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Four Finisterre-Huon languages: An introduction

Abstract: The verbal categories of Finisterre-Huon Papuan languages Awara, Ma Manda, Nek, and Nungon are typologically remarkable in several ways. Their tense systems have multiple subdivisions within past and future tenses. Tense is fused with number, but the number system varies depending on tense, with the most number values distinguished in the future tenses. Immediate and delayed imperatives are distinguished, with the immediate imperative implying brusqueness and the delayed imperative implying politeness. Aspect is generally encoded analytically, with auxiliary verb constructions, although some languages mark habitual aspect through a verbal suffix. Surprisingly, medial verbs may mark more aspectual distinctions than final verbs. Finally, although grammatical evidentiality is not widely known to exist in Papuan languages of northeastern New Guinea, non-firsthand evidentiality is found to be entwined with verbal aspect marking in both Awara and Nungon. The four Finisterre-Huon (FH) Papuan languages represented in this volume – Awara, Ma Manda, Nek, and Nungon – bring to light many of the unique typological characteristics of this group of under-described languages.¹ The papers presented here offer a sense of the commonalities and differences found in the verbal inflectional systems of FH languages. This introduction provides general background on FH languages, and summarizes some of the points of convergence and divergence among the languages discussed in this volume.

Keywords: comparative linguistics, Papuan languages, Finisterre-Huon, tense, aspect

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1 Typological profile of the Finisterre-Huon Papuan languages

The existence of a Finisterre-Huon language group comprising 60–80 Papuan languages spoken from the Finisterre Mountains east to the Huon Peninsula has been accepted since Hooley & McElhanon (1970) introduced the designation. The grouping was initially based on shared lexicon alone, but McElhanon (1973) described morphosyntactic commonalities in pronominal, verbal, and other paradigms among FH languages. See the Appendix for an account of early linguistic research into FH languages.

Most FH languages have medium-sized phonemic inventories. Some languages have labio-velar stops. Many have six phonemic vowels, with more back vowels than front vowels (McElhanon 1973: 5).

FH languages are predominantly-suffixing, with agglutinating morphology and some fusion. Nominal morphology is largely limited to pensive (possessive) suffixation, with non-human nouns generally unmarked for number, especially in the western FH languages.² Across these languages, the third person singular pensive suffix is homophonous with an adjectivizing suffix, making some adjectives similar in form to possessed nouns (McElhanon 1973: 11).

There is no grammatical gender and noun classification systems are rare (although see Quigley & Quigley 2011 for discussion of the classification system in Awara). The maximal number system used in pronouns and verbal inflections is a tripartite one distinguishing singular, dual, and plural, but in some parts of every language's grammar a bipartite number system, distinguishing singular and non-singular, also occurs.

Grammatical relations are marked through enclitics. These relations usually include: dative or benefactive, genitive, locative, comitative, instrumental, and focus or nominative, the marker of which is usually homophonous with the instrumental marker. Most languages have two overlapping sets of demonstratives: an oppositional pair 'here'/'there,' and a set of topographic demonstratives distinguishing three elevational tiers.

All FH languages are clause-chaining, meaning that a sentence may comprise numerous 'medial' clauses with minimally-inflected 'medial' verbal predicates, followed by a single 'final' clause with a fully-inflected 'final' verb predicate. If uninflected for person and number, medial verbs are understood to be 'same-

² With Nungon, for instance (Sarvasy 2014), number is only marked on nouns with prototypically-human referents following the singular pensive suffixes – that is, when such a noun is possessed by a singular Possessor.

subject' marked; if the S/A argument of the next clause is anticipated to differ, a medial verb receives a 'different-subject' suffix indexing the person and number of its own S/A argument. In this regard, FH languages differ from other Papuan languages such as Kobon (described in Roberts 1990), in which both same-subject and different-subject marking index S/A person and number.

Final verbs are maximally-inflected, marking tense, aspect, mood, reality status, and S/A person/number. Medial verbs cannot take tense suffixes, but in some languages they may take reality status suffixes.³ With indicative final verbs, the second and third persons share a form in the dual and plural numbers (McElhanon 1973: 14).

Verb roots are predominantly mono- or disyllabic. In many FH languages, the forms of the suffixes that directly follow the verb roots vary depending on the form – usually the final phoneme – of the verb root itself. FH languages have been analyzed as having between two and seven or more such verbal inflectional classes, unrelated to semantics or valency.

In many Papuan languages, certain verb roots are suppletive based on the number or person and number of a core argument – sometimes S, often O (Foley 1986: 128–142). This is evident in some verbs of FH languages. FH languages also feature a closed subset of transitive verbs – the membership of which varies from language to language – that take obligatory prefixes indexing the person and number of the O argument. These prefixes are formally related to personal pronouns, and may be further entwined with verb root suppletion based on O number. A primary piece of evidence for the genetic relatedness of FH languages is the apparent cognacy of O-argument person/number prefixes across FH languages (McElhanon 1973: 43–53, 1975; Suter 2012).

1.1 East Finisterre languages within the Finisterre-Huon group

The four languages discussed in this volume – Awara, Ma Manda, Nek, and Nungon – belong to three of the four East Finisterre families within the broader Finisterre-Huon grouping posited by McElhanon et al. in the early 1970s. Family divisions largely align with topographical boundaries and gaps between population centers.

³ These FH languages are similar in this regard to non-FH Papuan languages such as Amele (Roberts 1990).

Fig. 1: East Finisterre languages within the FH group

The similarities in verbal inflections presented in this volume are a strong indication of the genetic relations among Awara, Ma Manda, Nek, and Nungon. At the same time, their divergences are not insignificant. Trade and marriage relations with neighboring Austronesian languages add to the historical puzzle (Sarvasy 2013b).

2 Verbal inflectional morphology

2.1 Final verb structure

Indicative mood final verbs in the four languages are generally formed as in Figure 2. The second row in Figure 2 denotes the number values distinguished in each number-marking morpheme; the number marked in the aspect and tense or status suffixes index S/A argument number.

morpheme	(O person/ number prefix)	–	verb root	–	(aspect suffix)	–	tense or status/ number suffix	–	S/A person/ number suffix
numbers marked	SG/NSG				SG/ NSG		dependent on tense, status		SG/DU/PL

Fig. 2: Indicative final verb structure⁴

The O person/number prefixes usually distinguish two number values (singular and non-singular⁵), while the S/A person/number suffixes usually distinguish three number values (singular, dual, and plural⁶). In contrast, the tense/status suffixes mark either: a) no number values, in the past tenses of most of the languages; b) two number values, in the past and present tenses; or c) three number values, in the future tenses. Three different number systems thus operate in the tense suffixes (per Corbett 2000: 120–131). Sarvasy (forthcoming) calls these a ‘null’ system, a ‘bipartite’ system, and a ‘tripartite’ system, respectively. See section 2.7 for discussion of number systems and tenses.

S/A person/number suffixes are formally similar among the four languages here. These suffixes vary slightly in form depending on the tense suffix; the suffixes used in present tense are listed in Table 1. As noted in section 1.1, FH languages generally show conflation of the second and third person S/A person/number suffix forms in the dual and plural numbers.

⁴ Nek and Nungon future tenses differ slightly from this model. In Nek, both future tenses involve the verb root followed by an irrealis suffix in a tripartite number system, followed by a tense suffix, then the S/A person/number suffix. In Nungon, the remote future tense has an additional realis-marking suffix after the S/A person/number suffix. Further, the O person/number prefix may be inseparable from the verb root in some languages, leading analysts to interpret the two as comprising a verb stem that is suppletive depending on O number or O person and number.

⁵ There are two exceptions here. First, in some instances, phonological rules eliminate the morphological difference between the singular and non-singular prefix, meaning that instead of two number values distinguished morphologically, there is no number value marked. For instance, Nungon *n-aambit-ta-k* ‘1.O-tread.on-PRES.SG-3SG,’ which could mean either ‘s/he treads on me’ or ‘s/he treads on us.’ Second, the Ma Manda verb ‘hit’ shows the only instance in which a verb stem including object indexing encodes a three-way number distinction.

⁶ Except in the 1st person non-singular of the Awara future, Nungon irrealis and remote future, and Nek irrealis, and the non-singular remote future and irrealis of Ma Manda.

Table 1: Subject-indexing suffixes used after present tense suffixes

	1SG	2SG	3SG	1DU	2/3DU	1PL	2/3PL
Awara	-tʔ	-lak	-k	-mək	-mələk	-məŋ	-yiŋ
Ma Manda	-t	-ŋ	-k	-mot	-mok	-m	-ŋ
Nek	-t	-ŋ	-k	-mik	-mik	-miŋ	-ŋ
Nungon	-t	-ɾɔk	-k	-mɔk	-mɔɾɔk	-mɔŋ	-ŋ

2.2 Morpho-phonological verb classes

The verb roots of all four languages are analyzed as being divided into various morpho-phonological classes, not correlating with transitivity or semantics.

Table 2: Morpho-phonological verb classes

Awara	Ma Manda	Nek	Nungon
V-final	V-final	V-class	V-final
general V-final	general V-final	b-class	H-class
V~t-final	ə-final	m-class	ghost P-class
p-final	ghost b-final	t-class	ghost T-class
t-final	ghost y		ghost NG-class
mä-final	NV-final		Ø-class
	b-final		C-final
	l-final		
	N-final		

In Nungon, Ma Manda, and Awara, one or more morpho-phonological verb classes have ‘ghost’ consonants, which only occur before certain inflectional suffixes. These verb roots behave like vowel-final roots except before certain suffixes, when the root behaves as if it were consonant-final. This ghost consonant is either a bilabial or alveolar stop: /p/ (Nungon), /b/ (Ma Manda), /b/ (Nek), or /t/ (Awara and Nungon). A palatal glide also occurs only in the present tense singular suffix of certain verbs (Ma Manda and Nungon).

Awara is the only language in which a further division of verbs into subgroups affects inflectional morphology. In Awara, verbs either belong to a large ‘dynamic’

7 In Awara, the subject-indexing suffixes used in remote past and future tenses diverge slightly from the paradigm used with present tense. Indeed, Awara is the only language with different person/number suffixes in a past tense than in all other tenses.

class or a small ‘static’ class. Membership in these classes determines the forms of the present tense and imperfective suffixes that may follow each verb root. Both dynamic and static classes include verbs from varying morpho-phonological classes.

2.3 Transitivity

The inflectional classes described in section 2.2 do not correlate to transitivity or semantics. All four languages have a number of strictly intransitive verbs, including verbs of motion and verbs of change of state, among others. In Nungon, Sarvasy (2014) defines a class of S=O ambitransitive verbs, including *mö-* ‘fall/plant.’ These ambitransitives (Dixon 2010: 77) may serve in either intransitive clauses, such as *mö-wa-t* ‘I fell,’ or transitive clauses, such as *eep mö-wa-t* ‘I planted a tree.’ Although Nungon also seems to have a class of S=A ambitransitives, such as *maa-* ‘chop,’ this class in fact almost always entails interpretation of a null O argument.

A closed class of strictly transitive verbs indexes the person and number, or number, of the O argument on the verb through prefixes. This class includes a few ditransitive verbs, of which two are found in most languages – ‘tell,’ and ‘give.’ With these verbs, the Recipient or Beneficiary argument is marked on the verb, while the Gift argument is either explicit in the clause or omitted (see Comrie 2003: 276 on reasons for this). All other (non-prefixing) transitive verbs bear no indexation of the O argument.

Core arguments (S, A, O) are often non-explicit within a clause. This means that clauses including non-prefixing transitive verbs may be understood to have null O arguments. In example (1) from Nungon, the S=O ambitransitive verb *obö-* ‘break’ serves in a clause that could be interpreted as intransitive or as transitive, since no core argument(s) are explicit.

- (1) (Ø) *obö-wa-k*.
 OBJ break-NP.SG-3SG
 ‘It broke,’ or ‘S/he broke it.’

2.4 Object prefixes

There are two distinct sets of object prefixes in these languages: one set indexes both person and number of the O argument (along a bipartite number system), while the other set indexes only O argument number. Prefix-taking verbs may be

divided into two classes based on which set of prefixes they take. These two classes seem to be rooted in the humanness of each verb's prototypical O argument: verbs that take the person/number-indexing prefixes have prototypically-human O arguments, while verbs that take the number-indexing prefixes have prototypically non-human O arguments.

2.4.1 Verbs that take O person/number prefixes

Each of these languages, like other FH languages (McElhanon 1973: 43–53, Suter 2012), has a closed class of transitive verbs that take obligatory prefixes referencing the person and number of the verb's transitive object (O) argument. The number of these varies by language: Ma Manda has 17, Nungon has 13, Awara has ten, and Nek has nine. Verbs that take these prefixes in all four languages are: 'give,' 'hit,' 'see,' and 'tell.' Awara, Ma Manda, and Nungon also have 'follow'; Awara, Ma Manda and Nungon have 'hurt/bite,' and Awara, Ma Manda and Nek have 'leave' ('leaving' is expressed in Nungon through a causative construction). For each language, the class of O person/number prefix-taking transitive verbs contains at least one verb which is unique in taking these prefixes among the four languages: Awara has 'slice,' Ma Manda has 'damage,' Nek has 'await,' and Nungon has 'tread on.'

The person/number O prefixes are formally similar in each language to the independent personal pronouns, which are a probable historical source for the prefixes. In Nungon, independent personal pronouns, including the third person pronoun(s), usually occur with human referents (Sarvasy 2014). Likewise, the person/number O prefix-taking verbs have prototypically-human O arguments in Nungon and in Ma Manda.

This contrasts with the verbs that take the second set of O-indexing prefixes, which mark only number and not person: these have prototypically-non-human, or at least not prototypically-human, O arguments. The O number prefixes are formally unrelated to the independent personal pronouns.

2.4.2 Verbs that take O number prefixes

All of the languages also have at least one verb the root of which is suppletive depending on number of the O argument. In each language, there are one or two root-initial consonants that always indicate singular O, and one or two initial consonants that always indicate non-singular O. The verb root may be inseparable from the initial number-referencing consonant, as in Ma Manda and Nek, and as

with the verbs ‘pick’ and ‘take away’ in Nungon. But in some instances, the verb root may be separable from the initial number-referencing consonant, which is then analyzed as a prefix. This is the case with the Nungon verbs *ke-/he-* ‘bring,’ *köö-/höö-* ‘raise,’ and *koo-/hoo-* ‘lower,’ which seem to be derived from the intransitive verbs *e-* ‘come,’ *öö-* ‘ascend,’ and *oo-* ‘descend’ through the addition of the singular O-referencing prefix *k-* or the non-singular O-referencing prefix *h-*.

2.5 Tenses

Three of the four FH languages in this volume have been analyzed as having five tenses – two pasts, a present, and two futures – with only Awara analyzed as having four tenses – two pasts, a present, and a future. While the scope of the present tense in relative time seems consistent across all the languages (it is restricted to occurrences at the current time, or with relevance to the current time), the exact scope of each past and future tense in relative time is language-specific. In every language, the present tense has further imperfective and habitual or ‘gnomic’ (Bybee et al. 1994: 141) meanings.

Table 3: Tenses and relative time in Nek, Ma Manda, and Nungon

	before yesterday	yesterday	earlier today	right now	later today	tomorrow	after tomorrow
Nek	Distant Past		Immed. Past	Present	Immed. Future	Distant Future	
Ma Manda	Remote Past		Near Past	Present	Near Future		Remote Future
Nungon	Remote Past	Remote Past or Near Past	Near Past	Present	Near Future	Remote Future	
Awara	Remote Past		Near Past	Present	Future		

In Table 3, the boundary between ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’ divides the two future tenses of Nek and Nungon. The question of when exactly ‘tomorrow’ begins is not usually problematic: people go to sleep on one day and when they wake, rise, and go about their routine again it is the next day. Very late at night, however, a Nek or Nungon speaker may discuss plans for the next morning in either of the future tenses, based on perceived temporal proximity. A Nungon speaker who will sleep

only briefly before waking at dawn will likely speak of the morning hours in the near future tense. If a full night's sleep is anticipated, though, the speaker is more likely to speak of the next morning in the remote future tense. This has been corroborated for Nek (Linnasalo, p.c.).

Awara differs from the other four languages in having a single future tense encompassing events that are imminent today ('I will now tell a story') and events many years away – such as the end of the world. The Awara future tense is formally similar to the Ma Manda and Nungon remote future tenses, not to any of the other languages' immediate future or near future tenses.

For Ma Manda, Nek, and Nungon, the number of past tenses equals the number of future tenses. This is typologically somewhat unusual (Dixon 2010: 154).

2.6 Neutralization of tenses under negation

In Nungon and its neighboring FH language Nukna, two tense distinctions are neutralized under negation (Sarvasy 2013a, 2014 and Taylor 2013). That is, in Nungon clauses with positive polarity, the full range of five tense suffixes may be used. But it is ungrammatical to use the present and near future tense suffixes in a clause with negative polarity. To express current or imminent occurrences in negative polarity, the near past tense and remote future tense suffixes, respectively, must be used. Thus, only three tense suffixes are available for use in clauses with negative polarity. This accords with typological norms for dependencies between other grammatical systems and polarity (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1998).

In Awara and Nek, verbs inflected for all tenses may be negated: there is no neutralization of tense distinctions under negation. In Ma Manda, Pennington (this volume) writes that no examples of the negated remote future/irrealis have yet been verified: it may be the case that under negation the distinction between Ma Manda near future and remote future tenses is neutralized.

2.7 Fusion of tense and number marking

One of the typologically unusual features of Finisterre-Huon languages is the fusion of number marking, indexing the person/number of the S/A argument, with tense marking (discussed in Sarvasy forthcoming). As mentioned in section 2.1, the three number systems evident in tense suffixes are called 'null,' 'bipartite,' and 'tripartite.' Number marking in the tense suffixes is almost always redundant, because the S/A person/number suffixes that follow the tense suffixes index

number according to the maximal, tripartite, system (the exception occurs in the future tenses – see below). The distribution of number systems in tense suffixes is in Table 4.

Table 4: Number distinctions in tense suffixes

	Remote Past	Near Past	Present	Near Future	Remote Future
Awara	null		bipartite	N/A ⁸	tripartite
Ma Manda	bipartite				tripartite
Nek	bipartite	null	bipartite	tripartite ⁹	
Nungon	null	bipartite		tripartite	

The maximal number system – the tripartite system – is only found in the future tense suffixes. The minimal (null) system occurs only in the past tenses, while the present tense always shows a bipartite number system. Thus, past and present tenses are less-specified for number than future tenses (in the tense suffix itself).

Typologically, we might expect the opposite: more specification in the past tenses and less in the future tenses. For instance, it is common for evidentiality to be distinguished in the past tense but not in the future (Aikhenvald & Dixon 1998).

While a FH proto-language has not yet been reconstructed, it seems that the divisions between number systems are due to the way the future tenses evolved. In each of the four languages, the tripartite number system in the future tenses corresponds to irrealis marking; irrealis suffixes always seem to encode number in a maximal, tripartite system. This encoding is not always redundant, because in the future tenses, the S/A person/number suffixes in the first person non-singular share a single form.¹⁰ That is, in the future tenses, indexation of S/A person/number by the maximal number system occurs in the irrealis suffix, not

8 Awara’s single future tense is listed in the remote future column here because it formally resembles this tense form in Ma Manda and Nungon.

9 Linnasalo (this volume) analyses the two future tense suffixes in Nek as separate from an irrealis suffix that is obligatory with the future tenses. Number is analyzed as being fused with reality status, not tense – but the future tense suffixes must occur with the number-marked irrealis suffix.

10 In Nek, this single form actually occurs when the irrealis suffix is present and the future tense suffix is absent. In Ma Manda, it is not just the 1du and 1pl that share a form, but the 2/3du and 2/3pl as well – so that there are no separate dual number S/A suffixes in the remote future tense.

in the S/A person/number suffix. The following Nungon examples illustrate this.

(2) *Ma=na-ni-n.*

NEG=eat-IRR.PL-1NSG

‘We (PL) will not eat it.’

(3) *Ma=na-ri-n.*

NEG=eat-IRR.DU-1NSG

‘We (DU) will not eat it.’

In (2) and (3), the final S/A person/number suffix *-n* marks number according to a bipartite system, distinguishing between singular and non-singular, while the irrealis suffix before it marks number according to a tripartite system, distinguishing between singular, dual, and plural. Here, it is the irrealis suffix that serves to differentiate between 1DU and 1PL.

2.8 Reality status and modality

Reality status is an important inflectional category in these languages. Unlike some other Papuan languages, including Amele (Roberts 1990), in which irrealis and realis form a binary distinction, the languages here are analyzed to have two or more irrealis paradigms opposed to a single realis paradigm.

Each language here shows several base paradigms to which other paradigms are morphologically related. That is, the counter-factual is often formally similar to the immediate imperative; the delayed imperative, future tense, and future possibility or desire are morphologically related – or identical – in all four languages. These are all canonical instances of irrealis cross-linguistically (Mithun 1995, Roberts 1990). Beyond these expected similarities, different-subject marking on medial verbs is formally similar to imperative/hortative inflections in Awara, Nek, and Nungon.

This leads to a multiple division among verbal inflectional paradigms. While Roberts (1990) was able to neatly divide Amele verbal inflections into two groups, realis and irrealis, the languages here tend to show a three- or even four-way divide in morphological affiliation. In Awara, Quigley (this volume) identifies two sets of irrealis suffixes that serve as the morphological basis for all of the above paradigms. These contrast with the past tenses and the present tense.

Table 5: Morphological groupings of Awara verbal inflections

Realis	Irrealis 1	Irrealis 2
remote past	future	immediate imperative
near past	delayed imperative	counter-factual
present	apprehensive	possibility
		different-subject

Awara Irrealis 1 paradigms involve the verb root, followed by Irrealis 1 suffix, then S/A person/number suffixes. The Irrealis 1 suffixes encode only number (in a tripartite system), not person. In contrast, the Irrealis 2 paradigms involve the verb root, followed by portmanteau Irrealis 2 suffixes encoding S/A person and number.

Epistemic and deontic modality in these languages are expressed by irrealis or with adverbials or multi-verb constructions. Common modality distinctions include apprehensive, desiderative, and probable.

2.9 Mood

In none of the four languages is declarative mood or interrogative mood marked through verbal inflection. All four languages have two imperative paradigms, one for immediate or brusque commands, and another for delayed or polite commands. In Awara and Ma Manda, the delayed command form has become the norm in usage.

In all four languages, the delayed imperative is closely formally related to or identical to the future tense and/or irrealis: verbs inflected for delayed imperative comprise a verb root, status suffix, and subject-indexing suffix of the type used with irrealis in each language. In Ma Manda and Nek, there is no formal difference between the delayed imperative mood and irrealis status. In Awara, verbs inflected for ‘default imperative’ are identical to verbs inflected for ‘apprehensive’ modality, except that the vowel of the status suffix is altered. Similarly, in Nun-gon, verbs inflected for delayed imperative are identical to verbs inflected for irrealis, except that the final vowel of the subject-indexing suffix is altered.

In Awara, Nek, and Nungon, the immediate imperative paradigms include portmanteau suffixes combining mood and subject agreement and cover all three persons; the hortative first person immediate imperative suffixes are formally similar to first person different-subject suffixes and irrealis suffixes. The immediate imperative suffixes are morphologically very different from the subject agreement suffixes used with the delayed imperative paradigm.

In Ma Manda, however, Pennington (this volume) reports the immediate imperative as highly reduced; Ma Manda seems to lack immediate imperative forms for the first and third person, and the second person plural form is judged as ungrammatical by some speakers. While in the other languages the immediate and delayed imperatives are formally unrelated, the two paradigms are linked in Ma Manda. In Ma Manda, the immediate imperative takes the form of the basic imperative without the subject agreement suffix.

The formal relationship between the delayed imperative, future tense, and irrealis is cross-linguistically known (see Aikhenvald 2010: 143, 161, Mithun 1995: 378, Roberts 1990: 384, 390). But it is interesting to note that the immediate imperative and delayed imperative constitute completely separate paradigms in three of the four languages presented here. While the delayed imperative is formally similar to the future tense and irrealis inflection, the immediate imperative is formally related to the counter-factual and to different-subject marking on medial verbs (regardless of reality status). Further comparative research on FH languages will help reconstruct the development of the two imperative paradigms.

2.10 Aspect

There is more variation between the four FH languages described in this volume in aspectual marking than in tense marking. This is to be expected: while tense distinctions are marked in the suffix directly following the verb root and preceding the person/number suffix, most aspectual distinctions in these languages are marked analytically, through auxiliary verb constructions. The four languages differ in the number of aspects marked, and in the auxiliary verbs used for each aspect. The only aspects identified for all of the languages are the habitual, continuous/progressive, and completeive.

Table 6: Shared aspectual distinctions

	Habitual	Continuous/Progressive ¹¹	Completeive
Awara	root + suffix	root + suffix	root + ‘finish’
Ma Manda	root + suffix	medial + ‘be’	(prefix) + root + ‘throw’
Nek	root + suffix	root + ‘stay’	medial + ‘finish’
Nungon	root + ‘be’	medial + ‘be’	root + enclitic

11 Note that terminology varies in the analyses here. Pennington (this volume) uses “progressive” to describe what in the other languages is called the continuous aspect, reserving “continuous” for the construction involving Ma Manda stative verbs and ‘do’ auxiliary. In contrast, Lin-nasalo (this volume) uses “progressive” with durative meaning.

In all of these languages, verbs take one of two forms when functioning as non-final members of multi-verb constructions. The first form is simply the bare verb root – or, in Nungon, the verb root plus a velar nasal suffix, if the verb root is vowel-final. This form is used in tight multi-verb or serial verb constructions, and typically cannot serve alone as the predicate of a medial clause. The second form is the first form plus a suffix: the usual form taken by the predicates of medial clauses. In Table 6, the first form is referred to as the root, and the second form is referred to as ‘medial.’

As seen in Table 6, one point of variation between the languages is whether the lexical verb in an aspect-marking construction occurs in the root or medial form. In all four languages, habitual aspect must be marked using the root form of the verb, but languages vary in which form is preferred for the other aspects. Only in Nungon does the choice between root and medial form of the lexical verb differentiate between different aspects.

In Awara, Ma Manda, and Nek, habitual aspect in the past is marked by a suffix that occurs between the verb stem and the remote past tense suffix. In each language, the habitual aspect suffix used with the past tense is homophonous with the present tense non-singular suffix, regardless of actual S/A argument number. Formal similarity between the present tense and habitual aspect suffixes may underscore the habitual aspectual meaning of the present tense (noted in section 2.5). As for the non-singular number indexing, the formal correlation between past habitual action marking and non-singular number indexing may have to do with pluractionality (Newman 1990). This is as yet an untested notion in these languages, however.

It is also possible that the Awara, Ma Manda, and Nek habitual aspect suffixes were each originally an auxiliary verb functioning within a single phonological word with a lexical verb root, as is now the case with the Nungon habitual aspect. Over time, the auxiliary would have lost its status as a separate verb altogether, becoming an inflectional suffix. If the auxiliary had suppletive root form based on S or O number, the non-singular root could have been the form that grammaticalized into a habitual aspect marker for the past tense.

Continuous or progressive aspect in all four languages denotes an action or event as still in progress at the time of reference. Here, Ma Manda and Nungon align in employing the lexical verb in medial verb form followed by auxiliary verb ‘be,’ while Nek and especially Awara express this aspect with tighter expressions based on the lexical verb root. In Nek, continuous aspect is analyzed as a tight multi-verb construction, while in Awara, it is analyzed as verbal inflection.

In Awara and Nek, completive aspect is expressed with the lexical verb in medial form, followed by the verb ‘finish,’ interpreted as an auxiliary verb. This grammaticalization of ‘finish’ as completive aspect is widely attested cross-

linguistically (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 134–137). In Ma Manda, completive aspect is expressed with the lexical verb bare root in a serial verb construction with the verb ‘throw’ and an optional completive prefix; ‘throw’ is less common cross-linguistically as a source for completive aspect, but attested in diverse languages (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 297, Bybee et al. 1994: 58).

In Ma Manda and Nungon, the root form of a verb indicating downward motion – ‘go down’ in Ma Manda, and ‘fall’ in Nungon – may also precede a lexical verb with perfect or completive aspectual meaning.

2.11 Evidentiality

Grammatical evidentiality marking is not typical of FH languages, and in no FH language documented to date is evidentiality obligatorily marked on all verbs. But both Awara and Nungon – as well as the FH language Nukna – evince evidentiality conflated with aspect. This evidentiality is of Aikhenvald’s (2004: 26–29) evidentiality type A2, with only ‘non-firsthand’ information marked.

The Awara suffix *-hi* is used when the speaker has not visually observed an occurrence. Taylor (2013: 44–46) describes a similar construction in Nukna, marking events the speaker did not visually observe.

In Nungon, the ‘inferred imperfective’ aspect is used when the speaker infers through accrued visual and non-visual clues that the marked action is occurring, but has not directly observed the occurrence. It is only used with animate S/A arguments, and usually only in the present tense, with habitual meaning. This makes the Nungon inferred imperfective unusual: in languages where evidential marking occurs only in certain tenses or aspects, it most often occurs in the past tense or perfect aspect (Aikhenvald 2004: 264; Comrie 1976: 110).

In both Awara and Nungon, this marking of evidentiality has mirative extensions, so that it may be used to describe surprising events that the speaker actually did witness. This is a common extension of the non-firsthand evidentiality marker cross-linguistically (Aikhenvald 2004: 195–200).

2.12 Inflectional categories applicable to medial verbs

In the four languages in this volume, medial verbs do not inflect for tense. These languages also lack reality status marking on medial verbs of the type described in Roberts (1990) for Amele and other Madang Province Papuan languages.

In all four languages, most or all aspectual distinctions available to final verbs are also available to medial verbs. Further, in each language, some special aspectual or relative tense distinctions occur only in medial verbs. These aspectual distinctions relate especially to the relationship between the marked verb and the predicate of the succeeding clause in a clause chain.

For instance, Awara same-subject medial verb suffixes distinguish three aspects that are unique to medial verbs. Among these is the ‘terminative durative,’ which indicates that the action of the marked verb continued up until the action or event of the next clause. Ma Manda medial verbs may either distinguish durative aspect as final verbs do, with an auxiliary verb ‘go around,’ or through a special same-subject suffix. It is unclear whether these two ways of marking durative aspect can co-occur in Ma Manda. In Nek, when the lexical verb root is followed by the verb root ‘leave’ within a medial clause predicate, it is understood to have relative past tense within the clause chain. In Nungon, perfect aspect, indicating that a completed action has relevance to the succeeding clause, is only marked on medial verbs. Medial verbs also form the basis for the Nungon ‘temporal precedence’ aspect.

3 Conclusion

FH verbal categories evince both heretofore-unexplored grammatical phenomena and novel iterations of phenomena recognized by typologists. A split in number systems according to tense is unusual, with the maximal number system occurring in the tense in which fewer distinctions would be expected. Although they are under-specified for tense, medial verbs mark additional aspectual distinctions not evident in final verbs. Humanness of the O argument is at play in determining membership in the closed class of prefix-taking verbs. Verbal inflectional paradigms may be divided into two or three groups that relate to reality status. The papers here represent a landmark in Finisterre-Huon linguistics. More broadly, they testify to the breadth of variation possible among related languages, and to the range of alternative analyses possible for many linguistic puzzles.

Appendix: Origin of the Finisterre-Huon designation

European exploration of the northeastern part of the island of New Guinea, headed largely by missionaries, began soon after the German New Guinea

Company started operations at the Huon Peninsula port Finschhafen in October 1885. In the ensuing 60 years, apart from scattered vocabulary lists, linguistic descriptions of Papuan (non-Austronesian) languages of the region were limited to coastal languages such as Kâte (Pilhofer 1933) and Ono (Wacke 1931). It was not until the 1960s that Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)-affiliated linguists Donald Davis and Kenneth McElhanon began writing on the Papuan languages Wantoat (Davis 1961) and Selepet (McElhanon 1967b) spoken farther inland. Other SIL teams undertook descriptive work in the area from the late 1960s on. The existence of a Finisterre-Huon language group comprising 60–80 Papuan languages spoken from the Finisterre Mountains to the Huon Peninsula was first posited by Hooley & McElhanon (1970). This hypothesis was largely based on lexicostatistics (also presented in Claassen & McElhanon 1970), but McElhanon (1973) also presented an overview of commonalities in person-number distinctions, pronouns, demonstratives, verbal inflections, and person-number object prefixes on verbs among ten far-flung FH languages to add depth to the claim of a common genetic origin. Suter (2012) has since examined person-number object prefixes in FH languages in more detail, but the past three decades have seen little other comparative research on FH languages.

Over 40 years after McElhanon's pioneering work was published, little rigorous comparative work has been done to confirm linguistic relationships within and across the families posited in Figure 1. Some languages identified as such in Hooley & McElhanon (1970) were later reanalyzed as dialects within dialect continua (for instance, Wegmann 1994), but as yet there have been no rigorous proofs of the familial affiliations of languages on the borders of two families or higher groupings, such as Nukna, which is the easternmost Finisterre language, or Som, which is spoken at the juncture of the purported Yupna, Wantoat, and Uruwa families.

Claassen & McElhanon's lexicostatistical analysis yielded 'shared vocabulary percentages' of 15–34% between Awara, Ma Manda (referred to as Sauk), Nek, and Nungon (Claassen & McElhanon 1970: 48–49), with the highest shared percentage between Ma Manda and Nek. We may consider these estimates low, however; in-depth analysis of sound correspondences between these languages may yield much higher cognate counts. This has already been established for the cognate percentages between Nungon and its neighboring FH language, Nukna. Claassen & McElhanon (1970: 48–49) gave a count of 34–35% shared vocabulary between one Nungon dialect and two dialects of Nukna. Taking into account regular sound correspondences between the two languages, Sarvasy (2013a) counted 262 nouns and 97 verbs and found 45.4% cognacy rates for both word classes between the Towet dialect of Nungon and the Hamerengan dialect of Nukna.

Abbreviations

DU	dual	OBJ	object
IRR	irrealis	PL	plural
NEG	negation	PRES	present tense
NP	near past tense	SG	singular
NSG	non-singular		

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