Language and place in Komnzo

Christian Döhler
31.05.2016

Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel / Australian National University, Canberra
Overview
Overview

1. Background
2. Grammar
   2.1 System of demonstratives
   2.2 Directional marking on verbs
   2.3 Positional verbs
   2.4 Locationals
3. Conceptualisation of landscape
   3.1 Landscape terminology
   3.2 Mythology
   3.3 East-west axis
4. Place names
5. Conclusion
Background
Komnzo

- spoken in Rouku village
- around 200 speakers
- high-level of multilingualism
no previous linguistic work on the language

but relatively good anthropological coverage:


current SNG team: Nick Evans, Jeff Siegel, Wayan Arka, Eri Kashima, Charlotte van Tongeren, Matthew Carroll, Dineke Schokkin, Volker Gast, Philip Tama, Tina Gregor, Emil Mittag
Grammar: demonstratives, directionals, positional verbs, locationals
Demonstratives and deictics

- **Categories:**
  - proximal (z-)
  - medial (b-)
  - distal (f-)
  - ignorative (m-)

- **Japanese:** ko-, so-, a-, do-

- **Germanic:**
  - English: here, there, yonder, where
  - German: hier, dort, jenseits, wo
## Demonstratives and deictics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Adverbial</th>
<th>adv.ALL</th>
<th>adv.ABL</th>
<th>Verb clitic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROX</td>
<td>zane</td>
<td>zä</td>
<td>zbo</td>
<td>zba</td>
<td>z=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this</td>
<td>here</td>
<td>hither</td>
<td>hence</td>
<td>here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MED</td>
<td>bâne</td>
<td>bä</td>
<td>bobo</td>
<td>boba</td>
<td>b=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>thither</td>
<td>thence</td>
<td>there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIST</td>
<td>fä</td>
<td>fobo</td>
<td>foba</td>
<td>f=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yonder</td>
<td>to there</td>
<td>from there</td>
<td>yonder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGNO</td>
<td>mane</td>
<td>mä</td>
<td>mobo</td>
<td>moba</td>
<td>m=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>which</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>whither</td>
<td>whence</td>
<td>where</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Semantic extensions:**
  - proximal » immediate deictic **zf** ‘right here’
  - medial » recognitional **baf** ‘the one I assume you know about’
  - distal » anaphoric demonstrative **ane** ‘this’
  - ignorative » apprehensive proclitic **m=**
Directional marking on verbs

- neutral, towards (venitive), away (andative)

(1) *zba nezá ärithroth fäms ṃarer. boba nezá änrithrth fäms ṃarer*

From here, they give them away for exchange marriage. In return, they give them here for exchange marriage.

(tci20110802 ABB #159-161)
Directional marking on verbs

- ‘come’ » copula with a venitive (lit. ‘be hither’)
- ‘go’ » copula with an andative (lit. ‘be thither’)

(2) watik, teacher zwäkor “keke, kayé kwa nrno.”

watik teacher zwä\kor/ keke kayé kwa then teacher 3SG>1SG/speak NEG tomorrow FUT
n\rn/o
1DU:ANDAT/be

‘Then, the teacher said to me: “No, we will go tomorrow.”’

(tci20130823-06 STK #67-68)
Directional marking on verbs

- Semantic extension:
- can be used temporally

(3) *watik, ni ane wän bragwre zenathamar.*

`watik ni ane wän\brag/wre then 1NSG DEM 1PL>3SG.FEM:VENIT/follow zena=thamar today=TEMP.ALL`

‘We have been following this (custom) up to today.’

(tci20130914-01 KAB #3)
Positional verbs

- 42 members
- morphosyntactic behaviour:
  - largest group of prefixing verbs
  - four number values (singular, dual, plural + large plural)
  - stative suffix -thgr
- semantics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Komnzo</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>moraksi</td>
<td>to be leaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brüzsi</td>
<td>to be submerged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rmnzüfaksi</td>
<td>to be side by side (parallel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mgthksi</td>
<td>to be in the mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rngthksi</td>
<td>to be in a treefork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Locationals

- subclass of nominals
- postposed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Komnzo</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Etymology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>warfo</td>
<td>above</td>
<td>war ‘top layer’ = fo (ALL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banban</td>
<td>underneath</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zfthen</td>
<td>below</td>
<td>zfth ‘base’ = en (LOC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mrmr</td>
<td>inside</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zrfa</td>
<td>in front</td>
<td>zr ‘tooth’ = fa (ABL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tharthar</td>
<td>next to</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kamfa</td>
<td>behind</td>
<td>kam ‘bone, backbone’ = fa (ABL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bobatham</td>
<td>at the end of</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kратr</td>
<td>in between</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Locationals

- subclass of nominals
- postposed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Komnzo</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Etymology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>warfo</td>
<td>above</td>
<td>war ‘top layer’ = fo (ALL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banban</td>
<td>underneath</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zfthen</td>
<td>below</td>
<td>zfth ‘base’ = en (LOC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mrmr</td>
<td>inside</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zrfa</td>
<td>in front</td>
<td>zr ‘tooth’ = fa (ABL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tharthar</td>
<td>next to</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kamfa</td>
<td>behind</td>
<td>kam ‘bone, backbone’ = fa (ABL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bobathm</td>
<td>at the end of</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kratr</td>
<td>in between</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conceptualization of landscape: seasons, vegetation, mythology, east-west
Southern New Guinea Geography
“Its scenery often has a mild, almost dainty, attractiveness in detail, but represents on the whole the extreme of monotony” (Williams 1936: 1)

- Southern New Guinea is part of the ‘dry tropics’
  - wet season (≈ November - May)
  - dry season (≈ June - October)
Figure 1: Rouku and surrounds (screenshot from Bingmaps)
Changes in the water level are reflected in the geographic objects that are labeled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Komnzo</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tôna</td>
<td>high ground</td>
<td>never covered by water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zra</td>
<td>swamp or billabong</td>
<td>dries up late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nawan</td>
<td>small pool</td>
<td>dries up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dmgu</td>
<td>small pool</td>
<td>water stays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>area by river</td>
<td>dries up early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>märmär</td>
<td>hill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bod</td>
<td>island</td>
<td>during high flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rsrs</td>
<td>gentle slope</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ttfö</td>
<td>creek</td>
<td>dries up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ñars</td>
<td>river</td>
<td>never dries up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the polysemy in some verbs reflect the importance of the water level

- *frezsi* ‘take out of the water’ ~ ‘come up from the river (to the village)’
- *sogsi* ‘ascend’ and *rsörși* ‘descend’ are used in path descriptions

(4) *wiyak e nä tönä kresöbätho kräsöfthé kresöbätho mdüfi tønafo fof.*

‘I walked, I climbed up to another high ground, I walked down and climbed up to the high ground at *mdüfi*.’

(tci20130903-03 MKW #78-80)
### Vegetation type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Komnzo</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>fz</em></td>
<td>rainforest</td>
<td>on high ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>fath</em></td>
<td>clear place</td>
<td>anywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ksi kar</em></td>
<td>bushland</td>
<td>open grassland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>fz minz</em></td>
<td>thin strip of forest</td>
<td>lit. ‘forest vine’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>fokufoku</em></td>
<td>small patch of forest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>thaba</em></td>
<td>clearing in the forest usually from a garden</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>morthr</em></td>
<td>edge of forest with a smaller patch forest close by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• founding myth involves a tree (now in the Arafura Sea)
• tree was destroyed and a flood separated Australia and NG
• plant morphology for water systems:
  ▪ zfth ‘base of a tree’ ~ ‘river mouth’
  ▪ tuti ‘branch, twig’ ~ ‘river arm’

Figure 2: Ayres 1983: 47 (left) 101 (right)
“(...) there is a great deal of doubt as to the boundaries within which [smärki] should be applied. Informants at Rouku, for instance, placed the eastern boundary at Megeji, while others pushed it as far west as the Bensbach.” (Williams 1936: 36)
- smärki ‘people from the West’
- nzödmä ‘people from the East’
- Arammba speakers: *tharthar kabe* ‘people on the side’
Geography: Why East-west?

Figure 3: Pajimans et al. 1971
Place names
Place names

- Place names in the Morehead district are both numerous and densely clustered (Ayres, 1983: 129)
- Rouku: ~ 36 named places
- “if you ask your guide where you stand at any moment, he will be able to give a name to the land.” (Williams 1936: 207)

- differences between indigenous and introduced place names in Australia:
  - local network vs. system
    - local network: local knowledge, hidden knowledge
    - system: standardised template open to everyone
  - local mnemonics vs. mnemotechnics
    - local mnemonics: non-arbitrary, grow gradually
    - *swäri zfth* ‘milkwood base’ (Alstonia actinofila)
    - mnemotechnics: writing/maps open the possibility for arbitrary names
Place names

- absent from Indigenous Australia:

- Commemoration names (Sydney, Adelaide, Darwin)
  - in SNG: Morehead and Bensbach River

- Topographic descriptors
  - common in Komnzo, small set of words (zfth ‘tree base’, fr ‘stem, grove’ or ttfö ‘creek’)

- Relative terms (North-Melbourne, Westberlin)
  - one example in Komnzo: fthikr ‘fthi tail’
  - fthi mouth of a creek, fthikr end of the same creek
- Komnzo place names
- rather dry descriptors:
  - *karesa zfth* ‘*karesa base*’ (Melaleuca sp)
  - *atätö fr* ‘*atätö stem*’ (Pouteria sp)
  - *wsws zra* ‘*wsws swamp*’ (Combretum sp)
- the most colourful names:
  - *kwanz fath* ‘bald head clearing’
  - *düdü sam* ‘broom stick liquid’
  - *nzga warsi* ‘vagina chewing’
  - *zthé kabir* ‘penis sleep’
Hybrid place names

- Grimsby (Lincolnshire) vs. Grimston (Norfolk)
- Swakopmund (Namibia)
  - Nama: *tsoakhaub* ‘excrement opening, diarrhea’
  - German: *Mund/Mündung* ‘river mouth’
  - Swakopmund ‘diarrhea river mouth’
- Burkina Faso (before 1984: République de Haute-Volta)
  - Mossi: *burkǐna* ‘honourable person’
  - Dyula: *fa* ‘father’ *so* ‘house, village’
  - *burkina faso* ‘fatherland of the honourable people’
Hybrid place names

place name: *fotnz* ‘short coconut’

Warta
- **fo** ‘coconut’

Komnzo
- **ŋazi** ‘coconut’

- **tg** ‘short’
- **tnz** ‘short’
Hybrid place names

(5)  a. *tratra bæk* ‘bird type + back’; Kánhá (*tratra bak*) + Komnzo (*drädrä bæk*).

   b. *fü sari* ‘garden row + axe’; Nama (*fü mbilè*) + Komnzo (*ňanz sari*); The word *sari* is considered archaic.

   c. *dūdū sam* ‘broom + liquid’; Nama (*dūdū wkwr*) + Komnzo (*dōdō sam*).

(6)  a. *snzä zwär* ‘river crayfish + base’; Komnzo (*snzä zfth*) + Warta (*dawi zwär*).

   b. *yem gi faf* ‘cassowary killing place’; Komnzo (*yem zan faf*) + Nama (*awyé gi faf*).

   c. *märo fak* ‘tree type (*Dillenia ensifolia*) + ashes’; Komnzo (*märo kwr*) + Nama (*mane fak*).
Hybrid place names

- 30% of the toponyms are hybrid
- pattern roughly geographically
- an exhaustive collection/mapping of these place names would roughly recreate the location of varieties
Hybrid place names

- How did this come about? What was the “naming event”?
- Nobody remembers giving a name to a place: “Our fathers told the names!”
- Speakers were multilingual
- Conscious naming event
  - gradual development from a descriptor to a proper name??
  - *yem gi faf* ‘cassowary killing place’
Conclusion
Conclusion

- abundant deictic reference in speech
- structured lexical sets
  - elevation
  - water-level
  - vegetation
- place names play a major role in spatial reference
- hybrid place names attest a multilingual society in the past

»The importance, abundance and high frequency of place names in Komnzo might be caused by the absence of strong landmarks.«