Observations on Verb Suffixes in Umbu-Ungu

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1   Introduction

Umbu-Ungu is a dialect of the Kaugel language spoken by some 20,000 speakers living in the Tambul and Lower Kaugel Districts of the Western Highlands Province, and the Upper Mendi District of the Southern Highlands Province. In this paper I will illustrate and explain some of the morphophonemic patterns which occur from stem to suffix and from suffix to suffix in Umbu-Ungu verbs.

2   Background

The predominant syllable pattern in Umbu-Ungu is CV. Sequences of vowels are uncommon, and sequences of consonants almost non-existent. Apart from the pre-nasalised stops [mb nd ng nd3], which are not true consonant sequences, the /l/ phoneme may be followed by either /k/ or /t/. There are no closed syllables.

Independent verbs in Umbu-Ungu consist of stem plus suffixes.[1] There are three orders of these suffixes, though only two of them are obligatory. The first order benefactive suffix is optional. The second order tense-aspect-mood (TAM) suffix is obligatory, as is the third order subject person-number (PN) suffix. Object person or number is not marked. Beyond these is a system of clitics which indicate phrase or clause level functions which will not be covered in this presentation.

3   Verb Suffix Pairs

There are a total of eight TAM affixes as shown in (1).

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[1] There are also dependent verbs in Umbu-Ungu; these will not be dealt with in this paper.

1) *ru~ri*   distant past tense
    Ø   near past tense[2]
    kV   present tense
    pa~pe   present awareness tense[3]
    Ø   future tense
    a~e~Ø   near future tense
    le~li   customary aspect[4]
    le~li   subjunctive mood

The alternant forms in this as well as the PN paradigms are morphophonemically conditioned and will be discussed later.

These pattern in four pairs, with each pair taking an identical or related set of PN suffixes. The two past tenses–distant and near–take an identical set of PN suffixes, as shown in (2).

2) Past tense PN suffixes

Person	Sing	Dual	Plural
1st	*ndu*	*mbulu*	*mulu*
2nd	*nu*	*ngili*	*ngi*
3rd	*mu*	*ngili*	*ngi*

The two present tenses, the simple present and present awareness, also take an identical set of PN suffixes, but a set different from that taken by the past tenses. This set is shown in (3).

3) Present tense PN suffixes

Person	Sing	Dual	Plural
1st	*ro~ru*	*mbolo~mbulu*	*molo~mulu*
2nd	*no~nu*	*mbili~mbele*	*mili~mele*
3rd	*mo~mu*	*mbili~mbele*	*mili~mele*

The two future tenses[5]–the simple future and near future–take similar sets of PN suffixes. In all but the third person singular form, the only difference between the sets is that the simple future has an alternant which the near future does not have. For example, the first singular suffix for the near future is always *mbo*, while for the simple future tense it varies

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[2] The two past tenses differentiate between distant past and near past. Near past is any time today or yesterday; distant past is beyond that.

[3] Two types of present tense sounds rather odd. One functions in the way we would normally conceive of present tense and is used very frequently. The other, which occurs much less commonly, is used when the speaker has only just become aware of something. It may in fact have been happening for some time, but he uses what we have termed the "present-awareness tense" to speak of the action/event when he suddenly becomes aware of it.

[4] It could be argued that what I am calling the aspect marker is, in fact, an irrealis indicator.

[5] What I am calling the two future tenses hang together more loosely than the other pairs. One of these sets sometimes acts more like a type of imperative or hortative, especially in some persons.

between *mbo* and *mbu*. The set of future tense PN suffixes is shown in (4), with the simple future alternant (where there is one) in parentheses.

4)   Future tense PN suffixes

Person	Sing	Dual	Plural
1st	mbo~(mbu)	mbolo~(mbulu)	molo~(mulu)
2nd	ni	ngili~(ngele)	ngi~(nge)
3rd	**	ngili~(ngele)	ngi~(nge)

The third person singular form is very different for the tenses; it is *mba~mbe* in the simple future and *pili* in the near future.

As shown in (1) above, customary aspect and subjunctive mood share the same TAM suffix. However, they take different sets of PN suffixes as shown in (5-6).

5)   Customary aspect PN suffixes

Person	Sing	Dual	Plural
1st	lio	mbolo	molo
2nd	no	mbele	mele
3rd	mo	mbele	mele

6)   Subjunctive mood PN suffixes

Person	Sing	Dual	Plural
1st	ka~ke	mbola	mola
2nd	na	mbela	mela
3rd	ka~ke	mbela	mela

Several more types of patterning may be observed from the PN suffixes paradigms in (2-6).

1)   Second person singular suffixes are always of the form nV.

2)   Third person singular suffixes generally consist of m plus o or u.

3)   First person dual suffixes are always of the form mbV_1lV_1, except in the subjunctive mood.

4)   Non-first person dual suffixes are always of the form mbV_1lV_1 or ngV_1lV_1 except in the subjunctive mood.

5)   First person plural suffixes are always of the form mV_1lV_1, except in the subjunctive mood.

6)   Non-first person plural suffixes are either of the form ngV, or mV_1lV_1, except in the subjunctive mood.

7)   All first person suffixes contain only back vowels, except for the final *a* in the subjunctive mood.

8) Non-first, non-singular suffixes contain only front vowels, except for the final *a* in the subjunctive mood.

9) Subjunctive PN suffixes generally end in *a*.

4   Stress Patterns

In the future tense, customary aspect, and subjunctive mood stress falls on the final syllable of the PN suffix.[6] Examples are given in (7).

7) *tembó*   'I will do'   /te-Ø-mbo/   'do-FUT-1s'
    temoló   'we will do'   /te-Ø-molo/   'do-FUT-1p'
    telenó   'you always do'   /te-le-no/   'do-CUS-2s'
    telemoló   'we always do'   /te-le-molo/ 'do-CUS-1p'
    telená   'you should do'   /te-le-na/   'do-SUB-2s'
    telemolá   'we should do'   /te-le-mola/ 'do-SUB-1p'

In all other tenses, stress falls on the syllable immediately preceding the PN suffix. In most cases, stress falls on the TAM suffix as shown in (8).

8) *teríndu*   'I did'   /te-ri-ndu/   'do-D.PST-1s'
    terímulu   'we did'   /te-ri-mulu/ 'do-D.PST-1p'
    tekéno   'you are doing'   /te-ke-no/   'do-PRES-2s'
    tepámolo   'we are doing'   /te-pa-molo/ 'do-PR.AW-1p'
    teámbo   'I will do'   /te-a-mbo/   'do-N.FUT-1s'
    teámolo   'we will do'   /te-a-molo/   'do-N.FUT-1p'

In the near past tense, however, where the TAM suffix is /Ø/, the stress falls on the final syllable of the verb stem since it is the syllable immediately preceding the PN suffix. Examples are given in (9).

9) *téndu*   'I did'   /te-Ø-ndu/   'do-N.PST-1s'
    témulu   'we did'   /te-Ø-mulu/   'do-N.PST-1p'

Similarly, in the third person singular form of the near future, the allomorph of the TAM suffix is /Ø/, so stress falls on the final syllable of the verb stem as shown in (10).

10) *sípili*   'let him give'   /si-Ø-pili/   'give-N.FUT-3s'
    tépili   'let him do'   /te-Ø-pili/   'do-N.FUT-3s'
    nópili   'let him eat'   /no-Ø-pili/   'eat-N.FUT-3s'
    púpili   'let him go'   /pu-Ø-pili/   'go-N.FUT-3s'

6   It could be that this stress pattern marks irrealis in Umbu-Ungu.

5   Sundry Deletion Rules

When a morpheme ending in /IV/ is followed by a morpheme beginning with /IV/, the first /IV/ syllable is dropped. This most frequently occurs when the aspect/mood suffix *le~li* follows a verb stem ending in /IV/. Examples are given in (11-13).

11) *pilimolo*   'we hear'   /pili-li-molo/   'hear-CUS-1p'
12) *lemo*   'it is'   /le-le-mo/   'be-CUS-3s'
13) *nolio*   'I eat'   /no-le-lio/   'eat-CUS-1s'

As can be seen from (13), the result of this process is that the customary TAM affix *le* will always be deleted before the first singular PN affix *lio*. An extension of this rule is that when three /IV/ syllables come together across morpheme borders, the first two are dropped. Examples are given in (14-15).

14) *molio*   'I am'   /molo-le-lio/   'be-CUS-1s'[7]
15) *pilio*   'I hear'   /pili-li-lio/   'hear-CUS-1s'

When a morpheme ending in /IV/ is followed by a morpheme beginning with /kV/, the two syllables become one by elision of the first vowel, resulting in a syllable of the form /IkV/. This occurs most commonly in present tense, as in (16-17), though is also relevant to first and third person singular subjunctive forms, as in (18-19).

16) *kolkomele*   'they are dying'   /kolo-ko-mele/   'die-PRES-3p'
17) *pilkimu*   'he is listening'   /pili-ki-mu/   'hear-PRES-3s'
18) *telka*   'he might do'   /te-le-ka/   'do-SUB-3s'
19) *molka*   'he might be'   /molo-le-ka/   'be-SUB-3s'

In (19) both the /lo/ syllable in the verb stem and the /i/ in the subjunctive mood suffix have been deleted.

As shown in (10), the near future is marked by /Ø/ in the third singular. In all other PNs, it is marked by /a~e/. If the stem ends in a back vowel the vowel is deleted, while if it ends in a front vowel the vowel remains as shown in the first singular forms in (20).[8]

20) *siembo*   'I will give'   /si-e-mbo/   'give-N.FUT-1s'
     teambo   'I will do'   /te-a-mbo/   'do-N.FUT-1s'
     nambo   'I will eat'   /no-a-mbo/   'eat-N.FUT-1s'
     pambo   'I will go'   /pu-a-mbo/   'go-N.FUT-1s'

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[7] There are two roots for 'to be': *le* is used with inanimate subjects; *molo* is used with animate subjects.
[8] There are no verb stems which end in *a*, so only four examples are given here and in the next section.

6   Vowel Harmony

There are three different types of vowel harmony in operation in Umbu-Ungu: complete harmony, harmony in height, and harmony in backness.

Complete vowel harmony only applies to the benefactive suffix and the present tense suffix. In (1), the vowel in each of these suffixes is represented as V.[9] In the phonetic form, the vowel for each of these suffixes is identical to the vowel of the stem as shown in (21).

21) a. *ni(ndi)ki-ru*   'I am speaking (for someone else)'
    b. *te(nde)ke-ro*   'I am doing (for someone else)'
    c. *no(ndo)ko-ro*   'I am eating (for someone else)'
    d. *pu(ndu)ku-ru*   'I am going (for someone else)'

In all the forms, the vowels of both the benefactive suffix (*-ndi~nde~ndo~ndu*) and the present tense suffix (*-ki~ke~ko~ku*) are identical with the vowel of the stem.

In addition to complete harmony, harmony in height can be seen in (21) in the alternation in the first person PN suffix between *ru* and *ro*. The high vowel *u* occurs after the high vowels *i u*, while the mid vowel *o* occurs after the mid vowels *e o*. As illustrated in (3, 4) above, this same alternation between *u* and *o* occurs in the first person and singular PN suffixes in the present tenses, and in the first person PN suffixes for the simple future tense. Further examples are given in (22).

22 a. *ni-mulu*   'I will speak'
   b. *te-molo*   'I will do'
   c. *no-molo*   'I will eat'
   d. *pu-mulu*   'I will go'

A similar alternation in height between *i* and *e* can be seen in (23).

23) a. *ni-ngi*   'they will speak'
    b. *te-nge*   'they will do'
    c. *no-nge*   'they will eat'
    d. *pu-ngi*   'they will go'

This alternation occurs in the nonfirst person, nonsingular PN suffixes for the present tenses and the simple future tense. It also occurs in the customary aspect/subjunctive mood suffix *li~le* as shown in (24).

24) a. *ni-li-mela*   'they might speak'
    b. *te-le-mela*   'they might do'

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[9]   In a different dialect of Umbu-Ungu the benefactive suffix always takes the form *nji*. In that dialect the form shown in (21b) is *tenjikiru* 'I am doing for someone else'. The vowel in the present tense suffix, however, completely assimilates to the preceding vowel in both dialects.

   c.   *no-le-mela*   'they might eat'
   d.   *pu-li-mela*   'they might go'

A final set of alternations in height are between *a* and *e* in the present awareness suffix *pa~pe*, the near future suffix *a~e*, and the third singular PN suffix for future tense *mba~mbe*. Once again, the higher (mid) vowel *e* occurs after the high vowels *i u*, while the lower (low) vowel *a* occurs after a lower (mid) vowels *e o*, as shown in (25).

25) a. *ni-mbe*   'he will speak'
     b. *te-mba*   'he will do'
     c. *no-mba*   'he will eat'
     d. *pu-mbe*   'he will go'

The examples in (26) from the present awareness tense give evidence that harmony in height is conditioned by the preceding vowel, not the verb stem vowel.

26) a. *ni-pe-ro*   'I am speaking'
     b. *te-pa-ro*   'I am doing'
     c. *no-pa-ro*   'I am eating'
     d. *pu-pe-ro*   'I am going'

The forms in (21) showed that the first person singular PN suffix alternate between *ru* and *ro* in the simple present tense. The forms in (26) do not show any such alternation. One possible explanation for this would be to claim that there are simply different sets of PN suffixes for the simple present and present awareness forms. This would amount to claiming that it is accidental that the PN suffixes for the present awareness forms are identical with the alternant simple present tense forms with mid vowels. On the other hand, if we claim that the suffixal vowel is determined by the preceding vowel, the rule for harmony in height in this case is relative rather than absolute. That is, the alternant with the higher vowel is used following a high vowel, while the alternant with the lower vowel is used following a mid or low vowel.

The final harmony process, harmony in backness, only affects one suffix: the distant past suffix *ri~ru*. The allomorph with the back vowel occurs when both the stem-final vowel and the following suffixal vowel are back vowels, as shown in (27a). The allomorph with the front vowel occurs when either the stem-final vowel or the following suffixal vowel are front vowels, as shown in (27b-d).

27) a. *no-ru-ndu*   'I ate'
     b. *no-ri-ngi*   'they ate'
     c. *te-ri-ndu* 'I did'
     d. *te-ri-ngi* 'they did'

Appendix: Four Verbal Paradigms

	no 'to eat'	*si* 'to give'	*te* 'to do'	*pu* 'to go'
Distant Past				
1s	*no-rú-ndu*	*si-rí-ndu*	*te-rí-ndu*	*pu-rú-ndu*
2s	*no-rú-nu*	*si-rí-nu*	*te-rí-nu*	*pu-rú-nu*
3s	*no-rú-mu*	*si-rí-mu*	*te-rí-mu*	*pu-rú-mu*
1d	*no-rú-mbulu*	*si-rí-mbulu*	*te-rí-mbulu*	*pu-rú-mbulu*
2/3d	*no-rí-ngili*	*si-rí-ngili*	*te-rí-ngili*	*pu-rí-ngili*
1p	*no-rú-mulu*	*si-rí-mulu*	*te-rí-mulu*	*pu-rú-mulu*
2/3p	*no-rí-ngi*	*si-rí-ngi*	*te-rí-ngi*	*pu-rí-ngi*
Near Past				
1s	*nó-ndu*	*sí-ndu*	*té-ndu*	*pú-ndu*
2s	*nó-nu*	*sí-nu*	*té-nu*	*pú-nu*
3s	*nó-mu*	*sí-mu*	*té-mu*	*pú-mu*
1d	*nó-mbulu*	*si-mbulu*	*té-mbulu*	*pú-mbulu*
2/3d	*nó-ngili*	*sí-ngili*	*té-ngili*	*pú-ngili*
1p	*nó-mulu*	*si-mulu*	*té-mulu*	*pú-mulu*
2/3p	*nó-ngi*	*sí-ngi*	*té-ngi*	*pú-ngi*
Present				
1s	*no-kó-ro*	*si-kí-ru*	*te-ké-ro*	*pu-kú-ru*
2s	*no-kó-no*	*si-ki-nu*	*te-ké-no*	*pu-kú-nu*
3s	*no-kó-mo*	*si-ki-mu*	*te-ké-mo*	*pu-kú-mu*
1d	*no-kó-mbolo*	*si-ki-mbulu*	*te-ké-mbolo*	*pu-kú-mbulu*
2/3d	*no-kó-mbele*	*si-ki-mbili*	*te-ké-mbele*	*pu-kú-mbili*
1p	*no-kó-molo*	*si-kí-mulu*	*te-ké-molo*	*pu-kú-mulu*
2/3p	*no-kó-mele*	*si-kí-mili*	*te-ké-mele*	*pu-kú-mili*
Present Awareness				
1s	*no-pá-ro*	*si-pé-ro*	*te-pá-ro*	*pu-pé-ro*
2s	*no-pá-no*	*si-pé-no*	*te-pá-no*	*pu-pé-no*
3s	*no-pá-mo*	*si-pé-mo*	*te-pá-mo*	*pu-pé-mo*
1d	*no-pá-mbolo*	*si-pé-mbolo*	*te-pá-mbolo*	*pu-pé-mbolo*
2/3d	*no-pá-mbele*	*si-pé-mbele*	*te-pá-mbele*	*pu-pé-mbele*
1p	*no-pá-molo*	*si-pé-molo*	*te-pá-molo*	*pu-pé-molo*
2/3p	*no-pá-mele*	*si-pé-mele*	*te-pá-mele*	*pu-pé-mele*

Future

1s	*no-mbó*	*si-mbú*	*te-mbó*	*pu-mbú*
2s	*no-ní*	*si-ní*	*te-ní*	*pu-ní*
3s	*no-mbá*	*si-mbé*	*te-mbá*	*pu-mbé*
1d	*no-mboló*	*si-mbulú*	*te-mboló*	*pu-mbulú*
2/3d	*no-ngelé*	*si-ngilí*	*te-ngelé*	*pu-ngilí*
1p	*no-moló*	*si-mulú*	*te-moló*	*pu-mulú*
2/3p	*no-ngé*	*si-ngí*	*te-ngé*	*pu-ngí*

Near Future

1s	*n-á-mbo*	*si-é-mbo*	*te-á-mbo*	*p-á-mbo*
2s	*n-á-ni*	*si-é-ni*	*te-á-ni*	*p-á-ni*
3s	*nó-pili*	*sí-pili*	*té-pili*	*pú-pili*
1d	*n-á-mbolo*	*si-é-mbolo*	*te-á-mbolo*	*p-á-mbolo*
2/3d	*n-á-ngili*	*si-é-ngili*	*te-á-ngili*	*p-á-ngili*
1p	*n-á-molo*	*si-é-molo*	*te-á-molo*	*p-á-molo*
2/3p	*n-á-ngi*	*si-é-ngi*	*te-á-ngi*	*p-á-ngi*

Customary Aspect

1s	*no-lió*	*si-lió*	*te-lió*	*pu-lió*
2s	*no-le-nó*	*si-li-nó*	*te-le-nó*	*pu-li-nó*
3s	*no-le-mó*	*si-li-mó*	*te-le-mó*	*pu-li-mó*
1d	*no-le-mboló*	*si-li-mboló*	*te-le-mboló*	*pu-li-mboló*
2/3d	*no-le-mbelé*	*si-li-mbelé*	*te-le-mbelé*	*pu-li-mbelé*
1p	*no-le-moló*	*si-li-moló*	*te-le-moló*	*pu-li-moló*
2/3p	*no-le-melé*	*si-li-melé*	*te-le-melé*	*pu-li-melé*

Subjunctive Mood

1s	*no-l-ká*	*si-l-ké*	*te-l-ká*	*pu-l-ké*
2s	*no-le-ná*	*si-li-ná*	*te-le-ná*	*pu-li-ná*
3s	*no-l-ká*	*si-l-ké*	*te-l-ká*	*pu-l-ké*
1d	*no-le-mbolá*	*si-li-mbolá*	*te-le-mbolá*	*pu-li-mbolá*
2/3d	*no-le-mbelá*	*si-li-mbelá*	*te-le-mbelá*	*pu-li-mbelá*
1p	*no-le-molá*	*si-li-molá*	*te-le-molá*	*pu-li-molá*
2/3p	*no-le-melá*	*si-li-melá*	*te-le-melá*	*pu-li-melá*