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The Give and Take of the Verb Root -kaua in Arop-Lokep [apr]

Lucille S. D'Jernes

This presentation seeks to document a small but somewhat unusual phenomenon that occurs in the Arop-Lokep [apr] language of Madang Province. There is one verb root that expresses the concepts of both "give" and "get". The distinction in meaning is determined not at the word level, but at the level of the clause.

1. Introduction

The Arop-Lokep [apr] language is an Austronesian language spoken on four islands in Madang and Morobe provinces of Papua New Guinea. The people are a generous and hospitable group of between 4,000 and 5,000 speakers of the language. They have a growing appreciation for the uniqueness of their own language, and it has been my privilege to work among them in various areas of language development over the past 26 years.

2. The verb -kaua

One interesting aspect of this language is that the verb of transfer which expresses the concept "give" is the same as the verb that expresses concepts like "get" and "take". In other words, the varied concepts of 'give,' 'get' and 'take' and, in one case, 'do' are expressed using just one verb. The difference in meaning is understood not at the word level – it would be unexceptional if it were. Instead the specific meaning must be extracted at the clause level.

According to Dr. Bernard Comrie, many verbs of transfer worldwide[1] are complex in form, and it is not uncommon that verbs of transfer present numerous irregularities. This is certainly true for the Arop-Lokep [apr] verb in question, so before exemplifying the semantics and syntactic features of this verb, I will detail its basic forms.

2.1 Regularities and Irregularities of the Verb -kaua

The verb root could be listed in a root based dictionary as -*kaua*, and the meaning could be stated like this, 'to get, take or acquire something, or to take, give or impart something to someone'. The normal word order for transitive verbal clauses in Arop-Lokep [apr] is SVO, and

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[1] Dr. Bernard Comrie gave a series of lectures at the SIL centre at Ukarumpa, PNG in May 2013. This statement is paraphrased from his lecture, "Valency Classes in the World's Languages". My sincere thanks also go to Dr. Comrie for listening to my brief explanation of this data in private conference after he had presented some observations on verbs of transfer. It was his kind reassurance of the uniqueness of this information that prompted me to attempt this write up.

inflected verbs have agreement indexing for the syntactic subject and object. The basic forms are found next in Table 1: Forms of Occurrence for -kaua.

	SG.SBJ & SG.OBJ (overt object form)	SG.SBJ & PL.OBJ (overt & non-overt object form)	PL.SBJ & SG.OBJ (overt object form)	PL.SBJ & PL.OBJ (overt & non-overt object form)	SG.SBJ & 3SG.OBJ (Non-overt Object)	related nouns
1	*akaua*	*akap*	*amkaua* 1EXCL.SBJ	*amkap* 1EXCL.SBJ	*akauu* or *akaui*	*kaungu kauingi*
	----	----	*takaua* 1INCL.SBJ	*takap* 1INCL.SBJ	----	
2	*kouo*	*kop*	*kakaua*	*kakap*	*kouu* or *koui*	
3	*ikaua*	*tikap*	*tikaua*	*tikap*	*ikauu* or *ikaui*	

Table 1: Forms of Occurrence for -*kaua*

Notice from Table 1 that the verb stem differs depending on whether the object gotten, taken or given is singular or plural. Thus, the stem is -*kaua* with singular objects but is instead -*kap* with plural objects. Many Arop-Lokep [apr] transitive verbs have a stem difference between singular and plural object agreement. However, -*kap* is morphologically unusual, while -*kaua* is quite normal. The more usual pattern of forming the plural is to leave off the final vowel.[2]

There is a somewhat predictable irregularity with second person subject prefixing for this verb as well. This is conditioned by the root beginning with the phoneme /k/, and the normal second person prefix being *ku*-. Apparently the expected forms: **kukaua, *kukap, *kukauu* and **kukoui* are somewhat cumbersome, and have changed over time to *kouo*, *kop, kouu* and *koui* respectively. As I say loosely, this is "somewhat" predictable. By that I mean that there are a few verbs in the language that have an alteration in the second person subject form, and that they all have stems that begin with the phoneme /k/. The exact form that the alteration will take is not predictable.

Notice also in the table that there is a different stem form, depending on whether a singular third person object is stated overtly as a noun or not. This characteristic of a different form for non-overt reference is not unique to the verb -*kaua*, but is rather a regular feature in

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[2] There are also numerous verbs with no change in the stem to indicate singular or plural object agreement.

transitive verbs in Arop-Lokep [apr]. This occurs because a free pronoun is never used to denote the third person singular object and there is no single regular predictable form for third person singular object agreement suffixes. Instead there is most often the addition of a classifier vowel[3] as the agreement suffix, and in some instances a morphological change in the verb stem.

What is unusual about *-kaua* in the third person singular object agreement form is that the speaker has two choices of the stem shape for non-overt reference to an object, *-kauu* or *-kaui.* This is almost unprecedented in the Arop-Lokep [apr] verbs known at present. There are also two related nouns that exhibit these two choices of classifier vowel, noted in the final column in Table 1. Almost all Arop-Lokep [apr] verbs can have a related noun or nominalised form, but *-kaua* is unusual in having *two* possible forms.

The occurrence of these two sets of forms and the occurrence of such a wide range of meaning for the verb raises the question of whether this is one lexical item or two. The speakers of both Arop and Lokep dialects confirm that both forms are used in all dialects as completely interchangeable with no difference in meaning, and that both sets of forms are used for meanings 'give' and 'get/take'. In counting the usage in a set of collected natural texts, we do find a preference for the *-kauu* form and *kaungu* nominalisation.[4]

Because the classifier vowel of verbs in Arop-Lokep [apr] is not predictable, we do sometimes hear speakers trying to guess what the correct nominalisation form of a little used verb might be. Guessing is also one of the things that young children do as they learn the language. The most likely choice of classifier vowel for any given verb stem would be a vowel that comes late in the verb root. In the case of *-kaua* this suggests either the *-a* or *-u* classifier. This would tend to lend support to how the *-u* and *–ungu* forms came into use. Because of this, I would suggest that the *–kaui* and *kauingi* forms are older historically, and that the *-kauu* and *kaungu* forms are a more recent innovation.

This is supported by the fact that all other verbs in the language which end in an /au/ or /aua/ sequence nominalise using the *-ungu* suffix and have the *-u* classifier vowel. Thus, it is possible that the *-u* classifier vowel of the verb *-kaua* and the *-ungu* nominalising suffix are motivated by a tendency to regularise. The result then in the present linguistic context is that there is likely some form of syncretism involved where these two forms of inflection and derivation exist and are in common usage. One is likely historic and one a regularising innovation, but they are both referencing just one lexical item.

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[3] These classifier vowels are not determined by either the semantic or phonological characteristics of the verb. This has been studied and documented, but falls outside the scope of this paper to give all the details.

[4] In preparation for this paper I did a few counts of what forms of the verb occur in locally authored texts. In over two hundred and eighty single spaced A-4 pages of point 12 Times New Roman font, vernacular texts that contain approximately 177,000 words, the most common form of the verb *-kaua* was as *-kap* (1,041 occurrences). The other forms occurred the following number of times each, *-kaua* (551) and a variant spelling *-kau* (444), *-kauu* (246), *kouo* (66) and a variant spelling *kou* (25), *kop* (71), *kaungu* (58), *kouu* (9), *kauingi* and a variant spelling *-kawingi* (5), and *-kaui* (1).

2.2 What -kaua means

Next, let us look at the meaning of *-kaua* in examples from natural texts. The main arguments of the predication are identified below with the letters (A) for an agent-like argument, (R) for a recipient-like argument and (T) for theme arguments. When these are not apparent from a noun, pronoun or another word in the example sentence, I put them under the verb, as they are usually indexed there. The verb is bolded. In examples 1 and 2, we have the predicate meaning 'get' or 'take' with only the agent-like argument and the theme. In this first set of examples, the singular (1) and plural (2) forms of the verb are shown.[5]

(1) *I-rookoo   matuk   tani*
3SG.SBJ-climb   coconut GIV.SG

*a   i-lo   **i-kau-a**   garung*
and 3SG.SBJ-go.up   3SG.SBJ-get/take-SG.OBJ   mature.coconut
                    A   **T**

a   i-si.
and 3SG.SBJ-come.down

'He climbed that coconut tree and he went up (and) got/took a mature nut and he came down.' [from 'The Younger and Older Brothers']

(2) *Motong la   tareke   i-di*
after.R   FOC   chicken 3SG.SBJ-go.inland

*di   **i-kap**   kasa   yo   muka-na   nga*
go.inland 3SG.SBJ-get/take.3PL.OBJ   charcoal REL   black-3SG.PS   PROX.PL
            A   **T**

pot   i-sama   malau   ye.
come.seaward 3SG.SBJ-smear   wildfowl with.3SG

'After that the chicken went inland, (and) going inland he got/took some charcoal that was black (and) returning seaward he smeared the wildfowl with it.' [from The Story of the Chicken and the Wild Fowl]

In examples (1) and (2), the agent-like argument and the theme argument are either explicitly stated, or cross-referenced, and the meaning of the verb is 'get something' or 'take

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[5] In examples (1) through (4) the interlinear parse of the verb root is expressed as a meaning appropriate to the context. Later, in example (5) onward, I use a more generalized interlinear form, 'get;give;do', for all occurrences of the *-kaua* verb.

something'.[6] The addition of recipient-like arguments (R) will now be demonstrated in examples (3) and (4). The recipient-like argument is an oblique argument. The phrases are always prepositional, and here they are underlined.

(3) *…i-so   di   i,*
     …3SG.SBJ-shoot   3PL   fish

 *ngan   **i-kap**   i   mai~mai   pang*
 MED.PL   3SG.SBJ-give/take-3PL.OBJ   fish   big~RED.PL   to.RCPNT
         A   **T**   **R**

 tai-ni   garup   kase   i.
 yngr.sib-3SG.PS   female   small   PROX.SG

 '…he shot (some) fish, then he gave/took (the) big ones to his little sister.' [from The Story of Paka Mooloo]

(4) *Motong **i-kap**   pa-ttu   pang-a*
     after.R   3SG.SBJ-give.3PL.OBJ   portion-one   to.RCPNT-3SG
             A   **T**   **R**

 a   ni<n>tooroo   i-kan.
 and   <3SG.PS>husband   3SG.SBJ-eat.3SG.OBJ

 'Afterward she gave a portion to him, and her husband ate them.' [from The Story of How Yams Came to Modenge]

Example (3) tells the reader/hearer what a man did with some fish he had speared, 'he gave them (or took them) to his younger sister'. In example (4) we have a story about the origin of yams and a sentence where a woman who has received the yams, then *gives* some to her husband. Notice how the meaning for the action expressed has changed with the addition of the recipient-like argument.[7]

It is the addition of this particular type of oblique argument that alters the direction of transfer for the predicate. When there is only an **A + T** monotransitive activity predicate, the agent-like entity takes temporary or sustained possession of the theme, and the meaning is

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[6] There are a number of other lexical 'take' verbs in Arop-Lokep [apr] that have the manner of something being taken in focus, like *-yono* 'take something out of something else', *-sadi* and *-sadmaki* 'take something from someone with a quick snatching motion', *-yolomaki* 'take something from someone with a pulling motion', *-pasnaki* 'take something from someone without their being aware of it or seeing it happen', *-posi* 'take/bring something out into the open'. The 'get' or 'take' sense of *-kaua* is much more general.

[7] Example 4 shows the recipient-like argument in pronominal form. There is a full set of oblique proforms/pronouns for the recipient-like oblique argument, and these are listed at the end of the paper, in Appendix 1 in

Table 2: Recipient **Proforms**.

similar to the range of meaning expressed in English as 'get, acquire or take something'. The addition of the recipient-like argument results in an **A + T + R** ditransitive active achievement predicate,[8] where the activity continues to the point that the theme is transferred into the possession of the recipient-like entity. That is, the meaning expressed is in the range of 'give something to, or take something to someone'.

There is one other context in which the meaning expressed using the verb root *-kaua* is quite different. When the verb is followed by the event noun *urata* 'work' the meaning is more in the range of 'do' (5x10).

(5) *A-lon*   *di*   *kookoo-noo*   *ye*   *wik*   *atu,*   *in*   *ngan*
     1SG.EXCL.SBJ-help   3PL   white-3SG.PS   with   week   one   PROX.SG   MED.PL

     am-kaua   *urata*   *la*   *Matukpunu*   *nga.*
     1SG.EXCL.SBJ-get;give;do   work   FOC   Matukpunu.village   PROX.PL

     A   **T**

     'I helped the white (people) for one week, and in that week, we worked (at) Matukpunu village.'[from Helping the White People]'

There is a cognate verb root in a language related to Arop-Lokep [apr] that sheds some light here, the Mangaaba-Mbula [mna][9] verb root *-kam*. The sheer bulk of dictionary information on the occurrences of *-kam* attests to an even wider range of meanings, 'do, give, take, get, put, cause.' The *-kam* of Mbula [mna] seems to occur with numerous event nouns and motion verbs that affect its meaning. In fact, the combined subentries for the *-kam* verb root, including the event nouns, motion verbs and the unique meanings denoted, show well over a hundred combinations (Bugenhagen 2007:79-82).

The verb root *-kaua* in Arop-Lokep [apr] has a similar (though not nearly as broad) range of meanings, in comparison with the Mbula [mna] verb *-kam*. One difference in meaning is related to its combining with an event noun as well.

One further example is now given that may be of interest to the reader. Here the *-kaua* must be interpreted in two ways, as 'give' and as 'get/take' in a single utterance. For this example I've chosen a familiar scripture passage which has been translated into Arop-Lokep [apr]. The reference comes from the Gospel of Mark 14:11 and tells part of the story of the beheading of John the Baptist. In just this one verse, the *-kaua* verb root occurs four times.

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[8] Emma Pavey (2010:93- 102) suggests these possible labels for predicate classes.

[9] Arop-Lokep [apr] belongs to the Ngero/Vitiaz Family of languages in the Vitiaz Dialect Linkage. Another language in this linkage group is Mangaaba-Mbula [mna] which has been investigated in depth by Dr. Robert and Salme Bugenhagen.

(6) *Motong la   **ti-kau-a**   *kuto-no*
     after.R   FOC 3PL.SBJ-get;give;do-SG.OBJ   head-3SG.PS
                          A   **T**

     a   ti-non-a   *lo   tawiri   lo-no,*
     and 3PL.SBJ-put.inside-CLF.3SG.OBJ go.up wooden.plate inside-3SG.PS

     *inbe **ti-kau-u**   *pang   garup   kase   tani*
     and   3PL.OBJ-get;give;do-CLF.3SG.OBJ   to.RCPNT   female small.one   GIV.SG
          A   **T**   **R**

     *a   **i-kau-u**
     and   3SG.SBJ-get;give;do-CLF.3SG.OBJ
          A   **T**

     *lo   **i-kau-u**   *pang   tina-na*.
     go.up 3SG.SBJ-get;give;do-CLF.3SG.OBJ   to.RCPNT   mother-3SG.PS
          A   **T**   **R**

     'After that they got his head and they put it up inside a serving dish and they gave it to that young girl and she got it and going up she gave it to her mother.' [from the Arop-Lokep [apr] New Testament, Mark 14:11]

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, the verb root *-kaua* in the Arop-Lokep [apr] language is a single lexical item with a range of meanings informed by the context in which it occurs. It is the most general and common word expressing the concepts of 'get, take and acquire'. It is also the main word that expresses 'giving something to someone else', or 'transfering ownership or custody of something to someone else' when it occurs with a recipient-like argument. And when combined with the event noun, *urata* 'work', it expresses the concept of 'do'. This Arop-Lokep [apr] verb root could perhaps be given a very general gloss such as 'transfer' or 'do', but the more complex 'get;give;do' designation in the interlinear lines in this paper gives a fuller picture of these three major senses of the word mentioned above.

Syncretism, regularisation, derivation and inflection likely account for the range of forms that occur. And a similar verb root with an even broader range of meanings is found in a closely related language.

Abbreviations, Acronyms and Conventions

1, 2, 3	first, second, and third persons respectively
~	indicates a morpheme break for a reduplicated element
*	denotes a form that does not occur
A	agent-like argument
CLF	classifier
EXCL	exclusive of hearer
FOC	focus marker
GIV	given, known, previously mentioned
INCL	inclusive of hearer
MED	medial
OBJ	object index
PL	plural
PROX	proximal
PS	possessive/possessor marking
R	recipient-like argument (in the labeling lines below the interlinear parse line)
R	realis (in the interlinear parse line)
RCPNT	recipient
RED	reduplication
REL	relative, relative particle
SBJ	subject index
SG	singular
sib	sibling
T	theme argument
yngr	younger

Appendix

Person	Singular Forms	Plural Forms
1	*pau*	1EXCL *pam*
		1INCL *paidi*
2	*pong*	*pang*
3	*panga*	*pang di*

Table 2: Recipient Proforms

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