

UNEVENTFUL *-NE* IN IPILI

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In Ipili,¹ a language of Papua New Guinea, verbs have an elaborate morphology. With few exceptions, clauses end in a finite verb that is inflected for tense/mood/aspect, person and number (Ingemann 1997a). Non-final verbs may be inflected in the same way as sentence-final verbs if they occur in dependent or conjoined clauses or they may have any of several non-finite suffixes. Except in very simple utterances, sentences typically contain more than one verb, as can be seen in (1), which consists of ten sentences at the beginning of an autobiographical account. In this example, verbs, whether finite or non-finite, are printed in italics.

- (1) 1 wamba imba *pe-koni, atewa* 2 *atahu, atewane-ko*, Mosepi *pewa* 3 Mosepi *pulu*, e ana lapo *atewa* 4 *atahu, epewa* 5 oali peke *lewa* 6 *ipulu*, namba angini mali *piyu atear-kola, epewa* 7 *omea* ote 8 omandaka yia *yaweanini nema* 9 *nahu, atemane-ko*, o amanga mali *lima* 10 mali *hua atema-kola*, wanda namba-na *peteyapa* Sangame bala *epeae pia*

1 Long ago you went and I stayed 2 Having stayed, I stayed and then I went to Port Moresby 3 Having gone to Port Moresby, I stayed for two years 4 Having stayed, I came 5 I returned here 6 Having come, they had buried my mother and I came 7 She died 8 At the memorial, we ate pork that they roasted 9 Having eaten, we stayed and then we had a dance here on the field 10 We were dancing and the woman I am now married to, Sangame, she came

The proliferation of verbs occurs in part because most sentences in an oral narration begin with a recapitulation of the final verb in the previous sentence (Ingemann 1994) but also because Ipili has a very limited number of verb roots and very little derivation. There are, for example, no clear nominalizing affixes that create nouns from verbs. Consequently, verbs are used in instances where other languages might use nouns, adjectives or prepositional phrases. In addition, because Ipili has fewer than 100 distinct verb roots, the precision that occurs in other languages through lexical selection is achieved in Ipili through a series of verbs, only the last of which is inflected.

One verbal suffix that is unusual in that it occurs after verbal inflections is *-ne*.² This suffix has a number of different functions depending on the tense with which it occurs and the syntactic role of the

¹ Ipili is spoken by about 8000 inhabitants of the Porgera and Paiela regions of the Enga Province. It has been classified by Wurm (1982) as a member of the West-Central Family within the East New Guinea Highland stock.

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verb within the sentence. Some of these uses were described in Ingemann 1997b. In the present article, the uses of *-ne* will be further examined in an effort to find some common core of meaning or function that would justify treating all these occurrences as a single morpheme rather than a group of homophonous morphemes.

When following the immediate past tense (1Pst) inflection, *-ne* changes the meaning of the verb to customary action, which refers to no specific event and consequently has no time reference. An example of customary action is illustrated in (2).³ In this and subsequent examples the verb with the *-ne* suffix being illustrated is underlined to distinguish it from any other verb or occurrence of *-ne* that might be present in the context.

- (2) aiyane angimi ima la-mai-y-ama-ne
 father mother and say-give-1Pst-1p-CUST
 'We tell [the] father and mother.'

When the same form is embedded in a noun phrase, it may indicate customary action or simply something that has happened on one or more occasions previously, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) andipa iwana mindi lauwa-ko pa-l-a-ne-ko-na peac pia
 now youth one say-2Pst-1s- DEF go-1Pst-3s-CUST-DEF-LOC go-3Pst-3s-ne UNW
 'Now the other young man that I mentioned went where he went before.'

Another use of *-ne* occurs with what I refer to as the second future (2Fut) inflection. The second future is a tense that is normally used in subordinate clauses. However, when the suffix *-ne* occurs with it, the verb can be the main verb of the sentence and it takes on the function of a negative imperative.⁴ Because the second future may occur in any person or number, it can also function as a warning or an admonition to prevent something from happening. The admonition not to do something is illustrated in (4) and the admonition to prevent something is illustrated in (5). Note that there is no negative marker in this construction.

- (4) imba-to pi mindi l-ol-e-ne
 2s-AGEN talk INDEF say-2Fut-2s-ADM
 'Don't you say anything.'

² *-ne* has several allomorphs in addition to /-ne/ /-ni/ in vowel harmony, /-le/ with dual suffixes, and a short form /-e/ that occurs obligatorily between /a/ and the particle *pia* and occasionally elsewhere.

³ Abbreviations used in examples are

1Pst	immediate past	ADM	admonition
2Pst	recent past	BGD	background
3Pst	remote past	CUST	customary
2Fut	second future	DEF	definite
1	First person	EMPH	emphatic
2	Second Person	INDEF	indefinite
3	Third person	LOC	locative
s	singular	NEG	negative
d	dual	STAT	stative
p	plural	UNW	unwitnessed
PL	plural		

⁴ There is also a negative imperative formed with the negative *na-* prefixed to the affirmative imperative. I have not been able to establish a meaning difference between the two forms and whenever I asked if the imperative could be used in place of the *-ne* form, I was told that it would be correct.

- (5) wanda mane and-ol-ai-ni
 woman AGEN see-2Fut-2/3p-ADM
 'Don't let women see'

Borchard [1970:170] explains this construction as expressing “a possibility which may be a negative possibility” So, for instance, example (5) might be translated ‘the women might see’ with the connotation that this is something to be avoided. However, this interpretation does not fit all instances. Example (4) cannot be ‘you might say something’ but rather ‘don’t say anything’.

A third use of *-ne* is in a construction used to indicate that an event was not actually witnessed by the speaker. In this case, the verb is followed by *pia*⁵. The verb is normally in the remote past tense, but also occurs in the recent past if the time-frame is appropriate. Examples of this use are given in (6) and (7).

- (6) yangi ando at-e-ai-ni pia
 part see-ING stand-3Pst-2/3p-UNW UNW
 'Some [of them] stood looking'
- (7) bala yataka a-pi-ai-ni pia
 3s angry be-2Pst-2/3p-UNW UNW
 'They were angry with him'

It should be noted that the unwitnessed construction is not used before the clause conjoining clitic *-kola* ‘and’ even if the verb is recapitulating an unwitnessed event in the previous sentence. In the example of this given in (8), the verb with the /e/ allomorph of *-ne* before *pia* indicates an unwitnessed event. The recapitulation at the beginning of the following sentence referring to the same event is not so marked.

- (8) yu-nga tepa ya-nga molo p-e-a-e pia
 ground-LOC drop aux-3Pst-3s-LOC get-to go-3Pst-3s-UNW UNW
 'He went to get [it] where it went down on the ground'
- molo p-e-a-kola
 get-to go-3Pst-3s-and
 'He went to get [it] and'

Other uses of *-ne* are not as easily explained. One common, but not obligatory, use is with finite verbs of any tense in a clause embedded in noun phrases. These verbs are in constructions that are functionally like relative clauses but have no overt relativizer. The embedded verbs are usually, but again not obligatorily, followed by the enclitic *-ko*, which also comes at the end of a noun phrase without an embedded verb to indicate definiteness. Example (9) illustrates the use of an embedded verb with *-ne* followed by *-ko* and example (10) an embedded verb without *-ko*. It may be that *-ne* and *-ko* are serving as relativizers in these constructions.

- (9) kau aja tepo mudi mand-e-a-ne-ko
 lizard small three INDEF carry-3Pst-3s-DEF
 'three small lizards that he carried [in his bag]'

⁵ It is not clear whether *pia* is an abbreviated form of *la-pi-a* ‘say-2Pst-3s’ or *pia*, a definite marker normally used in noun phrases. Since the verb form plus *pia* is normally spoken as a single unit, *pia* could be considered an enclitic.

- (10) omandaka yia yaw-e-ai-ni nema
 memorial pig roast-3Pst-2/3p-ne eat-3Pst-1p
 'At the memorial, we ate pigs that they roasted'

-ne may also occur after the finite verb of any clause Borchard [1970 20] states that

The '-ne' ending is your testimony that you have personal knowledge of the fact and are not relying on other people's reports or other sources of information

However, a speaker has personal knowledge of the facts in many statements that do not have -ne In fact, -ne is remarkably absent from my texts when personal knowledge is involved In these texts, personal knowledge is signaled by the absence of devices (such as the -ne pia construction) which indicate that the speaker is not vouching for the authenticity of what he is saying, Borchard seems to have noticed this as well because he goes on to say

its usage is somewhat restricted by limited circumstances in which it is used I think it is used quite a bit in giving evidence in court cases In ordinary conversation it seems to be used mostly in asking and answering questions If a person asks you something it is quite obvious that he doesn't know the answer to you can use the -ne suffix to assure him you have personal knowledge in the matter and can give him an authoritative answer (p 71)

I do not have court proceedings so I cannot document the use of -ne in these circumstances but I do have examples of its use in question and answer situations, particularly those concerning where someone is coming from or what he has done As Borchard has noted, the -ne is used in both the question and the answer

What I have been able to observe about -ne with main verbs is that it sometimes is used to present background information but it is not used for the main events of a narrative For example, in (11) the speaker sets the stage for what he is about to tell concerning his mining for gold

- (11) namba wamba wete kate at-e-wa-ne kate p-e-wa-ne
 1s past EMPH Kare be-3Pst-1s-BGD Kare go-3Pst-1s-BGD
 'A long time ago I was at Kare I went to Kare'

After the first two sentences, the speaker stops using -ne except for customary action Finally at the conclusion, when the recounting of events is completed, the final state is described with a verb ending in -ne This is shown in example (12)

- (12) pindu andaka yata alu at-e-wa-ne
 goods at-house put having been be-3Pst-1s-BGD
 'having set up a store, I stayed'

Another example not involving personal narration comes as the speaker is ending a story about how a bird came to have red eyes After recounting how the bird's eyes turned red when it cried so much because another bird took its beautiful feathers, the speaker recapitulates this fact in the sentence in (13)

- (13) *lemongo le tundupa peya-ko tene-ko auwiya-to*
 lemongo bird eye red does-DEF explanation-DEF bird-of-paradise-AGN

balana eka ituni mialu peane okone-na ai i-e-a-ne
 its bird feather taken went that-LOC cry AUX-3Pst-3s-BGD

‘The reason that the lemongo bird’s eyes are red is that it cried when the bird of paradise went off with its feathers’

It cannot be claimed that the speaker had personal knowledge of this mythical event and at this point the listener has already learned about the bird’s crying

In trying to determine what all these uses of *-ne* with a finite verb might have in common, it is useful to contrast them with situations where *-ne* does not occur. It is never used with an imperative, desiderative, or hortatory inflection nor is it used with non-finite forms that cannot be the main verb of a sentence. It is rare as the main verb of a clause in accounts of events of which the speaker has personal knowledge and which are the focus of the discourse.

The only commonality for the uses of *-ne* seems to be that they distance the finite verb from the main line of the story. This is certainly true of the use in noun phrases and other situations where background or summary information is provided. The use with the future to form an admonition also removes the verb from describing an actual occurrence by giving it a negative connotation. Customary action does not, of course, describe any specific event. Unwitnessed events are also in a way distanced from personal reality. This distancing hypothesis is supported by the fact that sometimes in unwitnessed narrations, when a speaker describes some dramatic episode vividly, the speaker switches briefly to the use of verbs without *-ne pia*. Because verbs with *-ne* do not refer to specific events in the speaker’s experience on which the speaker is focusing, I have referred to *-ne* as ‘uneventful’ in the title of this article.

Stereotypically, verbs indicate actions and nouns things. If the function of *-ne* is to remove some of the verb-like action quality from a finite verb, an intriguing question arises as to whether the *-ne* might in fact represent some kind of nominalizing process, taking away the immediacy of the action. There are several reasons why this is not as strange a suggestion as might be thought at first.

First of all, there is a homophonous noun suffix. With nouns, *-ne* has a basic inalienable meaning, occurring with body parts, kinship terms, ordinal numbers, etc.

Another reason for suspecting some connection with nouns is the use of verbal *-ne* before clitics and particles which are used in noun phrases. For example, the *pia* used in the unwitnessed construction described earlier is phonetically identical to a demonstrative *pia* used with nouns. When *pia* occurs after a verb, the verb always ends in *-ne*. Another such marker is the enclitic *-ko*, which is used in both noun phrases and at the end of clauses. In noun phrases, *-ko* is a definite marker and is the last morpheme of the phrase unless there is an agentive marker. When *-ko* occurs at the end of a conjoined clause, it is translated ‘and’, ‘but’ or ‘although’. An example of this was included in the second sentence of (1), which is repeated here as (14) for convenience.

- (14) *atalu, at-e-wa-ne-ko, Mosepi pewa*
 having-been be-3Pst-1s-ne-DEF Moresby I-went
 Having stayed, I stayed [for a while] and I went to Moresby

When *-ko* occurs sentence finally, speakers typically do not translate it but, if pressed, may use an emphatic Tok Pisin *em*, which means ‘that’. Commonly, although not obligatorily, the clause final verb before *-ko* ends in *-ne* as well

Additional support for considering *-ne* to have a nominalizing function comes from the stative verb form, which is both tenseless and personless. It may occur as the final verb in a sentence, usually in the negative. As examples (15) and (16) illustrate, the stative may occur with or without *-ne*

(15) tatake e-ne
unaware [be]-STAT-*ne*
‘[I] didn’t know how’

(16) epapu yia tupa na-at-c
now pig PL NEG-be-STAT
‘Now there are not any pigs’

More frequently the stative is used in noun phrases to ascribe a characteristic and it functions like a modifier or even a noun. In these instances, it always has the *-ne* suffix. Examples are given in (17)-(20)

(17) koa pel-e-ne
marsupial kill-STAT-*ne*
‘marsupial hunter’

(18) yu narya na-p-e-ne mundi-nga
ground think NEG-do-STAT-*ne* INDEF-LOC
‘in an unknown place’

(19) om-e-ne
die-STAT-*ne*
‘dead’

(20) sialangai anda na-p-e-ne paliyamane
ginger see NEG-do-STAT-*ne* we-sleep
‘We sleep without looking at the ginger plant’

In sum, in addition to the semantic connotation of ‘non-eventful’, the evidence for classifying the verbal *-ne* as a nominalizer is 1) there is a phonetically identical nominal suffix, 2) verbs with the suffix can be followed by morphemes primarily associated with nouns, and 3) the stative form with *-ne* may function syntactically like a noun

However, there are reasons for keeping the nominal and verbal suffixes separate. For one, the verbal suffix has an allomorph */-le/* which does not occur with nouns. The only other occurrence of */-le/* is with locational words *ambi – ambele* ‘nearby on the level’, *napi – napele* ‘down’, *lipi – lepele* ‘up’, and *mupi – mopele*. Both the verbal allomorph */-le/* and this locational suffix share the vowel harmony property of causing a preceding high vowel to lower. This is in contrast to both nominal and verbal */-ne/*, which become */-nu/* when preceded by a high vowel. However, the strongest reason for considering the suffixes to be different is that finite verbs with *-ne* never function syntactically as nouns in the same way that nouns with *-ne* do. It, therefore, seems best to have a separate *-ne* suffix for finite verbs that diminishes the verbal property of the verb but never quite converts it to a noun. Verbs ending in –

ne are not as vivid in describing an activity as verbs without the suffix and that sense they are less 'eventful'

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