

# Counting and Number in Huli

Linguistic adaptations and  
modifications

# Disclaimer

- Not a study in Huli counting systems
- Not a satisfactory explanation of the reasons for discarding the traditional pattern and introducing a linguistically new pattern

# Traditional Base 15

- The traditional counting base 15: first documented and described by Rule & Rule in 1954
- Confirmed by linguist Cheetham (1978)
- The use of digits of two hands and one foot
- Counting in ordinals, not cardinals
- The base (*ngui*) – stem only, no suffix

# Stems of number words

number	ordinals	cardinals
3	tebo.ne	tebi.ria
4	ma.ne	ma.ria
5	dau.ni	du.ria
10	pi.ni	pi.ria
15	ngui.ni	ngui.ria

# Traditional example

- ngui (stem) pi (stem – no suffix)  
beane.go.naga (ordinal + suffixes)  
pini (ordinal) or  
pira (cardinal)
- Gloss:  
ten fifteens  
of the eleventh (fifteen)  
the tenth or  
ten

# 'ten' in the traditional base 15 context

- In the above ten may be used in all of its forms”
- Stem + suffix
- Stem + cardinal suffix
- So the same linguistic pattern is available for transfer to base 10.

# Introduction to written numerals base 10

- The traditional base15 system above is described in the absence of written numerals.
- Written numerals are base 10
- Introduced through
  - Money
  - Schools
  - The print media

# Current practice

## English or *Tok Pisin* loan

- Underlying belief
- Prestige (evidence of education)
- Elementary Schools



# Linguistic transitioning step one

- Discussion and teaching with small groups: the 'meaning' of the written numerals explained in the vernacular.
- Suggestion to follow the traditional linguistic pattern, only using ten
- Rejected

# Linguistic transitioning step two

- Group decision
- to use cardinals
- but in a different but similar pattern
  
- Incorporated into the literacy primers as a distinct lesson
- Current pattern influenced by those who had not done vernacular literacy.

# Current Practice

## Vernacular (1)

- Ordinals to fifteen – no recognition of base 10
- Sixteen – switch occurs
  - Base 10
  - Cardinals, not ordinals
  - Not the ‘stem’ but the full word with suffix
  - Shortening of / dropping the full extension clause

# Current Practice

## Vernacular (2)

- Second switch at *pira pira* (ten ten)
- English / *Tok Pisin* loans
  - *Handedi* (hundred)
  - *Daosini* (thousand)
- Rounded numbers used without the noun referring to large amounts of money (usually statements made by politicians or large companies in the extraction industries)

# Mental agility

- Switching from English to vernacular
- Switching bases
- The curious case of counting money: pounds, dollars, kina
- A recent example. The respondent told me K110 was *pira duriani pauni duria* [ten fives pounds five, that is, fifty-five pounds]