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SIMULTANEOUS ELEMENTS IN KRU

Richard L. Phillips

Languages commonly arrange their meaningful elements in a consecutive string within the flow of speech. Ferdinand de Saussure, pioneer in European descriptive linguistics, claimed that this was invariably the case. But in some languages recently studied there are elements, clearly identifiable in sound and meaning, that occur simultaneously rather than consecutively.

In the Kru language of Liberia, the person subject of a verb is generally indicated by a pronoun occurring before the verb. The tone of the pronoun (and sometimes the effect of that tone on the tone of the following syllable) is alone sufficient to distinguish between first and second persons. Singular first person pronoun bears high tone marked by the number 3 over the vowel, and second person has low tone<sup>1</sup>; plural first person bears mid tone<sup>2</sup> on the first vowel, and second person high tone<sup>3</sup>. (A fourth tone contrast in the language does not essentially modify these basic contrasts.)

<sup>3</sup> ne dyee <sup>22</sup>	'I am seeing it'	<sup>23</sup> aa dyee <sup>22</sup>	'we are seeing it'
<sup>1</sup> ne dyee <sup>11</sup>	'you are seeing it'	<sup>33</sup> aa dyee <sup>22</sup>	'you (plural) are seeing it'
<sup>23</sup> oo dyee <sup>22</sup>	'he is seeing it'	<sup>23</sup> uu dyee <sup>22</sup>	'they (personal) are seeing it'
<sup>23</sup> ee dyee <sup>22</sup>	'it is seeing it'	<sup>23</sup> il dyee <sup>22</sup>	'they(non-personal)are seeing it'

The forms ne and aa, then, indicate non-third person singular and plural respectively, and the appropriate tones occurring with these forms add the further meaning of specific person.

In the past tense form of some verbs, there are no clitic pronouns to indicate first and second persons singular, although there are such

pronouns for all the other persons. First and second persons are shown, rather, by changes in the verb stem. Verbs that begin with a voiced consonant have that consonant changed to a nasal sound at the same point of articulation. Tone again, suffices to distinguish first person from second. The additional component of tense is not treated.

$\overset{3}{n\bar{e}}$ $\overset{22}{ble\bar{e}}$	'I am singing'	$\overset{22}{m\bar{l}e\bar{e}}$	'I sang'	$\overset{11}{m\bar{l}e\bar{e}}$	'you sang'
$\overset{3}{n\bar{e}}$ $\overset{22}{dy\bar{e}\bar{e}}$	'I am seeing it'	$\overset{22}{ny\bar{e}\bar{e}}$	'I saw it'	$\overset{11}{ny\bar{e}\bar{e}}$	'you saw it'
$\overset{3}{n\bar{e}}$ $\overset{22}{g\bar{a}\bar{e}}$	'I am carrying it'	$\overset{22}{\eta\bar{a}\bar{e}}$	'I carried it'	$\overset{11}{\eta\bar{a}\bar{e}}$	'you carried it'

Traditionally, these past tense forms would be analyzed as consisting of verb stem plus replacement of the initial stop consonant by a nasal consonant. Yet, in each case, it may be noted that there are two relevant sound features distinguishable in the initial consonant--the point of articulation and the presence or absence of nasality, and that the former remains constant in both present and past verb forms while the latter changes.

Ethel Wallis, in a paper on Mezquital Otomi, a language of Mexico, (Language 32. 453-9), has shown that it is possible and sometimes preferable to treat such phenomena as simultaneous elements. According to this view, they might be considered what are called 'simulfixes' (by comparison with the term 'affix') involving sub-phonemic morpheme components. That is, the point of articulation of the consonant could be said to identify clearly the initial element of the stem, while the nasal element of the same consonant indicates non-third singular subject. These phenomena are widespread in Kru and seem to warrant consideration for their treatment in this manner.

The tone, together with the nasal component, specifies the person. The specific person indicator, then, which in the present tense forms above occur as part of a separate clitic pronoun, is here yet another element occurring simultaneously with the verb stem. It differs slightly in kind from the other simultaneous components, however, in that tone is not a subphonemic feature.