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Information structure in Amele, Papua New Guinea[1]

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Abstracts

This study describes the information structure of Amele, a Trans-New Guinea language, Papua New Guinea. This study illustrates several grammatical behaviors related to the information structure. Amele has a rigid word order SOV, and does not have a grammatical voice. The topic and comment in Amele are affected by switch reference, object topicalization, and by using several discourse markers. This study will clarify how Amele uses the grammatical means to deal with information flow, and finally, I claim that Amele has a limited few means of dealing information in the grammar.
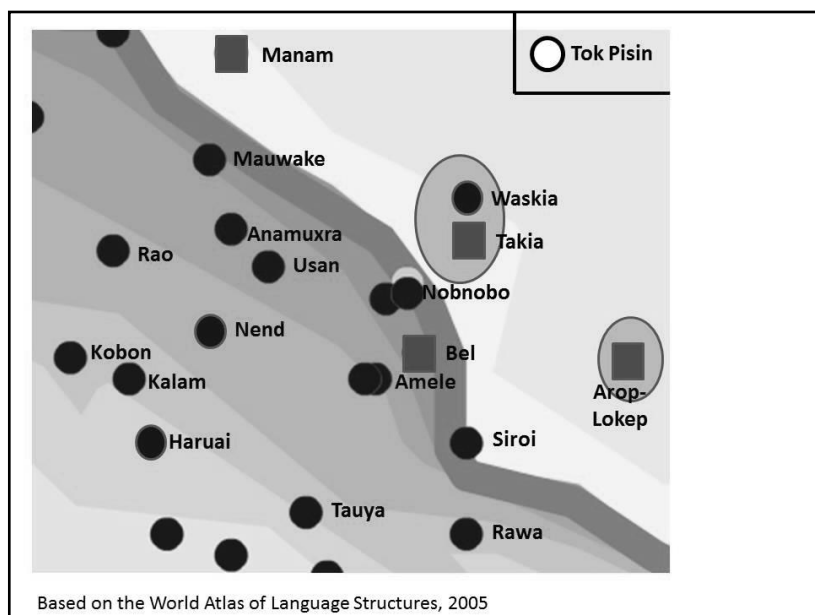
1. Introduction

Figure 1: Amele and other native languages in Madang Province.

In Papua New Guinea's Madang Province, there are 270 native Trans-New Guinea and Austronesian languages. Many of these are undergoing a gradual decline because the local population is switching to Tok Pisin, an English-based creole language (Figure 1: ■ indicates Trans-New Guinea languages, ● indicates Austronesian languages, and ○ indicates Tok Pisin). Amele is a Trans-New Guinea language spoken in the southern area of Madang town. It is a well-preserved language and is spoken as a first language by approximately 4000–5000 people, who are bilingual in Amele and Tok Pisin.

This study considers the information structure in Amele and illustrates several grammatical behaviors related to it. Amele has a rigid subject–object–verb (SOV) word order and lacks a grammatical voice. The topic/comment in Amele is affected by switch references, object topicalization, discourse markers, and other components. This study clarifies how Amele uses grammatical means to address information flow and highlights several factors that determine its information structure. Furthermore, it designates the grammatical options for the information structure.

Section 2 illustrates the basic grammatical information for Amele. Section 3 presents examples of sentences related to the information flow. Section 4 explains the characteristics of the observed data and concludes that Amele has limited means for expressing the information structure, some of which are considered to be affected by language contact.

2. Basic grammatical constructions in Amele

Amele has a rigid SOV word order with a nominative–accusative system and has verbal inflections for person, number, and tense. Moreover, Amele has 10 postpositions marking locational and instrumental relationships. Roberts (1987) provided grammatical descriptions of Amele, which were based on the Haia dialect. I, too, have provided grammatical descriptions, but they were based on the Huar dialect. There are several differences between Haia and Huar. For example, direct and indirect object agreements are not observed in Huar (Nose 2013). Therefore, verbal agreements in Huar are simplified compared with those in Haia. Roberts (1987: 227–230) described the distinctions between tense forms as shown in (1).

(1) Haia dialect: (Roberts 1987: 227–230)[2]
   a. Present tense: Ija   hugina. "I come."
                   1s   come-present
   b. Today's past: Ija huga. "I came (today)."
   c. Yesterday's past: Ija hugan. "I came yesterday."
   d. Remote past: Ija hoom. "I came."
   e. Future tense: Ija hugen. "I will come."
(2) Huar dialect:
   Ija huga. "I come, I came."

Huar speakers do not distinguish between tense distinctions in present and past tenses, although they understand the distinctions between as well as correctly inflect present, today's past, yesterday's past, and remote past tenses. Thus, grammatical complexities are lost in (2). Next, intransitive and transitive pairs are presented in (3). The following sentences illustrate the subject–verb (SV) or SOV orders, wherein the subject usually needs an element (noun or pronoun) and no object marker and direct object appears before the verb.

(3) "laugh" and "make laugh"
   a. Uqa   casale-a.
      3s   laugh-3s.past
      "He laughed."
   b. Ija   odo-in   uqa   casale-a.
      1s   do-1s-past   3s   laugh-3s.past (*odoc* "to do": causative)
      "I made him laugh."

In (3b), the transitive sentence is produced by using the causative verb *odoc* ("to do, to make"), and the verb *casalea* ("to laugh") agrees in both the third person singular and past tenses. This section presents several inconsistencies between Haia and Huar with regard to their usages of other grammatical constructions and certain lexical matters; however, the present study does not address these inconsistencies (cf. Donohue 2005).

3. Sentence types carrying information structure

This section illustrates several sentence types that can control information flow. First, the description provided by Roberts (1987) is reviewed, before several means of expressing topic and comment are presented

on the basis of field interviews with Huar speakers. Roberts (1987: 140–149) highlighted several options for expressing emphasis and topic in Haia. For example, emphasis can be expressed as shown in (4).

(4) Emphasis: (Roberts 1987:140–145)
    a. intonation/intensity
    b. particle expressing affirmation: *ao*, *cece*, *omom* (yes)
    c. emphatic mood particle: *ijom*, *om* (emphatic mood)
    d. adverbial expression *mele* (truly), *dih/himec* (just/only), *bahic* (very)

These emphasis options in (4a-d) are related to making focus in Amele. In addition to the emphasis shown in (4), Roberts (1987) described a mechanism for expressing topic and focus wherein the topic appears at a sentence's initial position and the focus is situated before the verb (preverbal position) or added as a special intonation. Amele is a subject-prominent language; thus, the subject pronoun is obligatory and the person and the number of the subject agree with the verbal inflections. However, other elements such as location or time can occur in the sentence's initial position. In (5), a temporal element *cum* is situated at the initial topic position, thus becoming the topic.

(5) **Cum**   ija   wen teian.
    yesterday 1s   hunger 1s-yesterday's past
    "Yesterday, I was hungry" (Roberts 1987:146).

As an alternative, Roberts (1987) explained that topicalization can be achieved with a double subject by using the pronominal copy strategy, as shown in (6). In this case, *dana i* ("this man") is topicalized. The element *"i"* is a demonstrative pronoun meaning "this".

(6) **Dana i**   uqa   hoia.
    man   this   3s   come-3s-today's past
    "This man, he came" (Roberts 1987:146).

Subsequently, data regarding Huar are collected in the field, and the following constructions and forms, which are involved in its information structure, are identified. First, Amele can topicalize the element by changing word order, although several orders are not allowed, as shown in (7). Predicates (verbs and copulas) cannot be placed at the sentence's initial position, and in (7d), *hel* ("cave") cannot be placed after the predicate.

(7) a. Sein onoc   hel   ja-ac bahic.
        Sein here (location) cave   beautiful
    b. Hel   ja-ac bahic   Sein onoc
    c. *ja-ac bahic   hel   Sein onoc
    d. *Sein onoc   ja-ac bahic   hel
        "The cave is beautiful in Sein."

The rules of topicalization are simple, and nouns (subject, direct, and indirect objects) as well as temporal and locational elements can be topicalized; however, they cannot be placed after the verbs and predicates (postverbal position). Moreover, the SV order (*hel ja-ac bahic* "cave is beatuiful") is fixed in (4a, b, d). The focus position is considered to be the preverbal position. Furthermore, as predicates (verbs and copulas) cannot move, other nominal or adverbial elements are placed in the focus position. Consequently, intonation and intensity also have a marked focus. This type of topicalization is also frequently observed in Tok Pisin, which has a rigid SVO order.

There is no passive voice in Amele, Tok Pisin, or the neighboring Austronesian Bel (Dempwolff n.d.). However, an informant explained that by changing the order and adding the demonstrative *uju*, Amele can express an equivalent sentence, as shown in (8). The demonstrative *uju* is discussed later (this is exclusively used in Huar dialect). This demonstrative usage is not a voice alternation but is similar to the example of *dana i* in (6), but the *uju* is not used in Haia dialect (Roberts 1987:215).

(8)　a.　Jesus asrec　　melait oso　　qagadon.
　　　　　Jesus black　　girl　one　　kill-3s.past
　　　　　"Black Jesus killed one girl."
　　　b.　**Melait**　　**uju**　　Jesus asrec　　qagadon.
　　　　　girl　　　　that　　Jesus black　　kill-3s.past
　　　　　"That girl is killed by Black Jesus."

Roberts (1987: 292–305) explained the excessive switch reference system in Amele, In Amele, switch references occur in two sequential sentences, which is also the case in the neighboring Trans-New Guinea languages Waskia and Siroi (Reesink 1983, Donohue 2005: 205–211). If the subjects of the first and second sentences are the same, an SS (same subject) marking is added to the verb inflections of the first sentence. If the subjects of the first and second sentences are different, a DS (different subject) marking is added to the same verb inflections. This switch reference can control information flow among subjects. An SS marking indicates unmarked and natural information flow; conversely, a DS marking draws listeners' attention to unnatural discourse. The examples in (9) and (10) are sentences from Haia and Huar, in which this system has practical uses in everyday discourse.

(9) Haia: Roberts (1987: 294)
　　　a. Ija **humig**　　　　sab jiga.
　　　　　1s come-1s.SS　　food eat-1s.today's past
　　　　　"I came and ate the food."
　　　b. Ija **hocomin**　　　sab jaga.
　　　　　1s come-1s.DS　　food eat-2s.today's past
　　　　　"I came and you ate the food."
(10) Huar:
　　　a.　Ija buk uqa **uti-mig**,　　　　　ija mosbi nuiga.
　　　　　1s book 3s give-1s.SS.past　　1s Port Moresby go-1s.past
　　　　　"I gave the book to him and I left Mosbi."
　　　b.　Ija buk uqa **ut-ein**,　　　　　uqa　　sianeya.

1s book 3s give-1s.DS.past   3s   read-3s.past

"I gave the book to him and he read it."

Roberts (1987) provided several means of emphasis, topic placement, and focusing on elements, as shown in (4). I also gathered data from Huar speakers and found several grammatical means of controlling discourses, as summarized in (11a–d). Huar speakers generally use several discourse markers and demonstratives to connect sentences and add emphasis.

(11) Various discourse markers and demonstratives in Huar:

      a. *odocob* (and then), *odi*, *odimei*, *odimig* (like, like this, then)

      b. *uju* (demonstrative: "that" indicating something/with discovery)

      c. *nu* (postposition: "purpose/cause")

      d. *madoga* (verb "tell, talk, say")

First, the form *odocob*, which means "then, and then," functions as a conjunction and is used to connect two sentences. *Odocob* is considered to be derived from the verb *odoc* ("to do"), but it becomes a conjunction.

(12) **Odocob**   uqa   ayan   snow-white boin. (Snow White c2)[3]

    And then   3s   name-poss   snow white call-3s.past

    "and then she called Snow White."

In (13), the form *odi* appears to be a shortened form of *odocob*, which also means "then." Sometimes, other similar forms are observed: *odimei* and *odimig*, meaning "like this, thus, then." These forms are functioning as discourse connectives. Meyerhoff (2011:253-257) examined the similar forms; *like this* in English and *olsem* in Bislama (an English-based creole spoken in Vanuatu), and she claimed that they have an effect of introducing discourse.

(13) **Odi** fii   ija iteiga, elnuc ija uqa kec bahic gabigina. (Snow White c10)

    Then suppose   1s give   what 1s 3s   like too much love

    "Then give it to me, because I cannot live without her."

There is no description in Haia (Roberts 1987: 215), but there is the special demonstrative *uju* in Huar. This demonstrative means "that," but it implies indicating something or discovery.[4] This demonstrative is used to specify someone or something during discourse (cf. passive translation in (8)). In (14) and (15), the forms *uju* indicate not only simple demonstrative meaning "that" but also a discourse effect of indicating things/animals/persons.

(14) Witic **uju-na**   uqan   abi-aya **uju**   madocob qe uur   **uju** iriton. (Snow White c3)

    Night that-postp 3s-poss   work-man that   talk   heart   that cooking

    "That night, she ordered the cook to put them in a stew and she ate them for dinner."

(15) Honaak   **uju**   uqa bitae   bahic. (Three little pig c45)

Little pig   that   3s   clever   very

"But the third little pig was too clever for the wolf."

Next, the form *nu* is inserted to connect the discourse. Roberts (1987: 161, 324) described *nu* as a postposition or subordinate conjunction that indicates "purpose" or "cause." However, the present study observed the usage of *nu* in (16) and (17); it assumes the meaning "and" and is used to coordinate sentences during discourse.[5]

(16) Age   yo uju-na   sab **nu**   wa **nu**   uus niju qaig on himec noroik. (Snow White c6)
     3pl   night that-postp   food postp water postp sleep   eat   only usually-go-3p
     "each night, they would return to eat and drink and sleep."

(17) Baan **nu**   meii   usadoiga (Three little pig) (* Baan meii usadoiga.) (Three Little Pigs c41)
     Wolf postp   look out   carefully
     "Beware, especially of the wolf."

Finally, the verb form *madoga* ("to tell, to say, to talk") is used to draw listeners' attention during spoken discourse. It has the effects of calling, paying attention, or confirmation, as shown in (18) and (19). In these cases, *madoga* is translated as "I tell you."[6]

(18) Na,   Masa!   **Madoga**, sab   je sain.
     Hay   Masa   talk   food   time
     "Hay, Masa! I tell you, food is ready."

(19) **Madoga,** aqan ajan   Pita.
     talk   name his   Peter
     "I tell you, his name is Peter"

4. Functional explanations and summary

This section summarizes the observations of this study and discusses several usages from discourse functional terms. Several previous studies on information structure have suggested that information structure denotes pragmatic roles and that there are several grammatical means of presenting or packaging information (Velupillai 2012: 232–235, Foley 2007). The present study examined the Huar dialect and compiled several sentence types related to its information structure. In general, both the Haia and Huar dialects of Amele are spoken data and subject-prominent, and the topic and focus can be indicated by intonation or intensity. The observed grammatical means are summarized in (20).

(20) Grammatical options regarding the information structure in Amele[7]:
    a. Clause internal: verbal agreement and switch reference
    b. Clause external:
      i. emphasis (focus): (4b-d) in Roberts (1987:140-145), pre-verb position
      ii. topicalization (changing orders), demonstrative *uju*
      iii. postposition *nu*, conjunction *odocob*, verb *madoga*

In (20a, b), the clause internal options are limited, and changing orders may usually be preferred. However, the clause external options, the usages of conjunctions and demonstratives, were frequently observed in the present study. In particular, the demonstrative *uju* in (20b-ii) was used for an alternative topicalization in the grammaticalization processes (Heine & Kuteva 2002; DEMONSTRATIVE > focus, relative). Other forms in (18b-iii) are also grammaticalized forms that maintain the balance between the foreground and background (cf. DO > emphasis; SAY > quotative, subordinator). While several complex grammars such as object markings, strict tense distinctions, and applicative constructions are lost in diachronic terms (Nose 2013, Donohue 2005: 181–182). Moreover, everyday discourse in bilingual situations and heavy language contact induces forms such as conjunctions and demonstratives to function as discourse markers (Muysken 2008: 245–246).

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. In Amele, the transcription "c" represents a glottal stop, and "q" is a voiced dorso-labiovelar plosive. Abbreviations: s, singular; p, plural; past, past tense; poss, possessive marker; postp, postposition; DS, different subject; SS, same subject.

3. Together with the informants, the author translated the following folk tales from English into Amele: *Snow White* and *Three Little Pigs*.

4. Roberts (1987: 215) described three types of demonstratives in Amele: *i*, "this"; *eu*, "that, near listener"; *ou*, "that, near neither speaker not listener." However, in the present study, there are five types of demonstratives in Huar: *i*, "this"; *eu*, "that, invisible"; *au*, "that, visible"; *ono*, "that/there"; *uju*, "that, with a discovery nuance."

5. The informants did not specify the meaning of *nu* and informed me that *nu* functions as a discourse filler.

6. This usage is parallel to the following usages in Tok Pisin: *yu tok/yu toktok* ("you say") and *mi tok* ("I tell you"). The usage *madoga* is considered to have been directly borrowed from Tok Pisin.

7. Furthermore, Roberts (1987:206) described that there is no cleft or pseudo-cleft construction in Amele. However, this study found that the usages of relative clause can carry a kind of cleft-operation, as shown in (i).

> (i) Sab   aic   wele   irya.
>
> food   mother   already   cook
>
> "The food which mama has already cooked."

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