

The Lost Cause: Inflection Class in Amarasi

1. Overview While the origin and development of inflection classes has long been an area of interest for historical linguistics, the majority of research in this area has focused solely on Indo-European languages (Maiden 2005, Collier 2013, Kaye 2015). With this gap in mind, this paper presents a novel perspective on the source of these classes by building on the observation that many Timoric languages appear to have undergone low-level innovations which have given rise to morphological inflection classes (which cannot be reconstructed for Proto-Austronesian).

In particular, this paper investigates an incipient inflection class system in Amarasi (Central Malayo-Polynesian: West Timor), which has two distinct paradigms of prefixal subject agreement that take the shapes CV (1a) and C (1b). The distribution of these prefix sets is partly phonologically predictable as in (1c) on the basis of regular phonotactic constraints (e.g. a ban on CCC clusters and cross-morpheme hiatus, and a dispreference for quadrisyllabic words).

<p>(1) a. Syllabic Agreement (CV)</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">SG</td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">PL</td> <td style="width: 10%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>ku/?u-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>ta-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;">(IN.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>mi-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;">(EX.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>mu-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>mi-</i></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>na-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>na-</i></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		SG	PL		1	<i>ku/?u-</i>	<i>ta-</i>	(IN.)			<i>mi-</i>	(EX.)	2	<i>mu-</i>	<i>mi-</i>		3	<i>na-</i>	<i>na-</i>		<p>b. Asyllabic Agreement (C)</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">SG</td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">PL</td> <td style="width: 10%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>k/?-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>t-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;">(IN.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>m-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;">(EX.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>m-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>m-</i></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>n-</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>n-</i></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		SG	PL		1	<i>k/?-</i>	<i>t-</i>	(IN.)			<i>m-</i>	(EX.)	2	<i>m-</i>	<i>m-</i>		3	<i>n-</i>	<i>n-</i>		<p>c. Phonotactic Distribution</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">SHAPE</td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">PREFIX</td> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">3SG EXAMPLE</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">#CC</td> <td style="text-align: center;">CV</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>na-skau</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;">‘invites’</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">#V</td> <td style="text-align: center;">C</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>n-inu</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;">‘drinks’</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">σσσ+</td> <td style="text-align: center;">C</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>n-marine</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;">‘is happy’</td> </tr> </table>		SHAPE	PREFIX		3SG EXAMPLE	#CC	CV		<i>na-skau</i>	‘invites’	#V	C		<i>n-inu</i>	‘drinks’	σσσ+	C		<i>n-marine</i>	‘is happy’
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2. Two classes However, **disyllabic #C** verbs appear to be idiosyncratically and lexically-specified to take one of the two prefix sets. Edwards (2020) observes that 75% of these verbs take C prefixes (2a, 3a) while 25% take CV prefixes (2b, 3b). Semantically-unrelated (near-)minimal pairs as in (2, 3) show that prefix set selection for verbs of this shape is not outwardly phonologically-conditioned, suggesting the existence of two conjugation classes.

<p>(2) a. In n-reku. 3SG 3SG.C-strike ‘It strikes (x o’clock).’</p>	<p>b. In na-reku. 3SG 3SG.CV-ruin ‘S/he ruins, besmirches.’</p>	<p>(3) a. Ho m-hani. 2SG 2SG.C-dig ‘You dig.’</p>	<p>b. Ho mu-hana. 2SG 2SG.CV-cook ‘You cook.’</p>
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3. Analysis I propose that the distribution of CV prefixes originates in verbs which took the PMP causative **pa-* prefix, and that the current system is the result of an interaction between historical antepenultimate vowel syncope and phonotactic constraints on cluster formation. Comparative data from neighbouring Rote languages (Tamelan 2021, Edwards 2021) shows that stem-initial #CC clusters in Amarasi originate from the application of antepenultimate vowel syncope to known derivational prefixes (4). This syncope clearly also derived the C prefix set from the original CV forms (e.g. 3SG **na-CVVCV* > *n-CVVCV*). Crucially missing from our comparanda is the highly productive and well-attested PMP causative prefix **pa-*, which should have produced Amarasi **h-*. Despite allowing many typologically unusual sonority-falling clusters like /fk/, /ft/, /mt/, Amarasi shows a complete absence of #hC. I argue that the descendants of these missing **pa-C* > **hC* clusters are verbs which synchronically take CV prefixes.

PMP			Rote		Amarasi	
Prefix	Function	Root	Verb	Meaning	Verb	Meaning
(4) <i>*ka-</i>	achieved state	<i>*b̄antəŋ</i>	<i>na-ka-bete</i>	‘is tense, tight’	<i>na-kbeet</i>	‘is stiff, tight’
<i>*ma-</i>	stative	<i>*lapaR</i>	<i>na-ma-laʔa</i>	‘is hungry’	<i>na-mnaha</i>	‘is hungry’
<i>*ta-</i>	spontaneous action	<i>?*belaj</i>	<i>na-ta-mbele</i>	‘flies’	<i>na-tpene</i>	‘flies’

I propose that the phonotactically illicit **hC* was repaired by deleting the overt featural content of **h* but retaining its representation in phonological structure as a ghost consonant \emptyset_C (Piggott 1991; Kiparsky 2003). Recalling how #CC verbs require CV prefixes (1c), I posit that this silent etymological \emptyset_C on #C verbs created a covert #CC cluster that similarly blocks C prefixes. Thus, a verb like *na-hana* ‘cooks’ (3b) goes back to PMP **pa-panas* ‘make hot’ > **na-ha-hana* > *na- \emptyset_C hana*. Strong evidence for this analysis comes from i) the existence of verbs which show an (anti-)causative alternation as expressed only by a change in prefix set (5), captured straightforwardly by a derivational history as in (6); and ii) the retention of a small set of fossilised forms where exceptionally unsyncoated causative *ha-* alternates with stative *ma-* (Edwards 2020: 445), confirming the existence of **pa-* in Proto-Amarasi (7).

C Prefix Set		CV Prefix Set		Stative Noun		Causative Verb	
Verb	Meaning	Verb	Meaning	Verb	Meaning	Verb	Meaning
(5) <i>n-ʔate</i>	‘serves (ITR.)’	<i>na-ʔate</i>	‘enslaves’	<i>mainuan</i>	‘open’	<i>n-hainua-b</i>	‘opens’
<i>n-mae</i>	‘is ashamed’	<i>na-mae</i>	‘shames s.o.’	<i>maʔeki?</i>	‘smooth’	<i>n-haʔeki</i>	‘smoothens’
<i>n-pea?</i>	‘breaks (ITR.)’	<i>na-pea?</i>	‘breaks s.t.’	<i>maʔkafa?</i>	‘light’	<i>n-haʔkafa</i>	‘lightens’
<i>n-punu</i>	‘rots, decays’	<i>na-punu</i>	‘makes rot’	<i>maputu?</i>	‘hot’	<i>n-haputu</i>	‘heats up’

- (6) a. PMP **buRuk* ‘rotten’ > **na-punu* $\rightarrow_{\text{syncope}}$ *n-punu* ‘rots’
 b. PMP **pa-buRuk* ‘makes rotten’ > **na-ha-punu* $\rightarrow_{\text{syncope}}$ **na-h-punu* $\rightarrow_{\text{CC red.}}$ *na-punu* ‘makes rot’

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