

## 2.15.4. ISOLATES: MOROBE DISTRICT: WASEMBO (OR GUSAP)

K.A. McElhanon

### 2.15.4.1. INTRODUCTION

The Wasembo language (476 speakers) is spoken in five villages of the Markham Headwaters Census Division, Kaiapit Subdistrict, Morobe District. These villages are Gusap (population 48), Hinggia (101), Yankowan (135), Rampa (101), and Maraboi (91) and they are located east of the Gusap aerodrome between the Gusap and Umi Rivers at altitudes between 3,000 and 5,000 feet.

The data upon which this study is based were elicited through the use of the Kâte language as the lingua franca and are regarded as having a high degree of reliability. Research in the Wasembo language was supported in part by the Papua New Guinea Research Fund of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. A vocabulary list of 313 words may be obtained from the writer.

The grammatical and morphological data support the classification of this language as non-Austronesian. The usual tagmeme order locates the Predicate Tagmeme final in the clause. Other clause level tagmemes are easily identified by the occurrence of enclitics which are diagnostic for particular tagmemes.

### 2.15.4.2. NOTES ON GRAMMAR

#### 2.15.4.2.1. BASIC VERB FORMS

There is a distinction between sentence-medial and sentence-final forms of the verb. The sentence medial form -mu indicates the same actor (homopersonal) as that of the following verb. The forms indicating a different actor (heteropersonal) from that of the following verb make seven distinctions of person and number and these forms are given in

Matrix I. Note that these seven distinctions of person and number are typical of the languages currently asserted to belong to the Trans-New Guinea Phylum.

*Matrix I: Heteropersonal verbal suffixes*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	-pa	-pua	-puna
2nd person	-mana	-pia	-pina
3rd person	-ne	-pia	-pina

There do not appear to be any sentence-medial suffixes indicating a distinction between simultaneous or antecedent action in relation to the action of the following verb.

Verb paradigms were elicited for past tense, present tense, present tense habitative mode, future tense, and the imperative mode. No separate contrary-to-fact forms were elicited; rather this category appears to be expressed by past or future tense forms with syntactic markers. Past tense habitative mode could not be satisfactorily elicited. The fact that the Kâte past tense habitative forms were not understood probably indicates that an equivalent category does not exist in the Wasembo language.

*Matrix II: Past tense verbal suffixes*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	-pakae	-puakae	-punakae
2nd person	-manakae	-piakae	-pinakae
3rd person	-nekae	-piakae	-pinakae

Note that the past tense suffixes are the same as the heteropersonal verbal suffixes plus the form *kae*. Further study is necessary to determine the significance of this similarity.

*Matrix III: Present tense verbal suffixes*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	-ra	-rou	-pu
2nd person	-ma	-rei	-pi
3rd person	-re	-rei	-pi

The forms of Matrix III were elicited with the verb root *o-* to hold *it*. When the verb root {*ire-*} *ire-* ~ *ira-* ~ *i-* to eat was elicited with present tense suffixes the resulting forms were those of Matrix IV.

*Matrix IV: Present tense forms of to eat*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	ire-ra	i-reu	ire-pu
2nd person	ira-ma	i-rei	ire-pi
3rd person	ire-re	i-rei	ire-pi

In general there appears to be a significant amount of verb root/stem variation. Until a study of Wasembo morphophonemics has been completed, the identification of morpheme boundaries and suffixes must be regarded as tentative.

*Matrix V: Future tense verbal suffixes*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	-kara	-kohu	-kopu
2nd person	-kanu	-keku	-kepi
3rd person	-komu	-keku	-kepi

The suffixes in Matrix V were elicited with the verb root *e- to hold it*. When occurring with *-ire to eat* the initial *k* is replaced by *t*.

*Matrix VI: Present tense habituitive suffixes*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	-makera	-makereu	-makepu
2nd person	-makema	-makerei	-makepi
3rd person	-makere	-makerei	-makepi

A common feature of the Finisterre-Huon group of languages is that the habituitive mode morphemes are related to a verb root meaning *to stay* or *to live* and are possibly derived from a proto-form involving a compound with this verb. The three hundred vocabulary items included in this study, however, do not include a verb root which could be identified with the posited 'habituitive mode' suffix *-make*.

*Matrix VII: Imperative suffixes*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	-o/-wo	-kohu	-kopu
2nd person	-∅	-ki	-ni
3rd person	-komu	-ki	-ni

Note in Matrix VII that the 3rd person singular, 1st person dual, and 1st person plural forms are the same as the corresponding future tense suffixes in Matrix V. These forms must be regarded with suspicion until they are confirmed by further study.

## 2.15.4.2.2. OBJECT MARKING AFFIXES

The limited data of this study do not allow for definitive statements on the status of the object-marking affixes. If one posits verb roots consisting of zero morphemes, then the affixes may be regarded as suffixes which directly follow the verb root/stem. These would be followed by a verb periphery consisting of mode, tense, and subject-marking suffixes. Alternatively one may posit both prefixes and suffixes without the supposed occurrence of zero morphemes as verb roots.

The benefactive forms were not obtained so nothing can be said regarding the possible occurrence of benefactive suffixes on the verb. No prefixes were observed in the verb morphology.

Some forms of the object-markers (particularly the dual and plural forms) are similar in phonological shape to the free personal pronouns (Matrix XII). There appear to be two allomorphic subclasses of the object-markers with apparently minor morphophonemic variants. One subclass is typified by the object-markers occurring with positive zero morphemes as verb roots for *to hit* and *to give*.

*Matrix VIII: Object-markers with Ø- to hit*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	ya-	hiya-	hita-
2nd person	na-	nia-	neka-
3rd person	a-	nua-	noka-

*Matrix IX: Object-markers with Ø- to give*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	opa-	hiɔ-	hiɔ-
2nd person	nɔ-	niɔ-	nekiɔ-
3rd person	nɔ-	nuɔ-	nokiɔ-

Another subclass is typified by the object-markers occurring with the verb roots *ge- to see* and *hina- to await*.

*Matrix X: Object-markers with ge- to see*

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	ge-ya-	ge-heva-	ge-hita-
2nd person	ge-na-	ge-nia-	ge-ke-
3rd person	gɔ-	ge-nua-	ge-ke-

Matrix XI: Object-markers with *hina-* to await

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	<i>hina-ya-</i>	<i>hina-hiya-</i>	<i>hina-ta-</i>
2nd person	<i>hina-hi-</i>	<i>hina-nia-</i>	<i>hina-ki-</i>
3rd person	<i>hina-</i>	<i>hina-nua-</i>	<i>hina-ki-</i>

Some examples with other verb roots are: *nanuka-ya-re* (*pass by-me-he*) *he passed by me*, *aka-ya-re* (*bite-me-he*) *he bit me*, *pihe-ya-re* (*call-me-he*) *he called me*, *hepure-ya-re* (*show-me-he*) *he showed me*, and *gae-ya-re* (*tell-me-he*) *he told me*.

## 2.15.4.2.3. NOMINALS

The structure of the noun appears to be + root + possessive suffixes + number as in *ipo-hito* *our father*, *ipo-hito-mo* *our two fathers*, and *ipo-hito-po* *our many fathers*.

Noun phrases evidence the noun followed by qualifiers as in *wóite bónggae* (*pandanus, red*) *red pandanus* and *hámungge khúha* (*man, all*), *all the men*.

The personal pronouns (Matrix XII) do not distinguish between inclusive and exclusive.

## Matrix XII: Personal pronouns

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	<i>ima</i>	<i>hia</i>	<i>hita</i>
2nd person	<i>na</i>	<i>nia</i>	<i>neka</i>
3rd person	<i>gu</i>	<i>nua</i>	<i>noka</i>

The nominal possessive suffixes (Matrix XIII) show similarities with the personal pronouns. It is possible that these possessive suffixes developed from personal pronouns which indicated possession when occurring after the noun. In time these pronouns became phonologically bound to the noun. Note, however, that elicited data indicate that possession also may be indicated by simply preposing a pronoun or noun as in *ná páhe* *my house* and *ipó-e páha* (*father-his, house*) *his father's house*.

## Matrix XIII: Nominal possessive suffixes

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st person	<i>-o/yo</i>	<i>-(h)iyo</i>	<i>-(h)ito</i>
2nd person	<i>-na</i>	<i>-nia</i>	<i>-neka</i>
3rd person	<i>-e/-ye</i>	<i>-nuo</i>	<i>-noka</i>

The clitics identified in the data are: (1) the subject/instrument clitic *-ka*, (2) the directional clitic *-ge towards*, (3) the locational clitic *-geku at*, (4) the associative clitic *-kahu with*, and (5) the benefactive clitic *-age for*.

#### 2.15.4.3. CLASSIFICATORY STATUS OF WASEMBO (GUSAP)

Wasembo (or Gusap) has until now been regarded as a phylum-level isolate (see 1.3.4. in this volume). However, Z'graggen (personal communication), on the basis of similarities between pronominal forms and a limited number of basic vocabulary items, suggests that the Wasembo language is an aberrant language of the Pihom Stock (Madang and Adelbert Range Sub-Phylum in the Trans-New Guinea Phylum) located about 80-120 miles to the north-east in the Madang District (see 2.8.2.2.2.3.). Similarities also exist, however, with languages of the Rai Coast Stock (Madang and Adelbert Range Sub-Phylum, Trans-New Guinea Phylum, see 2.8.2.2.1.1.) located thirty miles to the north-east, and any definitive statement will have to await further study.