

# An exploration of metonymic phenomena in a Papuan language of Northern New Guinea

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The aim of this talk, exploratory in nature, is to discuss and provide examples of possible metonymic phenomena in a Papuan language of Northern New Guinea. The focus is on Srengé [ISO: lsr], but data from other languages such as Aro [ISO: tei] and Walman [ISO: van] are brought into the discussion. Metonymy motivates parts of the lexicon of Srengé, Aro, and Walman, especially in domains referring to abstract concepts and new concepts. For instance, the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE motivates the use of *asiə* ‘tears’ in the expression *asiə lana yoltə* ‘sadness (lit. tears go down)’. A syntactic phenomenon that lends itself to a partial metonymic interpretation in Srengé is that of tail-head linkage (THL) (de Vries, 2005), as shown in (1) and (2). THL in Srengé sometimes follows the metonymy SALIENT PART OF A CONSTRUCTIONAL FORM FOR WHOLECONSTRUCTIONAL FORM (Barcelona, 2016), as shown in (1). In (1b), we find the recapitulative clause *yolku* ‘they are hanging’, which evokes the entire tail clause in (1a), *pelpel yolku* ‘they were hanging and swinging to and fro’. Note that, in (1b), reduplication of the verb *yolku* is used to indicate the duration of the action.

(1a) Y-awi            y-asuə            ainu   tondu, **pelpel y-olku**.  
3PL-come    3PL-hold            penis   DEM   IDEO   3PL-hang  
‘They kept going to and fro as they held on to the penis’.

(1b) **Y-olku**            y-olku            y-olku,    y-kulə    ainu   l-ndaarkə   wuseldi.  
3PL-hang    3PL-hang    3PL-hang   3PL-pull penis 3SG.N-come.off all  
‘As many women were hanging from the penis, it came off’.

(2a) Lmeyis,                            **di**    **w-indi-Ø**                            **y-a**.  
go.ahead=IMP                            3SG.F   3SG.F-and-3SG.F                            3PL-be.at  
‘He went ahead and the two women stayed behind’.

(2b)	<b>Di</b>	<b>w-indi-∅</b>	<b>y-a,</b>	y-ngaarkə.
	3SG.F	3SG.F-and-3SG.F	3PL-be.at	3PL-follow

‘The two women stayed behind, and then followed him after a while’.

The salient part of the construction which triggers the metonymy is usually the verb, which can evoke its (pro)nominal arguments through the pronominal affixes attached to it. That is the case in (1b) with *yolku*, where the 3PL subject pronominal prefix *y-* makes reference to the women in the story. While one can usually retrieve the referents of noun phrases acting as arguments from the verb, it is much harder to retrieve the event(s) in which the referents of noun phrases partake. While the source of the metonymy is found in the recapitulative clause, the target of the metonymy is found in the tail clause. Both are explicit and, in most cases, adjacent in discourse. There are instances of THL, however, that are not metonymic in nature, as that in (2). The tail clause in (2a), *di windi ya* ‘they (she and she) stayed’, is reproduced verbatim in the head of clause in (2b). The function of THL in Srengé is that of thematic continuity and mostly makes reference to motion events, locative states, and referents of noun phrases that are important in the story line. The relevance of this talk is threefold. First, to my knowledge, metonymy has been neglected in most descriptions of Papuan languages and, when that has not been the case, it has often been limited to a few lexical fields (Brooks, 2019). Second, exploring the role of metonymy in a syntactic phenomenon, that of tail-head linkage, helps broaden the scope of metonymy studies. Third, given that Srengé is a highly endangered language, it is of utmost importance to explore fields such as that of figurative language, not traditionally included in documentary grammars (cf. Döhler, 2018).

**Keywords:** metonymy; abstract concepts; new concepts; Srengé; Torricelli languages; tail-head linkage.

#### **References:**

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