

## Perfective Aspect in the Languages of Madang Province, Papua New Guinea

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### I Introduction

When we consider tense and aspect in the grammars of the languages in the world, the perfective aspect and the related usages (completive, terminative, and imperfective) are important features (Bybee et al. 1994: chapter 3). This study examines perfective usages of Trans-New Guinea languages and Austronesian languages spoken in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea.<sup>1)</sup> Though Trans-New Guinea languages and Austronesian languages are grammatically and lexically different from each other (Foley 2000), this study tries to find common aspectual features by contrasting these sample languages (Lynch 1998: 62-64, Nose 2016a, Nose 2016b).

This study chose the four sample languages spoken in Madang Province at the north-west of Papua New Guinea: Amele and Kobon in Trans-New Guinea, and Bel and Manam in Austronesian (see Figure 1). These languages might have connected Trans-New Guinea and Austronesian languages and their grammars could have influences each other (cf. Dempwolff n.d., Nose 2016b, Ross 2002). As a result, these languages generally maintain partly complicated elements in their grammars (Foley 2000). Moreover, they have dense contacts with Tok Pisin, the lingua franca of Papua New Guinea.

This study examines the perfective features of the sample languages and summarizes them in terms of functional perspective. Finally, this study works to clarify aspectual features in the area and explain their perfective usages in terms of their semantic characteristics (Frawley 2013, Nose 2019).

<sup>1)</sup> Trans-New Guinea languages are sometimes called as Papuan languages, they are the language group of more than 500 languages in Melanesian area (Foley 2000). In Madang Province, there are several Austronesian languages, spoken along the coast and the rest of the languages are Trans-New Guinea.

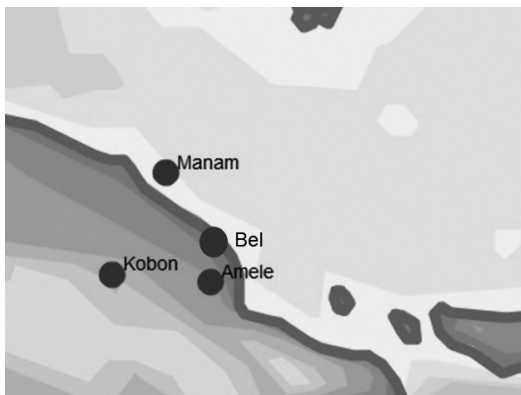


Figure 1: Sample languages in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea (modified by WALS language viewer (Haspelmath et al. 2005))<sup>2</sup>

Section 2 offers an overview of previous studies that have investigated perfective aspect and language descriptions of Papua New Guinea. The purposes of this study are then presented. Section 3 examines the data of perfective usages of the sample languages. Section 4 is a discussion of form/meaning of the perfective aspect, and Section 5 is a conclusion.

## II Preliminary studies and purpose of this study

This section deals with previous studies of tense and aspect and summarizes several studies of the perfective and the languages in Papua New Guinea. In linguistic studies, there are many studies on perfect/perfective aspect in the grammar; classical studies: Comrie (1976, 1985), and further functional studies: Bybee et al. (1994), Bybee and Dahl (1989), Bybee et al. (1994), and also Dahl (1985). Recently, more advanced studies on tense and aspect have been conducted by Smith (1997), Bhat (1999), and Dahl and Velupillai (2005).

<sup>2</sup> I have been conducting the fieldwork in Madang Province, and particularly in Amele and Bel area. In contrast, the languages such as Kobon and Manam are hard to reach the spots, and it is still difficult to find a consultant at present. Fortunately, we can find several kinds of descriptive grammars in Madang Province and this study utilizes them (Davies 1989, Lichtenberk 1983).

First, this study focuses on the perfective, not perfect usages of the languages. The difference between them are discussed by Comrie (1985; Aspect) and Bybee and Dahl (1989) (Kroeger 2005:158). The perfective and the perfect are not semantically similar, and the term perfective indicates the opposite of imperfective, but the opposite of perfect does not exist. However, recent studies prefer using the term perfect. Nevertheless, this study chose the perfective, contrasting imperfective (or past).

General linguistic studies have been conducted on New Guinean languages, including by Lynch (1998), Foley (2000), and Aikhenvald (2015). There are around 1,000 languages spoken in Melanesia area and more than half of them are classified as Papuan or Trans-New Guinea languages. Despite the existence of many previous studies and descriptive grammars, we cannot find common grammatical traits (such as tense or aspect features) which we can detect the Trans-New Guinea features (see also, tense and aspect studies of Nose 2016a, 2016b, 2019).

Typologically, many languages in the world lack perfective marking grammatically. Dahl and Velupillai (2005a, 2005b) investigated the grammatical marking of perfective and the perfect usages cross-linguistically. First, Dahl and Velupillai (2005a) classified the languages into grammatical marking of perfective/imperfective aspect, as shown in Figure 2.

Overall, half of the world's languages lack grammatical marking of perfective and imperfective aspect. Particularly, the languages in South East Asia and Europe do not have the grammatical marking, as well as Japanese and many languages in the American continents. Focusing on New Guinea Island, many lan-

There are more than 250 indigenous languages including Trans-New Guinea and Austronesian in Madang Province and around 50–70 languages have been described, but others are not described yet or already have been dying and switching to Tok Pisin.

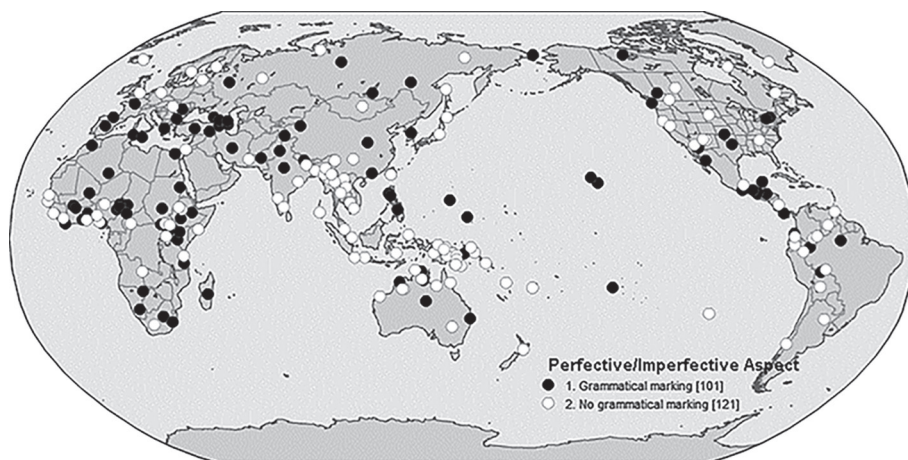


Figure 2: WALS #65: Perfective/imperfective aspect: typological overview (Dahl and Velupillai 2005a)

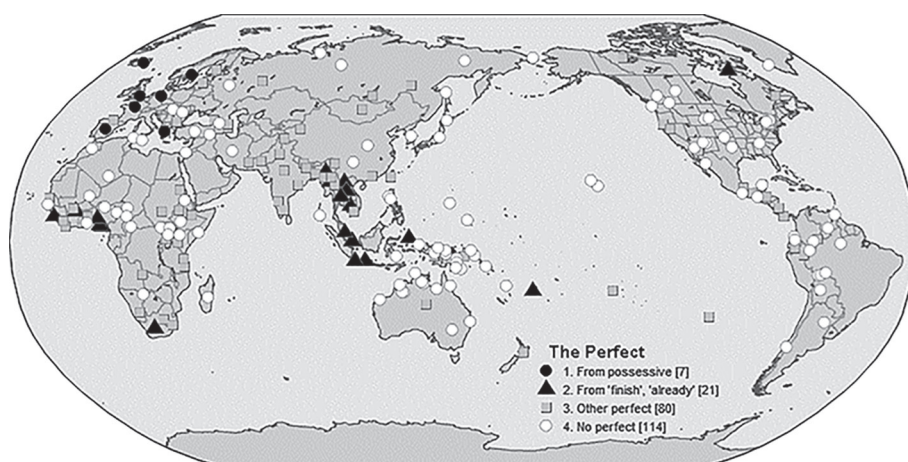


Figure 3: WALS #68: The perfect: typological overview (Dahl and Velupillai 2005b)

languages lack grammatical marking of perfective/imperfective.

Next, Dahl and Velupillai (2005b) examined the semantic origins of the perfect, as shown in Figure 3. There are four options: from possessive (7 languages), from “finish,” “already” (21 languages), other perfect (80 languages), and no perfect (114 languages). European languages prefer the possessive type, including “have” perfect, but this type is not common in the rest of

the world. Eurasian languages use other perfect and “finish”/“already” type can be observed in South East Asia. In New Guinea, we observe the following in Figure 4.

In Figure 4, “finish”/“already” type, and other perfect, and no perfect types are observed in the sample languages of Dahl and Velupillai (2005b)<sup>3</sup>

Finally, in this study, we explore common feature of perfective usages among the four

**3**) Recent study of Dahl and Wälchli (2016), the “already” type perfect is called as *Iamitive*.

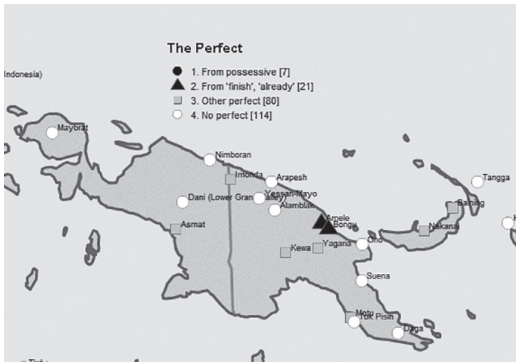


Figure 4: Perfect in PNG (WALS #68)

sample languages. The languages of Trans-New Guinea and Austronesia in the area had contacts each other and affected their grammars (Foley 2000, Lynch 1998, Nose 2019). Thus, this study will examine grammatical perfective (or not), original meaning of the perfective, and other related usages in the sample languages.

### III Perfective data of Trans-New Guinea and Austronesian languages

This section presents the data of the sample languages and explains the grammatical mechanism of the perfectives in Trans-New Guinea and Austronesian languages. Morphologically, their forms are suffix, inflection, or other lexical forms, and this study confirms the meanings of the various perfective forms. This study utilizes the interview data (Amele and Bel) and the books of descriptive grammars (Kobon and Manam). Because, the locations of Kobon and Manam are hardly accessible in geography and the quality of each grammar book is enough in this study (Aikhenvald 2015: chapter 7).

First, Amele is a Trans-New Guinean language and spoken near the coast area. There are five kinds of past tenses with remoteness distinctions and other additional tenses, as shown in (1) and (2).

#### (1) Remoteness distinctions in Amele:

Present: Ija hu-gi-na.

I come-PRES/1SG  
"I come."

Past:

Today's past: Ija hu-g-a.

I come-PAST(today)/1SG  
"I came (today)."

Yesterday's past:

Ija hu-g-an.

I come-PAST(yesterday)/1SG  
"I came (yesterday)."

Remote past: Ija ho-om.

I come-PAST(remote)/1SG  
"I came (before yesterday)."

#### (2) Two additional past usages in Amele:

Habitual past: Ija ho-l-ig.

I come-PAST(habitual)/1SG  
"I used to come."

Negative past:

Ija qee ho-l-om.

I not come-PAST(negative)/1SG  
"I did not come."

These past tense forms have inflections together with persons and numbers. In contrast, aspect forms are poor (Roberts 1989: 224) and "(t)he perfective aspect is inherent to Today's past tense" (Roberts 1989): mate-a "cut(past) today-today's past."

Generally, the perfect/perfective meanings are realized by using the today's past tense form

(Roberts 1987: 227), or by using the adverbial word *wele* “already,” as in (3) and (4).

- (3) Uqa **wele** nui-a.  
He already go-PAST(today)/3SG  
“He has already gone.” (Roberts 1987:232)
- (4) Uqa na **wele**  
He wood already  
mate-a.  
cut-PAST(today)/3SG  
“He has already cut the wood.”

There is another option to use the verb “hedoc” (to finish, complete), as shown in (5).

- (5) Uqa na meti-**hedo**-ya.  
He wood cut-finish-PAST(today)/3SG  
“He finished cutting the wood”

Next, this study observes another Trans-New Guinea language, Kobon. Kobon is spoken in mountain area in Madang Province, and Amele and Kobon are geographically far and do not influence each other. Kobon has a complicated past tense system with near and remote pasts, but it has the perfect aspect form (cf. Nose 2016a). The perfect aspect form in Kobon is the element *-b-*, which is inserted between the verb-base and person/number inflection, such as “Verb-**b**-in,” Um-öb. “He had died” (Davies 1989: 168), and examples (6) and (7). Therefore, Kobon has a perfective grammatical form in verbal morphology. But at the same time, simple past tense forms are often used with a perfect aspectual value (Davies 1989: 167-169).

- (6) Al-öp.  
Shoot-PERF/3SG  
“He has shot.”

- (7) Ar-bal.  
Go-PERF/3PL  
“They have gone.”

Moreover, Kobon can utilize the verb “pis” (to finish) to imply the perfective. Davies (1989: 171-172, 176) refers to this usage as terminative aspect, as shown in (8) and (9).

- (8) Kanim anom im **pis** gi-pal.  
Banana sucker plant finish-PERF/3PL  
“They have finished planting the banana.”
- (9) Yad ning **pis** gi-pin.  
I eat finish PERF/1SG  
“I have finished eating it.”

Another possibility is the perfective with the adverb “already.” Davies (1989:140) described the adverb “midönöp” (already), but there is no description of “already type” perfective in Kobon.

Next, we observe the region’s Austronesian languages, Bel and Manam, both of which are spoken in Madang Province. Austronesian and Trans-New Guinea languages are totally different from each other in their grammars and lexicons, but both have come into contact in the area over time, and several grammars have thus affected each other (cf. Foley 2000, Ross 2002, Nose 2016b). Generally, the Austronesian languages spoken in Papua New Guinea are poor in tense and instead have several aspect forms or Tense-Aspect-Mood markers. Moreover, verbs have no inflection and no person/number marking in verbal morphology. In addition, the languages have prefix or (and) suffix uses (sometimes included in person/number marking).



First, Bel<sup>4</sup>) is spoken in the coast area, near Madang city. Bel is quite similar to another Austronesian language, Takia (Ross 2002), regarding grammar and lexicon.<sup>5</sup>) The grammar of Bel was briefly described by Dempwolff around 1940-1950, which is now understood as outdated. But the enclitic (this is not suffix, according to Dempwolff) “-lak” is used as a marker of past, past perfect and perfect tenses, as shown in (10). Practically, this form “-lak” can be described as realis marker.

- (10) Am a-god-lak.  
 we ask-REAL  
 “we asked for/we have asked for/we had asked for”(situations in reality)

I gathered the Bel data on the spot, and it turned out that the enclitic “-lak” can be used to imply perfective, but there are other options as well. They are by using the adverb “get” (already) and by using the verb “bini” (to finish), as shown in (11a, b).

- (11) a. Already type:  
 ŋa get buk mustig.  
 I already book read  
 “I have already read the book.”  
 b. Finish type:  
 ŋa get buk mustig bini.  
 I already book read finish  
 “I have already read the book.”

In (11a, 11b), the adverb “get” and the adverb “get” (already) are a necessary and simple solution of perfective in Bel.

Manam is another Austronesian language, spoken in Manam island, Madang Province.<sup>6</sup>) The grammar was described by Lichtenberk

(1983), who posits that the verbal structure in Manam can be formalized as prefix-verb-suffix (104). The prefix indicates subject and mood information (realis/irrealis) and suffix includes object, directional and other information, as shown in (12).

- (12) U-doʔ-i.  
 1SG/SB(REAL)-take-3SG/OB  
 “I took it.”

Manam also has realis mode and the suffix “-doi” carries this realis meaning (Lichtenberk 1983:202-203). The form “-doi” indicates completion of an event (realis situation); the perfective, as shown in (13).<sup>7</sup>)

- (13) U-moanʔo-doi.  
 I(REAL)-eat-completive  
 “I have finished eating/I have eaten.”

Moreover, Lichtenberk added that the adverb “abe” (already) can enhance the perfective meaning, as in (14).

- (14) Abe u-ruʔu-doi.  
 already I(REAL)-wash-completive  
 “I have washed already.”

## IV | Discussion

The data in Section 3 show that each of the sample languages has partly grammatical or partly lexical perfectives, but there are no common characteristics among them. Amele and Kobon have a diverse tense system, including near and remote past, and sometimes near past forms imply perfective meaning. On the other hand, Bel and Manam formally distinguish be-

<sup>4</sup>) Bel has alternative names, Gedaged, or Graged (Dempwolff n.d.).

<sup>5</sup>) Linguists consider that Bel and Takia are different in terms of their phonology and morphology, nevertheless, many Takia and Bel people told me that they are the same language.

<sup>6</sup>) Recently (2018-2019), a volcano of Manam island is still active and several eruptions occurred. The road conditions from Madang to Bogia are not safe, and I gave up going there.

<sup>7</sup>) According to Lichtenberk (1983: 182-183), there are realis and irrealis prefixes on verbs and the form “-doi” can appear with the realis prefix.

Table 1: Perfective usages and their meanings in the sample languages in Papua New Guinea

	Tense	Perfective usages	Adverb “Already”	Verb “Finish”
Amele	Rich	Lexical	wele	Hedoc
Kobon	Rich	Grammatical(perfective)	(midönöp)	Pis
Bel	Poor	Grammatical (realis enclitic)	(get)	bini
Manam	Poor	Grammatical (realis prefix)	(abe)	---

tween realis and irrealis, and the realis marker carries past and perfective meanings, as shown in Table 1.

The findings in Table 1 show that Amele and Kobon (Trans-New Guinea) have rich tense systems, and only Kobon has grammatical perfective involved in verbal morphology. In contrast, Bel and Manam (Austronesian) have grammatical realis (and some grammatical forms) carrying perfective meaning (cf. Bybee and Dahl 1989, Bybee et al. 1994). Moreover, there are two options: “already”-type and “finish”-type, and “already”-type is preferred in Amele, but the adverb “already” is used to enhance the perfective meaning in other languages (Dahl and Velupillai 2005b). Alternatively, the “finish”-type can be used as lexical perfective in Amele, Kobon and Bel.

Overall, the perfective can be realized grammatically (Kobon, Bel and Manam) and lexically (Amele). All sample languages utilize lexical aid of “already” or “finish,” which are not grammaticalized yet.

Here, we consider the perfective in Tok Pisin, the lingua franca in Papua New Guinea. There is the perfective marker “pinis” in Tok Pisin, as shown in (15).

- (15) Mi ridim buk **pinis**.  
 I read book PERF  
 “I have (already) read the book.”

This perfective marker “pinis” is derived from the English verb “finish,” but its meaning in Tok Pisin is “already” (i.e., iamitive). This usage in Tok Pisin might affect the “already”-type and “finish”-type in sample languages.<sup>8)</sup>

Finally, this study claims the perfective aspect markers in all languages are more or less related to simple (or near) past tense (and realis situation in Austronesian languages), and this fact means that the languages of the area do not clearly distinguish past tense and perfective aspect meanings (cf. Frawley 2013, Bhat 1999). The Trans-New Guinea languages prefer tense-conscious and Austronesian languages are based on realis/irrealis grammatical forms. Because of this, there is no common feature among the sample languages. However, their usages of “already”/“finish” perfective might be affected by the “pinis” in Tok Pisin and this point (the perfective derived via “pinis” in Tok Pisin) is a common feature based on the language contact with Tok Pisin.

There is a distinction of the perfective formation between Trans-New Guinea and

<sup>8)</sup> I observed that native speakers of Amele and Bel know the difference between the simple past “bin” and the perfective “pinis” in Tok Pisin. They are bilinguals of each native language and Tok Pisin and they know the concept of the perfective in their native languages.

Austronesian languages, because Austronesian languages have realis/irrealis moods in their grammars (cf. Aikhenvald 2015, Frawley 2013). Their grammar and perfective meanings are different from typical Indo-European languages, but similar phenomena can be observed in neighboring area (inside Melanesia and around South East Asia).

## V | Conclusion

This study claims the perfective aspect is realized in several ways among the sample languages in the area, and their usages are mixed with grammatical aspect forms and lexical (rather “already”-type). The perfective meaning is realized in realis (or simple/near past tense) situations in the sample languages, and there is no clear distinction between past tense and perfective (cf. Bybee and Dahl 1989). Therefore, “already”-types and “finish”-types are supplementary for enhancing the perfective meaning. They are considered to be an influence of Tok Pisin “pinis” perfective. However, further investigation of behaviors of the perfective usages in other languages in the area is necessary.

## Abbreviations

SB: subject; OB: object; PAST (today, yesterday, remote) : past tense marker (today’s past, yesterday’s past and remote past); PERF grammatical perfective marker; PRES: present tense marker; REAL: realis marker; SG: singular; PL: plural; 1, 2, 3: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person, respectively.

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## Perfective Aspect in the Languages of Madang Province, Papua New Guinea

Masahiko Nose

This study tries to clarify the functions of aspect forms in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea. It particularly focuses on the perfective aspect forms in four sample languages: Amele, Bel, Kobon, and Manam. Amele and Kobon are Trans-New Guinea languages while, and Bel and Manam are Austronesian languages. Generally, Austronesian languages tend to have aspect features, whereas Trans-New Guinea languages lack instead have rich tense systems. This study discusses their perfective behaviors from a contrastive viewpoint.

I collected the data through fieldwork and found that there are two kinds of aspect marking: with morphology and without morphology. Morphologically, perfective aspect forms were incorporated into person and number of the verbs, as in (1a).

(1a) With aspect morphology  
Bel: Am agod-lak. (realis marker)  
“We have asked for” (Dempwolff n.d. 11)

Bel: Nga book get mushuti-gbini. (past)  
“I have already read a book/I read book”

Manam: U-moana?-dói.(completive suffix)  
“I have eaten” (Lichtenberk 1983:202)

Kobon: Um-öb. (recent past+perfect)  
“He has died” (Davies 1989:168)

(1b) Without aspect morphology  
Amele: Uqa wele (already) nui-a (today’s past).  
“He has already gone” (Roberts 1987:232)

Amele: Uqa na meti-hedo-ya  
(cut-finish-today’s past).  
“He finished cutting the wood”

Austronesian languages (Bel and Manam) are poor in tense forms, but they have aspect morphology (realis marker) in verbs. However, Kobon has morphological perfective markers, but their usages are related to the recent past form. In (1b), Amele lacks aspect marker and instead utilizes the temporal adverb “wele” (already) or the verb “finish” and today’s past form. Therefore, this study found that each language has partly formal means indicating perfective and Trans-New Guinea languages utilize past tense forms, and Austronesian languages have bound morphology of tense-aspect-mood. Thus, perfective aspect is not common feature of the area, and perfective meaning turns out to be realized differently.

Finally, this study claims the perfective aspect markers in all languages are more or less related to simple (or near) past tense. In other words, these languages do not significantly distinguish past tense and perfective aspect meanings. Additionally, “finish”-type or “already”-type forms can help implying the perfective meaning.