

# Preliminary remarks on object-marking in Makalero\*

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## 1. Introduction

The newly independent state of East Timor exhibits striking linguistic diversity: on a surface area of just over 15,000 km<sup>2</sup>, it is home to some 16 languages. The majority of these belong to the Austronesian family, whereas a minority of four languages are classified as Papuan/non-Austronesian. One of these is Makalero, spoken in the Iliomar sub-district by about 8,000 people (according to the 2004 census of the East Timorese National Statistics Office). It is closely related to the other non-Austronesian languages of the island.

Makalero is a predominantly isolating language that exhibits the basic SOV word order characteristic of most Papuan languages (see e.g. Foley 1998:513). The sentences in (1) and (2) may serve as illustration.

- (1) Ani kiloo tuku.  
1SG 3SG punch  
'I punched him.'
- (2) Kiloo seur mei=ni sefar kini.  
3SG meat take=SEQ dog give.to.3  
'He gives meat to the dog.'

## 2. The *k*-alternation

Makalero has a number of roots in which initial *k*- alternates with Ø-. These morphemes are generally verbal or verb-like. The list in Table 1 gives them grouped into three types according to their behaviour, which differs slightly.

Applying to 13 items only,<sup>1</sup> the phenomenon can be considered marginal; however, several members of the group are high-frequency items, most notably

**Table 1.** *k*-/Ø-alternating morphemes

Type I	Type II	Type III
( <i>k</i> -)uta ‘kill’	( <i>k</i> -)utu ‘blocking’	( <i>k</i> -)umu ‘die’
( <i>k</i> -)ene ‘hit’	( <i>k</i> -)ata ‘contact’	( <i>k</i> -)afu ‘carry/with’
( <i>k</i> -)asu ‘for’	( <i>k</i> -)afa ‘away from’	
( <i>ko</i> -)horu ‘with’ <sup>2</sup>	( <i>k</i> -)ue ‘around’	
	( <i>k</i> -)ua ‘on top’	
	( <i>k</i> -)ia ‘under’	
	( <i>k</i> -)ou ‘towards’	

postpositional verbs such as (*k*-)asu ‘for’ and (*k*-)afu ‘carry/with’, and locationals, such as (*k*-)ua ‘on top’ and (*k*-)ou ‘towards’.<sup>3</sup> An understanding of the phenomenon is therefore crucial to the student of the language.

Below, each of the three types given in Table 1 will be treated separately. The final section of the article provides a short outlook on the related languages of the area.

## 2.1 Type I

In type I, which includes four transitive verbs, the distribution of initial *k*- versus Ø- is tied to the nature of the verb’s object. A 3rd-person object is always followed by the *k*-initial form, whereas 1st- and 2nd-person objects take the vowel-initial form.

The sentences in (3) and (4) give examples of 3rd-person objects. Note that it makes no difference whether the object is a noun, as in (3), or a pronoun, as in (4); the objects in question are bracketed.

- (3) ... mara=ni la’a [infirmreira-laa] **k-asu** lolo...  
 go=SEQ go nurse-PL 3:OBJ-for say  
 ‘... then (I) went to tell the nurses...’

- (4) ... ani=ni (...) [kilo] **k-asu** lolo wata ira mei.  
 1SG=TOP 3SG 3:OBJ-for say coconut water take  
 ‘... I told him to get young coconuts.’

In fact, (5) shows that 3rd-person reference is inherent in the *k*-initial form, so that there is no need for an overt object NP.

- (5) Hai nomo rau-rau hau **k-uta**=si...  
 NSIT NEG RDL-good IPF 3:OBJ-kill=SEQ  
 ‘(He) didn’t manage to kill them (all), so then...’

Sentences (6) and (7), on the other hand, illustrate combinations of these verbs with 1st- and 2nd-person objects.

- (6) Ei=ni ani mei pa'uk-ini=si ani=**uta**=si...  
 2SG=TOP 1SG take bad-CAUS=SEQ 1SG=kill=SEQ  
 'It was you who hit me and killed me...'

- (7) ... ei=**asu** namiraa=ni hai nana...  
 2SG=for man=TOP NSIT NEG.EX  
 '... there is no man left for you...'

Based on this evidence, the distribution of *k*-initial versus  $\emptyset$ -initial forms can be summarised as in (8). Clearly, the *k*-prefix is a 3rd-person object marker.

- (8) [SUBJ] > 3<sub>obj</sub> → *k*-  
 [SUBJ] > 1<sub>obj</sub> / 2<sub>obj</sub> →  $\emptyset$ -

The *k*-object marker can be directly related to the 3rd-person possessive form *ki*. For illustration, Table 2 gives the Makalero personal pronouns, with specialised possessive forms, where present, in brackets. In all other cases, the same form functions as both independent and possessive pronoun.

Table 2. Personal pronouns

	singular	plural
1st exclusive	<i>ani (asi)</i>	<i>ini (isi)</i>
1st inclusive		<i>pi</i>
2nd	<i>ei</i>	<i>i</i>
3rd	<i>kiloo (ki)</i>	<i>kiloora</i>

I would like to propose that *ki*, whose function is now restricted to that of 3rd-person possessive marker, was originally an all-purpose 3rd-person marker, while the present-day independent pronoun *kiloo* is a compound that developed at a later stage. This is supported by the evidence from closely related Makasae, which has *gi* for both functions (Huber 2008). Besides, *kiloo* exhibits a marked stress pattern (with the main stress on the ultimate syllable) and a long vowel as the nucleus of the second syllable, both of which I take as indications of compound status; a prototypical Makalero morpheme is stressed on the penultimate, while long vowels are in general characteristic of monosyllabic morphemes. Lastly, in possessive constructions *kiloo* behaves as a noun rather than a pronoun; it is joined to the possessum using the possessive clitic *ki*, as in (9a). As such, the behaviour of *kiloo* is the same as that of nominal possessors, as in (9b).<sup>4</sup> For comparison, all other possessors are directly cliticised to the possessum, whether they have a specialised possessive form (9d) or not (9e). (9c), without the redundant 3rd-person pronoun that is present in (9a), is analogous to the possessive constructions in (9d) and (9e).

- |        |          |                         |  |                        |
|--------|----------|-------------------------|--|------------------------|
| (9) a. | kiloo    | ki=omar                 |  | 'his house' (emphatic) |
|        | 3sg      | 3SG:POSS=house.on.poles |  |                        |
| b.     | liurai   | ki=omar                 |  | 'the chief's house'    |
|        | chief    | 3SG:POSS=house.on.poles |  |                        |
| c.     | ki=omar  |                         |  | 'his house'            |
|        | 3sg      | 3SG:POSS=house.on.poles |  |                        |
| d.     | asi=omar |                         |  | 'my house'             |
|        | 1sg      | 1SG:POSS=house.on.poles |  |                        |
| e.     | ei=omar  |                         |  | 'your house'           |
|        | 2sg      | 2SG=house.on.poles      |  |                        |

In sum, the scenario that I am suggesting is that the original form for the 3rd-person pronoun was *ki*, which was replaced by the probably compounded *kiloo*. Rather than disappear, *ki* developed into a possessive clitic.

As to the *k-/Ø*-alternation, I propose that the morphemes in question are vowel-initial, but have pronominal objects cliticised to them, as shown schematically in (10) below. Initially, this applied to all persons, but eventually the 3rd person *ki* was reduced to *k-*. This is a sign of its transition from a clitic to a prefix. The fact that *ki*, rather than *kiloo*, is used to mark a 3rd-person object shows that this cliticisation process predates the change of the full 3rd-person pronominal form from *ki* to *kiloo*.

- (10) [SUBJ] ani=uta 'X kills me'  
[SUBJ] ei=uta 'X kills you'  
[SUBJ] ki=uta → k-uta 'X kills him'

Crucial to this analysis are such sentences as (11) and (12), in which the object pronoun cannot be cliticised to the verb because of an intervening element (*tepa* 'constant' in (11) and *nomo* NEG in (12)). In these cases, though the object is a 1st person, the verb takes the *k*-prefix of the 3rd person, despite the latter's conflicting semantics. If not for the intervening element, (11) would have *ani=asu* and (12) would have *ini=asu*.

- (11) Kiloo [ani] tepa      **k-asu**    lolo=ni ki=sirvisu      mei naʼa.  
3SG    1SG    constant OBJ-for say=SEQ 3SG:POSS=work take IRR  
'He always makes me do his work.'
- (12) ... waini teni    mei=ni    [ini]      nomo **k-asu**    lolo.  
CONJ    again take=SEQ 1PL:EXCL NEG    OBJ-for say  
'... but (they) didn't let us know.'

These examples show that the vowel-initial form is a bound morpheme that obligatorily occurs with object-marking. Furthermore, an important difference in status

between 1st- and 2nd-person object-marking and 3rd-person object-marking becomes apparent; as mentioned, *k-* has grammaticalised as a prefix. The fact that in the above sentences it seems to have undergone semantic bleaching is consistent with its reduced form, both of which are characteristics of grammaticalisation (see e.g. Bybee et al. 1994:6). Thus, wherever the actual object cannot be cliticised to these bound morphemes, they take the *k-* prefix by default. In such cases, its inherent 3rd-person reference is overruled by the contradicting overt object pronoun earlier in the sentence.

Not only 1st- and 2nd-person objects trigger the use of the vowel-initial form, but also the reciprocal *ta* and the reflexive *ni*, as shown in (13).

- (13) Namiraa meih      ere    ta=**uta**. / ni=**uta**.  
       man      two:HUM DEM REC=kill    REFL=kill  
       ‘These two men killed each other / killed themselves.’

These particles are thus also cliticised to the bound verbal stem, as has been argued above to be the case for the 1st- and 2nd-person pronouns; as such, I take it that they qualify for pronominal status. In short, then, all pronominal objects are cliticised to this specific class of verbal morphemes, with the exception of 3rd-person objects, which are marked by a prefix. This prefix also cross-references overt nominal objects.

## 2.2 Type II

Type II includes a variety of locationals, which form a complex with the following verb, such that they combine with a verb and provide it with a locative argument slot. These items occur in the vowel-initial form when preceded by a bare noun or pronoun object, as in examples (14) and (15). Thus, as opposed to type I, the bound vowel-initial form occurs in a wider range of contexts.

- (14) Kiloo pusi mei ata-**ua**-daru.  
       3sg    pan    take fire-on.top-put  
       ‘He put the pan on the fire.’
- (15) Namira-laa ere    ani=**ue**-la’a.  
       man-PL      DEM 1sg-around-go  
       ‘The men surrounded me.’

It appears that only non-referential noun objects can stand with the vowel-initial form; it is thus not available in (16), where the party in question has been talked about before. As a referential nominal object, it needs to be cross-referenced on the locational with the *k-* prefix.

- (16) ... watu.rai festa **k-ou-la'a**.  
 evening party 3:OBJ-towards-go  
 '... (they) went to the party on that night.'

(17) and (18) show more instances of referential NPs used as locative arguments; in (17), it is overtly expressed in the same predication, whereas in (18), its referent is introduced in the preceding predication. In both instances, the referential objects are marked on the locational with the *k*-prefix.

- (17) ... ma'u [asi=laipun] **k-ata-mit**...  
 come 1SG:POSS=back 3:OBJ-contact-sit:SG  
 '... come and sit on my back!'
- (18) ... [festa] Venilale isi-'i=si **k-ou-la'a**.  
 party V. LOC-VBL=SEQ 3:OBJ-towards-go  
 '... there was a party in Venilale, and (they) went there.'

In sum, pronominal objects are cliticised to the vowel-initial locational, as in type I. A similar process applies to non-referential nominal objects. Independent evidence (e.g. from the position of aspect particles) supports the idea that these make part of the verbal complex. Hence, I will for now consider cases such as (14) as an instance of compounding, though further research is needed to ascertain this assumption.

### 2.3 Type III

In the third subgroup, the appearance of the *k*-prefix distinguishes full verbs from dependent verbs. There are only two clear instances of type III, namely (*k*-)*umu* 'die' and (*k*-)*afu* 'carry'. In either case, when used as full verbs (i.e. as the only predicative element in a sentence), they occur in the vowel-initial form, as shown in the (a) examples (note especially (20a), which has a referential 3rd-person object, yet takes no *k*-prefix), whereas the (b) sentences illustrate how they are object-marked when used in a serial verb construction.

- (19) a. Ki=ni ki=upa hai hau **umu**...  
 3SG:POSS=mother 3SG:POSS=father NSIT IPF die  
 'His parents were already dead...'
- b. Papa na'a.muni na'u **k-[umu-suri]**...  
 Indonesian OLDTOP just 3:OBJ-die-shoot  
 'The Indonesians shot him dead...'
- (20) a. ... ni=sefar hai **afu**...  
 REFL=dog NSIT carry  
 '... (he) holds his dog in his arms...'

- b. Kiloo (...) osan-e      ho'o   nomo k-[afu-la'a].  
      3SG           money-DEF some NEG   3:OBJ-carry-go  
      'He went (to the market) without taking money.'

I suggest that, similar to the situation with the locationals in type II, the dependent verb and the main verb form one verbal complex. The internal make-up of the complexes given in (19b) and (20b) differs significantly, yet in both instances the verbal complex as a whole is transitive, as opposed to one of its parts. In (20b), the intransitive part is the V1 *umu* 'die', whereas in (21b), it is the V2 *la'a* 'go'. The *k*-prefix applies to this verbal complex as a whole and marks it as having a 3rd-person object (as indicated by the square brackets in the above examples). I am not aware of verbal complexes with other dependent verbs which take object-marking.

## 2.4 Summary

The *k*-prefix in Makalero applies to a small group of vowel-initial morphemes, many of which occur with high frequency in speech. In the normal case the prefix marks the verb as having a 3rd-person referential object. In the first subgroup, that of transitive verbs, it is present unless the object is a 1st- or 2nd-person pronoun — these are cliticised to the form in question. Whereas the *k*-prefix applies to simple verbs in type I, I claim that in the other types it operates on verbal complexes as a whole. In the case-type II directionals, the vowel-initial form appears not only after pronominal object clitics, but also with non-referential nominal objects in larger verbal compounds. All other kinds of objects must be cross-referenced on the verbal complex with the *k*-prefix. In type III, the *k*-prefix generally has the function of marking 3rd-person objects on verbal complexes.

There is a number of interesting examples of type I items showing that elements intervening between a cliticisable object and its verb trigger the *k*-form. Hence I conclude that the vowel-initial form is a bound morpheme; in the absence of an object clitic it takes *k*- by default, in which case it no longer necessarily has 3rd-person reference. I proposed that this *k*-prefix started out as a clitic 3rd-person object marker analogous to those used for 1st- and 2nd-person objects.

Overall, the data are suggestive of a remnant of an object-marking system that used to be more pervasive and regular, but is now confined to a limited set of morphemes.

### 3. Outlook

If the object marking system of Makalero is indeed the remnant of an earlier, more pervasive phenomenon, a look at the languages in the vicinity might prove insightful. The present outlook is largely confined to the non-Austronesian languages of Timor, namely Makasae, Fataluku and Bunak.

To my knowledge, Makalero's closest relative Makasae does not exhibit a comparable phenomenon. However, in those cases where Makasae has a direct cognate, it corresponds in form to its *k*-prefixed Makalero equivalent; for instance, Makasae has *gua* 'on top' where Makalero has (*k*-)*ua*, *gia* 'under' where Makalero has (*k*-)*ia* (see e.g. Brotherson 2003), or *guta* 'kill' where Makasae has (*k*-)*uta* (see Huber 2008). As such, the Makasae morphemes look like fossilised object-marked forms. This suggests that a similar phenomenon was present, but has been lost in Makasae.

Fataluku makes use of a vowel prefix to cross-reference 3rd-person nominal objects with a variety of verbs, in those cases where the object does not directly precede the verb (van Engelenhoven, to appear). An example is given in (21).

- (21) A            le,        ana        e-me        nu    Dili na-pa'i.  
          1SG:POSS house 1SG:SUBJ 3:OBJ-take SIM D.    LOC-make  
          'My house, I build it in Dili.' (van Engelenhoven, forthc.:8)

Not all Fataluku verbs take such an object marker, but many do. The kind of vowel varies depending on the verb and is, apparently, unpredictable. The origins of this vowel prefix are unclear.

Bunak, isolated in the west, makes use of specialised object prefixes in the singular number with vocalic verbs, i.e. verbs that are vowel-initial (Hull 2004:81). These prefixes are directly related to the personal pronouns, of which they represent shortened forms. (22) shows a Bunak sentence and its Makalero equivalent. The two are remarkably similar, also in the form of the verbal prefixes.

- (22) a.    Wala'i ñie        kuda (...) g-ebe'e    ua.  
          3PL    1SG:POSS horse        3:OBJ-kill PFV  
          'They killed my horse.' (Hull 2004:81)  
       b.    Kiloraa asi=kuda        hai    k-uta.  
          3PL    1SG:POSS=horse NSIT 3:OBJ-kill  
          'ibid.'

These data suggest that object marking is a common trait of the non-Austronesian languages of Timor, and the systems found in Makasae and Bunak, where the object marker is a reduced form of the personal pronoun, are directly comparable to Makalero. A cursory look further afield shows that the non-Austronesian languages



of Timor-Alor-Pantar in general mark the undergoer as the only personal affix on the verb (Reesink 2007). Whereas most languages seem to have specialised object prefixes for all persons (see e.g. Baird (2005) on Klon or Klammer (forthcoming) on Teiwa), Makalero has one for the 3rd person only, with 1st- and 2nd-person objects being marked by regular object pronouns cliticised to the verb. A curiosity particular to Makalero is that the progressing grammaticalisation of the 3rd-person object marker seems to involve a degree of semantic bleaching, which has led to it being used as a default object marker in specific contexts. In this paper I have suggested a scenario of how this situation may have originated.

## Notes

\* Unless otherwise indicated, the data discussed in this paper were collected by myself during fieldwork in Iliomar, East Timor, in early 2007. The abbreviations used in the glosses are CAUS (causative), CONJ (conjunction), DEF (definite), DEM (demonstrative), EX (existential), EXCL (exclusive), HUM (human), IPF (imperfective), IRR (irrealis), LOC (locative), NEG (negative), NSIT (new situation), OBJ (object), OLDTOP (old topic), PFV (perfective), PL (plural), POSS (possessive), SG (singular), SEQ (sequential), SIM (simultaneous), SUBJ (subject), TOP (topic), RDL (reduplication), REC (reciprocal), REFL (reflexive), and VBL (verbaliser).

1. A number of other items also display variation of initial *k-* with  $\emptyset$ -; these include *(k-)ako* 'steal', *(k-)ini* 'do', and *(k-)e* 'grip?'. They have not been included in Table 1 since it is as yet not quite clear whether they follow the system discussed here.

2. *(ko)horu* 'with' is the only item in which the prefix is not a simple *k-*, but *kV-*. Vowel insertion serves to avoid an unlicensed consonant cluster *kh-*.

3. The issue of Makalero word classes has not been examined in detail yet. The following discussion is therefore somewhat tentative. Several morphemes in the list are not translated as verbs; these are either postpositions or locationals. In many languages of the area, there is no distinct class of adpositions; the notions expressed by adpositions in English correspond to verbs in these languages. In Makalero, too, these elements can function as full predicates and take TAM marking much like verbs. Locationals, on the other hand, must always be followed by a verb. Also, they follow aspect markers, which normally immediately precede the verb and as such make part of the verbal complex. Based on these arguments, I assume, at least for the time being, that both postpositions and locationals are verb-like.

4. Note that this exactly parallels the characteristics of the *k*-initial forms as shown in 2.1: the *k*-prefix does itself imply 3rd-person reference, but a nominal object can optionally be overtly expressed; see e.g. examples (3) and (4).

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