



Verbal subject marking in Ambel: Accounting for apparent irregularities

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Verbal subject marking in Ambel

1. Introduction

2. Subject marking in Ambel: The basics

3. Accounting for apparent irregularities

4. Verb classes

5. Conclusion

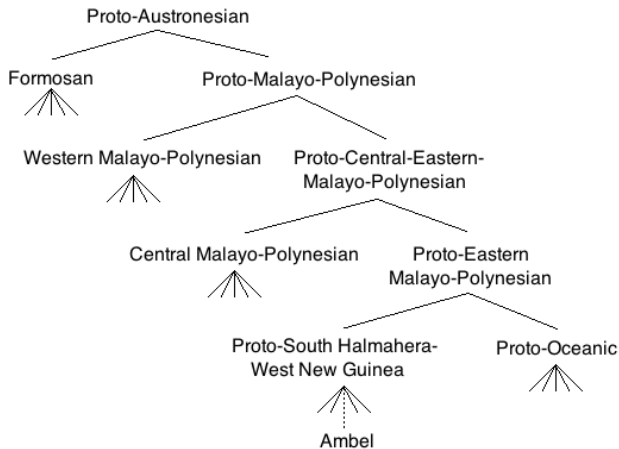
Ambel: Language background



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See Kamholz (2014) for subgrouping of SHWNG languages

Ambel: Typological background

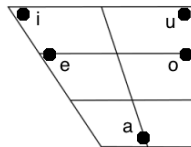
- ▶ SVO constituent order
- ▶ Largely analytic
- ▶ Head marking: possessive morphology, subject marking on verb
- ▶ Clause-final negation and aspect markers

Ambel: Phonology

► Consonants:

	bilabial	alveolar	velar
stops	p b	t d	k g
fricatives	f	s	
nasals	m	n	
liquids		l r	
semivowels		y	w

► Vowels:



- Lexical tone: Two-way underlying contrast (Arnold 2015)
- Syllable structure:
 - Most frequent: CV(C)
 - Maximal: CyVyC, CwVwC

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Subject marking in Ambel

- ▶ All verbs in Ambel are obligatorily marked with the person, number, and animacy of the syntactic subject:

(1) (ine) **y**-abí **y**-áp be **ya**-síri
 (1SG) 1SG-want 1SG-paddle to 1SG-fish
 ‘I want to go fishing.’

(2) (isne) **t**-abí **t**-áp be **ta**-síri
 (1PL.I) 1PL.I-want 1PL.I-paddle to 1PL.I-fish
 ‘We want to go fishing.’

Subject marking in Ambel

- ▶ Unlike nearby related languages (e.g. Taba, Bowden 2001), the form of the marking is straightforwardly nominative-accusative:
 - ▶ The form of subject marking is the same whatever the semantic role of the syntactic subject

Agent	Agent-like S	Patient-like S
<i>na-kapíl dún</i>	<i>na-katón</i>	<i>na-mdól</i>
3SG.AN-grill fish	3SG.AN-sit	3SG.AN-fall
‘S/he grills fish.’	‘S/he sits.’	‘S/he falls.’

Subject marking in Ambel

- ▶ As with possessive morphology (see Arnold 2014), subject marking in Ambel is particularly rich:
 - ▶ Four-way number distinction (singular, dual, paucal, plural)
 - ▶ Inclusive/exclusive distinction in the first person
 - ▶ Animate/inanimate distinction in the third person (singular vs. non-singular)
- ▶ The data presented today will focus on forms with singular animate subjects.

Subject marking in Ambel

- ▶ For most native verbs, the form of the subject marking is predictable from the phonological shape of the root:

	ROOT	1SG	2SG	3SG.AN
V-initial	/-ánum/ 'drink'	y -ánum 'I drink'	ny -ánum 'You drink'	n -ánum 'S/he drinks'
C-initial	/-tápe/ 'stab'	ya -tápe 'I stab'	nya -tápe 'You stab'	na -tápe 'S/he stabs'

Exceptions 1: Loan words

- ▶ Loan words always take C-initial prefixation, even if the root is V-initial:

e.g. *ya-istirahat* 1SG-rest ‘I rest’ < PM *istirahat* ‘rest’

- ▶ This is taken as evidence that the subject marking pattern 1SG *ya-*, 2SG *nya-*, 3SG.AN *na-* is productive in Ambel.

Exceptions 2: Apparent stem alternation

- ▶ There are some C-initial verbal roots that do not follow the regular pattern of prefixation:
 - ▶ At first glance, when these verbs are marked for a 1SG or 2SG subject, they appear to undergo a process of irregular stem alternation
 - ▶ Forms marked for a 2SG or 3SG.AN subject are sometimes prenasalised

Exceptions 2: Apparent stem alternation

	Root	1SG	2SG	3SG.AN
t-initial	/-tú/	[tʃú]	[(n)tʃú]	[(n)tú]
	‘wash’	*[ya-tú]	*[nya-tú]	*[na-tú]
d-initial	/-dow/	[dʒow]	[(n)dʒow]	[(n)dow]
	‘push’	*[ya-dow]	*[nya-dow]	*[na-dow]
b-initial	/-bun/	[dʒun]	[(n)dʒun]	[(m)bun]
	‘hit, kill’	*[ya-bun]	*[nya-bun]	*[na-bun]
l-initial	/-lá/	[ʎá]	[(n)ʎá]	[(n)lá]
	‘swim’	*[ya-lá]	*[nya-lá]	*[na-lá]
m-initial	/-mát/	[myát]	[myát]	[mát]
	‘die’	*[ya-mát]	*[nya-mát]	*[na-mát]

Exceptions 2: Apparent stem alternation

- ▶ In the remainder of this presentation, I will argue that these apparently irregular surface forms are in fact regularly derived
- ▶ The surface forms of these verbs are entirely predictable from the phonological shape of the root, if we:
 1. Posit <y>-infixation in the 1SG and 2SG, and /n/-prefixation in the 2SG and 3SG.AN
 2. Make reference to a small number of other regular phonotactic restrictions and phonological processes found elsewhere in Ambel, and allomorphy

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<y>-infixation in 1SG and 2SG

	ROOT	1SG	2SG	3SG.AN
t-initial	/-tú/ 'wash'	[tʃú]	[(n)tʃú]	[(n)tú]
d-initial	/-dow/ 'push'	[dʒow]	[(n)dʒow]	[(n)dow]
b-initial	/-bun/ 'hit, kill'	[dʒun]	[(n)dʒun]	[(m)bun]
l-initial	/-lá/ 'swim'	[ɬá]	[(n)ɬá]	[(n)lá]
m-initial	/-mát/ 'die'	[myát]	[myát]	[mát]

<y>-infixation in 1sg and 2sg

- ▶ Reasons to posit <y>-infixation for all these verbs:
 - ▶ Clear-cut case of <y>-infixation for *m*-initial verbs
 - ▶ Some closely related languages spoken on Raja Ampat have <y>-infixation in the 1sg and 2sg when the verbal root is C-initial:

	Root	1sg	2sg	Reference
Ma'ya	-ba ¹² s 'lift'	b<y>a ¹² s	m-b<y>a ¹² s	van der Leeden (n.d.)

<y>-infixation in 1SG and 2SG

► *t-* and *d-*initial verbs:

- [tʃ] and [dʒ] come from underlying sequences of /t+y/ and /d+y/ respectively:

e.g.	<i>t</i> -initial	/t<y>ú/	→	[tʃú]
		<1SG>wash		‘I wash’
	<i>d</i> -initial	/d<y>ow/	→	[dʒow]
		<1SG>push		‘I push’

<y>-infixation in 1SG and 2SG

► *t-* and *d-*initial verbs:

- There is independent evidence to suggest that [tʃ] and [dʒ] segments found in monomorphemic words in Ambel are also realisations of sequences of /ty/ and /dy/:
 1. The distribution of [tʃ] and [dʒ] within the syllable:
[tʃ] and [dʒ] only occur in syllable onsets (thus preserving maximal CyVyC structure)
 2. The distribution of Cy onsets across the phonological inventory:
If [tʃ] and [dʒ] were realisations of separate phonemes /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, we would expect to see [ty] and [dy] alongside [tʃ] and [dʒ]

<y>-infixation in 1sg and 2sg

► **b-initial verbs:**

- [dʒ] comes from an underlying sequence of /b+y/:

e.g. /b<y>un/ → [dʒun]
 <1sg>hit 'I hit'

- There is no independent evidence to suggest that underlying /by/ → [dʒ] in monomorphemic words:

e.g. /byáw/ → [byáw]
 'blue'

<y>-infixation in 1SG and 2SG

► /-initial verbs:

- [ʎ] comes from an underlying sequence of /l+y/:

e.g. /l<y>á/ → [ʎá]
 <1SG>swim 'I swim'

- The segment [ʎ] is not attested in monomorphemic words

<y>-infixation in 1SG and 2SG

▶ *m*-initial verbs:

- ▶ [my] comes from an underlying sequence of /m+y/:

e.g. /m<y>át/ → [myát]
 <1SG>die 'I die'

- ▶ Sequences of [my] are not attested elsewhere in the corpus

<y>-infixation in 1SG and 2SG

	ROOT	1SG	2SG	3SG.AN
t-initial	/-tú/ 'wash'	[tʃú] /t<y>ú/	[(n)tʃú]	[(n)tú]
d-initial	/-dow/ 'push'	[dʒow] /d<y>ow/	[(n)dʒow]	[(n)dow]
b-initial	/-bun/ 'hit, kill'	[dʒun] /b<y>un/	[(n)dʒun]	[(m)bun]
l-initial	/-lá/ 'swim'	[ʎá] /l<y>á/	[(n)ʎá]	[(n)lá]
m-initial	/-mát/ 'die'	[myát] /m<y>át/	[myát]	[mát]

Nasal prefixation in 2SG and 3SG.AN

	ROOT	1SG	2SG	3SG.AN
t-initial	/-tú/ 'wash'	[tʃú] /t<y>ú/	[(n)tʃú]	[(n)tu]
d-initial	/-dow/ 'push'	[dʒow] /d<y>ow/	[(n)dʒow]	[(n)dow]
b-initial	/-bun/ 'hit, kill'	[dʒun] /b<y>un/	[(n)dʒun]	[(m)bun]
l-initial	/-lá/ 'swim'	[ʎá] /l<y>á/	[(n)ʎá]	[(n)lá]
m-initial	/-mát/ 'die'	[myát] /m<y>át/	[myát]	[mát]

Nasal prefixation in 2SG and 3SG.AN

- ▶ Whether the nasal segments are realised depends on the phonotactic context:
 - ▶ Recall the maximal syllable structure is CyVyC or CwVwC
 - ▶ The nasal segment only fully manifests if preceded by an open syllable:

	No preceding open syl	Preceding open syl
e.g. t-initial	[tú] [ˠtú] *[ntú]	[láw.ran.tú]
/-tú/ ‘wash’	‘he/she washes’	‘Laura washes’
b-initial	[bun] [ᵐbun] *[mbun]	[láw.ram.bun]
/-bun/ ‘hit’	‘he/she hits’	‘Laura hits’

Nasal prefixation in 2SG and 3SG.AN

- ▶ The form of the nasal depends on the stem to which it attaches:

- ▶ When preceding a labial segment, /n-/ → [m]:

e.g. /lávra n-bun/ → [láv.ram.bun]
 Laura 3SG.AN-hit 'Laura hits'

- ▶ When preceding a nasal segment, /n-/ → [∅]:

e.g. /lávra n-mát/ → [láv.ra.mát]
 Laura 3SG.AN-die 'Laura dies'

- ▶ Elsewhere, /n-/ → [n]:

e.g. /lávra n-lá/ → [láv.ran.lá]
 Laura 3SG.AN-swim 'Laura swims'

Nasal prefixation in 2SG and 3SG.AN

- ▶ The form of the nasal depends on the root to which it attaches:
 - ▶ Place assimilation of nasal consonants is found elsewhere in Ambel
e.g. 3SG.INAN adjective subject marking:

/aN-/	→	[am-]	/	_____	[+obstruent, +labial]
		e.g.		[am-byáw]	‘It is blue’
	→	[an-]	/	_____	[+obstruent, +alveolar]
		e.g.		[an-tádʒu]	‘It hurts’
	→	[aŋ-]	/	_____	[+obstruent, +velar], [+glottal], [+liquid]
		e.g.		[aŋ-héy]	‘It is good’
	→	[a-]	/	_____	[+nasal]
		e.g.		[a-matém]	‘It is black’

Nasal prefixation in 2SG and 3SG.AN

	ROOT	1SG	2SG	3SG.AN
t-initial	/-tú/	[tʃú]	[(n)tʃú]	[(n)tú]
	‘wash’	/t<y>ú/	/n-t<y>ú/	/n-tú/
d-initial	/-dow/	[dʒow]	[(n)dʒow]	[(n)dow]
	‘push’	/d<y>ow/	/n-d<y>ow/	/n-dow/
b-initial	/-bun/	[dʒun]	[(n)dʒun]	[(m)bun]
	‘hit, kill’	/b<y>un/	/n-b<y>un/	/n-bun/
l-initial	/-la/	[ɬa]	[(n)ɬa]	[(n)la]
	‘swim’	/l<y>á/	/n-l<y>á/	/n-lá/
m-initial	/-mát/	[myát]	[myát]	[mát]
	‘die’	/m<y>át/	/n-m<y>át/	/n-mát/

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Verb Classes

- ▶ Three patterns of prefixation looked at so far:
 1. 1SG /ya-/ , 2SG /nya-/ , 3SG.AN /na-/
The regular, productive paradigm of subject marking in Ambel.
Used with most C-initial native roots, and all loan verbs
 2. 1SG /y-/ , 2SG /ny-/ , 3SG.AN /n-/
Used with all native V-initial roots
 3. 1SG /<y>/ , 2SG /n-<y>/ , 3SG.AN /n-/
Used with some C-initial verbs

- ▶ The form of subject marking is partly predictable based on the phonological shape of the root, but it is not wholly predictable:
 - ▶ All verbs following pattern (2) are V-initial
BUT not all V-initial verbs follow pattern (2)
 - ▶ All verbs following pattern (3) are C-initial
BUT not all C-initial verbs follow pattern (3)

Verb Classes

- ▶ **This motivates an analysis of Ambel in which the form of verbal subject marking is partly phonologically determined, and partly lexically determined:**
 - ▶ **Class I:** 1SG /ya-/ , 2SG /nya-/ , 3SG.AN /na-/
The regular, productive paradigm of subject marking in Ambel.
Used with most C-initial native roots, and all loan verbs
 - ▶ **Class II:** 1SG /y-/ , 2SG /ny-/ , 3SG.AN /n-/
Used with all native V-initial roots
 - ▶ **Class III:** 1SG /<y>/ , 2SG /n-<y>/ , 3SG.AN /n-/
Used with some C-initial verbs

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Conclusion

- ▶ Apparently irregular verbs in Ambel are in fact regularly derived. Observed surface forms are due to:
 - ▶ <y>-infixation in 1SG and 2SG
 - ▶ Nasal prefixation in 2SG and 3SG.AN
 - ▶ A small number of other phonotactic restrictions, regular phonological processes, and some allomorphy
- ▶ What form the subject marking takes is not wholly predictable from the shape of the root
 - ▶ This motivates an analysis which distinguishes three lexically-specified verb classes in Ambel

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