Reconstruction: A Puzzle from New Guinea

Ty Dolochol: Plausibility and Historicism

A. V. Ahenakewad
preserves a number of typical features of Ndu languages, among them two genders (mas- 
culine and feminine), three numbers (singular, dual and plural) and switch-reference 
marking on verbs. The language is predominantly suffixing and agglutinating, with just 
a few prefixes.

The Manambu people are known for their traditional warfare and tendency to ex-
pand their territories at the expense of other, non-Ndu speaking people. As a result of the 
substrata from such unrelated languages (whose speakers the Manambu had subjugated 
and subsequently absorbed: see: Aikhenvald 2008; 2009), the language is in many ways 
more complex than other Ndu languages. Manambu is also more innovative than its rela-
tives: it has undergone a number of phonological mergers (in the sense of Trask (2000: 
210)). The Proto-Ndu contrast of word-final voiceless stops (p, t and k), the nasal n and 
the rhotic r has been lost in Manambu, all five segments merging as r. As a result, Ma-
ambu has a high number of morphemes with a similar form. Some of these appear to be 
semantically linked. But their history is often different.

We now turn to one highly versatile form, used as a suffix and as a free pronoun.

2. One form, many meanings: the versatile (-)bar

The form (-)bar is highly frequent in Manambu. It is pronounced as [ʰər] — like 
most languages of New Guinea, stops in Manambu are phonetically prenasalized. 
The free form bar combines the meaning of the second and third person dual personal 
pronoun:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSON/GENDER</th>
<th>SG</th>
<th>DU</th>
<th>PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 feminine/masculine</td>
<td>wun</td>
<td>an</td>
<td>n'an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 feminine</td>
<td>n'an</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 masculine</td>
<td>man</td>
<td></td>
<td>gwur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 feminine</td>
<td>io</td>
<td>bər</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 masculine</td>
<td>de</td>
<td></td>
<td>day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personal pronouns are optional, and are typically used only for emphasis and dis-
ambiguation. This is the case in many languages of the world with obligatory cross-
referencing of person, number and gender on the verb.

Third person pronouns also appear as markers of agreement on adjectives and de-
monstratives, as shown in Table 2 (which features the adjective numa ‘big’). The plural 
agreement form -di is a contraction of the third person plural pronoun day.

200 speakers (also see: Laycock 1965); (3) Gala, or Ngala, spoken by about 150 people; (4) 
Abelam-Wosera, a dialect continuum with over 40,000 speakers, also known as Ambulas 
(see: Wendel 1993: 1—5; Wilson 1980); (5) Boiken (also known as Boikin, Nucum, Yangoru 
and Yengoru) spoken by over 30,000 people [Freudenburg 1976; 1979].
Note that dual number is not marked on the noun itself (this is a typical feature of Nuu-languages, see (1)).

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{p-} & \text{q-} & \text{masculine} \\
\text{m-} & \text{f-} & \text{feminine} \\
\text{n-} & \text{n-} & \text{neuter} \\
\text{pl} & \text{de} & \text{se} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Table 3. Subject markers on verbs.

Table 2. Agreement markers used with numa and q-ear.

These morphemes can also mark non-subject participles; see Chapter 3 of Ahrends.

They are transparently related to the per-
(B) The suffix -bər marks third person dual subject on the verb (see Table 3):

(2) taːkw kra-bər
woman take-3duSUBJ
‘(They two) got married’ (lit. took woman)

(C) The suffix -bər participates in marking dual number of the subject on the verb (see Table 3), as part of first person dual subject marker -bər-an and as part of second person dual subject marker -bər-bər. An example is in (3).

(3) taːkw kra-bər-bər
woman take-2duSUBJ
‘(You two) got married’ (lit. took woman)

(D) The suffix -bər marks plural on a few kinship terms, e.g. asaːy ‘father’, asaːy-bər ‘fathers, classificatory fathers, men of generation of one’s father’, awaːy ‘maternal uncle’, awaːy-bər ‘maternal uncles’. That these forms have plural referents is corroborated by the plural agreement on verbs and other modifiers:

(4) a-di awaːy-bər ata ya-di
that-pl maternal.uncle-pl then come-3plSUBJ
‘Then those maternal uncles came’

Using dual agreement form on the demonstrative ‘that’ or on the verb would result in an ungrammatical sentence.

(E) The suffix -bər marks associative non-singular, with the meaning of ‘X and associate(s)’ (cf. English The Smiths). This meaning only surfaces when the suffix is used with personal names (see Moravcsik 2003, for a typological overview of associative plurals), e.g. Leo-bər ‘Leo and his associates (e.g. friends, family, etc.)’, Gemaju-bər ‘Gemaj (female name) and her associates’. An associative in Manambu may refer to two people, as in (5) (where Leo-bər referred to Leo and one of his children):

(5) Leo-bər ata ya-bər
Leo-ASS.NSG then come-3duSUBJ
‘Leo and his child (them two) are coming’

Or it may refer to more than two people — (6) describes Leo arriving with his wife and several children:

(6) Leo-bər ata ya-di
Leo-ASS.NSG then come-3plSUBJ
‘Leo and his associates (wife and children: many of them) are coming’

Table 4 summarizes the meanings of the versatile morpheme (-)bər as a free and as a bound morpheme.
One can thus establish the following semantic chain of hierarchical development:

- Non-singular marking on a personal pronoun other than an associative reading, as it does

    \[ \text{Non-singular marking on a personal pronoun other than an associative reading, as it does} \]

    development accounts for a plausible link between (ii) and (iii).

This non-singular number has happened in Mandarin. — Table 2 illustrates this kind

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non-singular number. The four groups of meanings of the morpheme (-er) (see Table 4) appear to be inter-

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- Topological plausibility versus historical development

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\[ \text{3. The meanings of (-er):} \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(i)</th>
<th>(ii)</th>
<th>(iii)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meanings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The meanings of (-er):

\[ \text{- The meanings of (-er):} \]

- These eight meanings of the morpheme (-er) cover:

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- **Formative morpheme with the meanings of third person and dual meanings**

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- **On verb**

\[ \text{- On verb} \]

- **On modifier**

\[ \text{- On modifier} \]

- **On noun**

\[ \text{- On noun} \]

- **Reference marker:**

\[ \text{- Reference marker:} \]

- **Non-singular (and plural) on personal:**

\[ \text{- Non-singular (and plural) on personal:} \]

- **Plural number marker:**

\[ \text{- Plural number marker:} \]

- **Associate non-singular marker:**

\[ \text{- Associate non-singular marker:} \]

- **Universal**:

\[ \text{- Universal:} \]

- **On noun**

\[ \text{- On noun} \]

- **Reference marker:**

\[ \text{- Reference marker:} \]

- **Non-singular (and plural) on personal:**

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- **Associate non-singular marker:**

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\[ \text{- Universal:} \]

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\[ \text{- On noun} \]

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\[ \text{- Reference marker:} \]

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\[ \text{- Non-singular (and plural) on personal:} \]

- **Plural number marker:**

\[ \text{- Plural number marker:} \]

- **Associate non-singular marker:**

\[ \text{- Associate non-singular marker:} \]

- **Universal**:

\[ \text{- Universal:} \]
That is synchronically, (1/)bar can be viewed as one morpheme with a general meaning of 'non-singular'. However, comparison with other Ntu languages and subsequent reconstruction of Proto-Ntu tell us a different story. Proto-Ntu had three formal and semantically different morphemes, each of which gave (1/)bar in Manambu and other languages as a result of a phonological merger of word-final voiceless stops, dental nasals, and rhoids mentioned in §1. (Further discussion of phonological correspondences between Manambu and Proto-Ntu is forthcoming.)

These Proto-Ntu morphemes are as follows:

(A) Proto-Ntu *ga(n) (second person singular), attested in Wosera bering (Abelam bér), Galab (see Chapter 22 of Akkenwald 2003), in some forms also in Laycock 1965: 152, Ialum Kte (Staal 1973: 16), *pa (Tendagashen p. c). Proto-Ntu *gana (second person plural) is found in restricted contexts in Manambu 'gana' (Wilson 1980: 46; here it is restricted to kinship nouns).

(B) Proto-Ntu *bo(l) (third person dual), attested in Abelam bér, Wosera bering (also see Laycock 1965: 152; Galab, Ialum Kte in Staal 1973: 16). The morpheme 'bo(l)' could be analyzed as consisting of the 'third person dual' marker and the third person plural marker, as shown in Table 3 and discussion in §2. The morpheme 'bo(l)' third person dual' is found in restricted contexts in Manambu 'gana' (Wilson 1980: 46; here it is restricted to kinship nouns).

(C) Proto-Ntu *bér (plural; associative plural marker), attested in Abelam bér, Wosera bering (also see Laycock 1965: 152), Galab, Ialum Kte (Staal 1973: 16). The morpheme 'bér' is found in restricted contexts in Manambu 'gana' (Wilson 1980: 46; here it is restricted to kinship nouns).
4. Tyrodean Plausibility versus Reconstructed History

(from [[ii]] to [[vi]], and [[vi]]) — which is a highly common path —

govern involves restructuring a third person dual pronoun as a dual agreement marker
subject agreement marker from a third person dual
is the basis for [[vii]] and [[viii]].

A) accounts for the meaning of (i), while (g) underlies the meanings of (i)—(i) and (c) acquire meaning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal usage</th>
<th>Proto-Ndju form and its meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| (i) pronouns non-plural
  (ii) plural on some kinship and other nouns |
| (vii) (viii) | [[++], [++,+]] |
| (vi) dual number agreement with second person dual |
| (v) dual number agreement with first person dual |
| (viii) dual number agreement marker on modifiers |
| (i) third person dual number subject agreement marker |
| (ii) third person dual, three two |
| (vii) third person dual, two |

Table 5. From Proto-Ndju to Mlanambo

(c) to Mlanambo (–peh) and other verbal meanings.

Table 6 summarizes the historical developments from the Proto-Ndju forms (v).

The minimal impact of Plausibility concern.

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 assoc [ndju] 37—52: the few examples given here are with kinship terms,
shows that this analysis is spurious, from a historical perspective. This one form came about as a result of a phonological merger of three different Proto-Ndu morphemes. That the meanings of the erstwhile ancestors of the Manambu (-)bor are intertwined to an extent of being relatable to one another can be described as a semantic merger.

This is an example of how a diachronic analysis can provide additional perspective for solving synchronic conundrums in a language with pervasive polysemy and homonymy of forms. Historical reconstruction provides an ultimate proof for the limits of typological plausibility — or a typologist's imagination.

A final word is in order. The extreme genetic diversity among the non-Austronesian (or Papuan) languages in New Guinea, with numerous families interspersed with isolates, remains a puzzle for comparative linguists. The Sepik River Basin (which includes East Sepik and Sandaun Provinces) is the most complex linguistic area within New Guinea. The Sepik River Basin displays cultural as well as linguistic diversity and fragmentation, perhaps more so than any other area of New Guinea. Reasons for this include geographic diversity, inaccessible terrains, patterns of language contact and language attitudes (see: Aikhenvald 2004; Aikhenvald, Stebbins 2007), and also frequent migrations in search of further hunting and fishing grounds and sago fields. The average size of language communities is significantly lower than in the New Guinea Highlands. The area boasts about 200 languages, an extreme language density unparalleled anywhere else in the world.

A case study like this one is only possible for a language with established genetic relatives. In this way, Manambu is a lucky language. Only further descriptive and comparative studies will help solve similar puzzles for other languages in the Sepik domain.

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SOME COMMON FUNCTIONS OF THE DATIVE, ACCUSATIVE, AND LOCATIVE CASES

I have proposed earlier that the attested Indo-European dative, accusative, instrumental and locative cases were originally not very clearly morphologically differentiated. As a typological example of the expression of what Indo-Europeanists might consider the use of a single case with multiple meanings (direct and indirect object) I would quote the Georgian example supplied by Gamkrelidze and Ivanov in their path-breaking work on Indo-European [1984: 286]. In Georgian the direct and indirect object (from the Indo-European point of view) can both be expressed by the same case (-s): k'aci a'zlevs c'ign-s bavšvas ‘the man gives the book (c'ign-s) to the child (bavšvas).’ In this paper I will focus primarily on the similarity of the functions of the Indo-European dative and accusative cases.

I hold the view that the Indo-European case endings derive primarily from the addition of particles with locative meaning to stems of various kinds. The meanings of these particles were not very clearly defined and the resulting cases only came to have relatively clear separate meanings in the course of time. I have written elsewhere [Schmalstieg 2000: passim.; 2004: 5—8] that for the *-o stem nouns and adjectives in Balto-Slavic there is evidence of an etymological particle *-m(-) in the dative, accusative, instrumental and locative singular. Expanding on my earlier view I would now say that in the Indo-European noun the functions of these cases derive from the assignment of different meanings to various sequences of the stem vowel plus the particles '(--)m(--) and/or '(--)i(--) and/or '(--)u(--) when attached to a root. The etymological identity of these cases is to be found in the fact that the same meaning can frequently be expressed by several cases, a phenomenon which Hopper [1991: 23] has characterized in the following way: ‘The Principle of Layering refers to the prominent fact that very often more than one technique is available to serve similar or even identical functions. This formal diversity comes about because when a form or a set of forms emerges in a functional domain, it does not immediately (and may never) replace an already existing set of functionally equivalent forms, but rather that the two sets of forms co-exist.’ Thus as the single etymological general oblique case was split into dative, accusative, instrumental, and locative cases, the old identity has left traces not only in the partial

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ОБЕЩЕНИЯ ПЕРЕКАЗА

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