

Omission of object verbal markers in Amele: Difference in data between Haia and Huar dialects

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1. Introduction

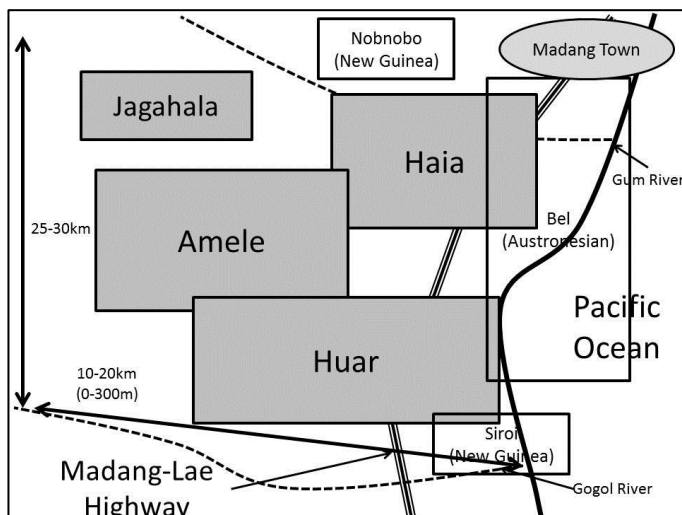


Figure 1. Amele speaking area

Amele is a Trans-New Guinea language, spoken in the suburban area of Madang, Papua New Guinea. Amele consists of four dialects, Haia (the most prestigious); Amele; Huar; and Jagahala (Figure 1). This study concerns the grammatical differences between the Haia and Huar dialects of Amele.

Previously, Roberts (1987) described the grammar of Amele, mainly based on the Haia dialect. The author visited an Amele village named Sein¹, where the Huar dialect is spoken, and began fieldwork in 2006. The author found that the grammar

of Huar differs slightly from the Haia dialect. These phonological and morphological differences have been previously noted by Roberts (1987:10) and Capell (1969:103). However, these differences are not described in detail, and moreover, the area in which Amele is spoken is not large (approximately within an area of 20–30 km), and its speakers are a few (5300 speakers, according to SIL (1987)²).

This study examines structures in the Haia and Huar dialects and summarizes the resulting data. Section 2 outlines the basic structures of Amele, and section 3 discusses the sentence examples (in particular, transitive sentences) of the two dialects. In section 4, this study tries to explain their differences. Section 5 is the conclusion.

2. Basic overview of Amele

This section introduces the basic grammatical structure of Amele. Word order in Amele is subject-object-verb (SOV) with a nominative-accusative system, and it has Noun-Adjective, Noun-Demonstrative, Genitive-Noun, and Noun-Numeral orders. Amele does not have morphological case marking, but it has 10 postpositions. Verbs do not have a voice system, but they have applicative constructions and a switch reference system (Roberts 1987).

The following examples show typical intransitive and transitive sentences in Amele. In (1), a personal subject pronoun marker is not obligatory, and the 3rd person singular pronoun “uqa” can be omitted, but a 3rd person marker is necessary in verbal agreement. Transitive verbs agree with the subject and the direct object in (2a). But object verbal agreement is not obligatory, as in (2b).

- (1) Dana (uqa) ho-i-a³.
 man 3s come-3s-today's past
 "A man came." (Roberts 1987:162)
- (2) a. Uqa jo ceh-ad-en
 3s house build-3p-3s-remote past
 "He built houses." (Roberts 1987:280)
- b. Uqa jo cehe-i-a.
 3s house build-3s-today's past
 "He built a house." (Roberts 1987:162)

Furthermore, there is verbal agreement with direct and indirect objects, and Roberts (1987) described direct and indirect object agreement as obligatory, as seen in (3a). However, the author's data on the Huar dialect, in (3b), shows that certain marker(s) are omitted, and the direct or indirect object marking is not specified.

- (3) a. Uqa sab i-te-i-a. (Haia dialect)
 3s food pred.-1s-3s-today's past
 "He gave the food to me." (Roberts 1987:281)
- b. Uqa sab i-t-i-ya. (Huar dialect)

3. Differences between Haia and Huar

This section contrasts the data of Haia (Roberts (1987)) and Huar (the author's). A number of morphological differences between them are observed in verbal agreements. In addition, this study observed several distinctions between them in their usage of demonstratives, moods, switch references, and some lexical matters, but this paper does not address these.

First, this case may be one of morpho-phonological differences, and in (4a), the Haia dialect displays a distinct verbal agreement. In contrast, in (4b), the inflectional forms in Huar appear shortened or fused morphologically. Thus, it is not possible to analyze a 3rd person marking and tense forms separately in Huar. In (5), the two dialects differ completely in verbal inflection. In particular, Huar sentences such as (5b) lack the subject agreement element *-i-*; instead another element, *-o-*, is used.

- (4) a. Dana mel age ced-ade-i-a. (Haia); Roberts (1987:201)
 Man boy 3p get-3p-3s-today's past
 "The man got the boys."
- b. Dana mel age cedadeya. (Huar)
- (5) a. Uqa wele od-i-na. (Haia); Roberts (1987:235)
 3s already do-3s-present
 "He is doing it."
- b. Uqa wele odona. (Huar)

Next, we observe double object markings such as the ditransitive and applicative constructions (Roberts 1987:280–281). Roberts notes that “two object clitics can be suffixed to the verb and this can be in either of the combinations DO + IO or IO + IO,” as shown in (6a). However, this pattern of marking in (6b) does not occur in the Huar dialect. In the Huar example in (7b), the verbal agreement “*itiya*” appears to be morphologically shortened and the IO clitic “-i-” omitted. Thus, the clitic formed in (7b) appears fused and cannot be further decomposed morphologically.

- (6) a. Uja jo ceh-ad(DO)-ut(IO)-en. (Haia); Roberts (1987:280)
 3s house build-3p-3s-3s-remote past
 “He built houses for her.”
 b. Uqa jo cehiton. (Huar)
- (7) a. Uqa sab i-te-i-a. (recipient) (Haia); Roberts (1987:281)
 3s food pred.-1s-3s-today’s past
 “He gave the food to me.”
 b. Uqa sab itiya. (Huar)

Example (8) shows a type of applicative construction (Nose 2012). Verbal agreement includes both direct and indirect object marking and is identical in Haia and Huar.

- (8) Uqa ija na ho qu-te-i-a. (malefactive), (Haia, Huar); Roberts (1987:281)
 3s 1s of pig hit-pred.-1s-3s-today’s past
 “He killed my pig on me.”

Though there are other grammatical differences between Haia and Huar, the most prominent differences are observed in verbal agreement marking. Some Huar sentences are consistent with Roberts (1987) data, but generally, Huar verbal forms are shorter than Haia forms. The shorter verbal forms in Huar show morphological fusion and cannot be decomposed morphologically.

4. Language’s internal and external explanations

Roberts (1987:10) has claimed that Haia and Huar are dialects that differ slightly in morphology. However, since the total number of Amele speakers is around 5000 and the area it is spoken in is small, the divergence of dialects is surprising. This section explores two possible explanations.

First, we examine whether their different verbal agreement patterns affect verbal transitivity. There are contrasts between transitive and intransitive verbs, and the omissions of subject/object agreement are related to transitivity. The Haia examples, based on Roberts (1987), have verbal agreement with subjects and objects (direct and indirect) that reflect clear markers of high transitivity. However, in the Huar examples, the correspondence between transitivity and agreement is ambiguous because of the omission of subject/object markers. Data from Roberts (1987) comes from quoted Bible translations and while not written language, the data reflects a certain formality or prestige. In contrast, the author’s data are elicited from oral communications and are based on everyday conversation. In (9), a pair of transitive and intransitive verbs is shown and the verbal inflection is the same, even though the

subjects in (9a) and (9b) are 3rd and 1st persons, respectively.

- (9) Huar: a. Window osodu-ga
window open-today's past
"The window opened."
b. Ija window osodu-ga
1s window open-today's past
"I opened the window."

In (9), Huar speakers do not distinguish verbal agreement according to transitivity, and this indicates that the Huar dialect is more flexible and less strict in verbal morphology than the Haia dialect.

Second, we try to explain these differences from a sociolinguistic perspective (cf. Ross 1987, Muysken 2008). The morphological and phonological variations observed in this study can be classified as dialectal differences. However, Roberts (1987)'s data and the author's data differ in time (before 1987/after 2006) and location (near Madang town/far from Madang town). Specifically, their morphological differences are observed only in verbal agreements and a limited number of other grammatical forms. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that the shortenings and omissions on Huar verbs are a result of language change initiated by Huar speakers. Amele people (even Huar speakers) may recognize that the more formal usages of verbal agreements, and possibly they are used in churches or other formal contexts. Nevertheless, Huar speakers usually prefer the shortened or fused forms, and these forms cannot be analyzed morphologically. Subsequently, Huar speakers consider these grammatical simplifications as representative of their speech area Ross (1987:597) explains that local usage indicates that this variety of speech is an emblem of group identity. However, these dialectal differences do not reflect a case of metatypy (Ross 2008): a type of contact-induced language change⁴.

5. Summary

This study observes several cases of omission among transitive and other related constructions, and tries to explain them. Roberts (1987) described Amele grammar based on a study of the Haia dialect, which requires subject/object agreement on verbs. In contrast, the Huar dialect sometimes lacks such agreement. This study concludes that they are not simply classified as dialect differences, but their variations can be explained by the sociolinguistic fact that Huar speakers allow flexible usage of simplified verbal agreement.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Neret Tamo and the villagers in Sein, Madang Province, Papua New Guinea for their data and kindness. I claim sole responsibility for any errors. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 23720211.
2. Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ae.
3. In Amele, the transcription "c" represents glottal stop, and "q" is voiced dorso-labiovelar plosive. Some abbreviations: s: singular, p: plural, pred: predicate marker

4. Ross (1987, 2008) claims that the neighboring Austronesian language Bel had contact with New Guinea languages (but Ross did not suggest Amele as a contact language), and Bel has grammaticalized subject/object marking suffixes on verbs. Nevertheless, the Huar dialect has omitted verbal agreement and such a differing tendency of grammaticalization is still questionable (cf. Muysken 2008:ch. 11).

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