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The interaction of hierarchies of number, animacy and morphosyntax in Meso-Melanesian

Oral (preferred) or poster

*'Typological hierarchies in synchrony and diachrony' session **or** general session*

Across the Meso-Melanesian (MM) subgroup of Oceanic (Papua New Guinea), a hierarchy of expression of number interacts with hierarchies of animacy and morphosyntactic exponence in ways that are unusual and significantly under-reported in the literature. This paper presents the details of some of these interactions.

Some MM languages give neat evidence for differential number marking on the basis of hierarchies of number and animacy. In Vinitiri (Van Der Mark 2007), dual, trial and plural are expressable by pronoun or inflection. With humans, plural marking is obligatory while dual and trial are optional, but not equally so: dual occurs significantly more frequently than trial. Rather than simply supporting number hierarchies such as Corbett (2000:38) as an implication hierarchy of the exponence of number categories in a language, this therefore demonstrates a hierarchy of preference of use in a language that allows expression of multiple categories, providing even stronger evidence for the psychological reality of the number hierarchy. Vinitiri also displays differential likelihood of expression of optional categories on the basis of a morphosyntactic hierarchy where expression of dual or trial is more likely in pronouns than in agreement, as in (1). Moreover, animacy also plays a role in this system. While the facts above are true for humans, non-singular inflection is impossible with inanimates, singular occurring regardless of number (agreeing with Corbett 2000:55-57). However, lexical expressions of number such as a dedicated plural quantifier can occur, giving apparent number contradictions, as in (2), again demonstrating differential number marking on the basis of both animacy and morphosyntax.

(1) ***Mi*** *mutu βuse burəsi u-ra=ra pisa*
1EXC.PL.SBJ chop throw.away fall to-DIR=ART ground
'We [three] chopped [it] away onto the ground,

na-muru ***mitalu*** *mutu-iau a uruə-na-pəkanə.*
LOC-follow 1EXC.TR.SBJ chop-1SGOBJ ART two-LIG-piece
then we three chopped me a piece.'

(2) *Supu di gə kəli ra=**umənə** tuŋu.*
PURP 3PL.SBJ PST dig ART=PL tunnel
'They were supposed to dig tunnels.

*βare mi gə kisi, mi gə launu ta-**nə**.*
PURP 1EXC.PL.SBJ PST stay 1EXC.PL.SBJ PST live LOC=3SG.PSSR
So we stayed, we lived in it [the tunnels].'

Animacy also interacts with number in unusual ways in the phenomenon of inverse number marking. Some MM languages divide nouns into animacy-based classes in which the singular article of one class marks plural in the other and vice versa (Baerman 2007:40-41; Corbett 2000:163-165; Palmer 2012:449-451). The role of animacy in inverse number varies between languages, but in several animacy interacts with number variably on a number of bases, a fact not reported in the literature. In Nehan (Logan et al 2013), class boundaries fall at different points on the animacy hierarchy on the basis of grammatical role. While human and body-part terms are always in an "A-Class", and inanimates in an "O-Class", the boundary varies with non-human animates. For core arguments, some animates are A-class and some O-Class. With obliques, however, all animates are A-Class.

In Teop (Mosel & Spriggs 2000), class membership again divides at differing points in the animacy hierarchy, but on a completely different basis. In this language three classes exist, an "E-Class", an A-Class and an O-Class. Corbett (2000:164-165) treats the E-Class as distinct only in singular, with plural expressed using the same article as the A-Class. However, a distinct E-Class plural article does in fact occur, but with a reduced range of items. In singular, personal names, kin terms, important humans ('chief', 'priest' etc) and domestic animals are E-Class, while ordinary humans and items further down the hierarchy are A-Class. In plural, however, only personal names and kin terms are E-Class. Important humans and domestic animals are A-Class.

(3)

	E-Class names, kin	important humans, domestic animals	A-Class humans, animates	O-Class inanimates
SG	*e*		*a*	*o*
PL	*ere*	*o*		*a*

The Teop system is also significant in the differential ranking of humans in the hierarchy, with domestic animals placed below important humans, but above ordinary humans, an arrangement not represented in Corbett's (2000:56-66) typology or similar hierarchies, and at odds with Silverstein's (1976) basic split between humans and animates (see Allen 1987:57; Comrie 1989:185,194-197; Nichols 1992:160–161; Smith-Stark 1974).