Aere, Asa, Nupu1, Nupu2, Werner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD, BAD</td>
<td>Etamau, Warikau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIG, SMALL</td>
<td>Arene, WeraKahuno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THINK, KNOW, WANT, NOT WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR</td>
<td>U1<del>Urunu, sipamu, urunu</del>Apesi, Maikohu,Oru~Urunu, Were, Eseru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAY, WORDS, TRUE</td>
<td>U1~Sa, Sakine, Itini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH</td>
<td>Haru, Airi, Motomoto, Moto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE(SOMEONE/SOMETHING), HAVE (SOMETHING)~BE SOMEONE’S</td>
<td>Mene, Mene, Mene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVE, DIE</td>
<td>Ene, Eme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME*, MOMENT</td>
<td>Enapu<del>Oto</del>Sa, APU, Surumapa, Epone, -Apae, Suhupe, Oto Atopate, APU Morei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE</td>
<td>AnipA~Sa, Mo Pa, Naumpa, Wirasea, Aiake, Waimesa, Mesa, Oru Pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF</td>
<td>Ia~Tai, Taumo, Nauto, U Sei, Uo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERY, MORE</td>
<td>Herekani, Apai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIKE</td>
<td>Uapu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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