



BACKGROUND

Introduction:

- **Kawaiwete** (ISO code: kyz) is a language spoken by around 2,200 people in the Xingu Indigenous Land in Mato Grosso, Brazil (Lapierre, 2021).
- **Language documentation** is important for
 - **preserving the language** as the number of speakers decreases, and
 - **expanding linguists' knowledge** of the variation in the world's languages.
- Kawaiwete **verbal prefixes show rare** and unique **interactions** not well understood by previous field linguistics.

Background:

- Kawaiwete transitive sentences (i.e., sentences with a subject and object) tend to have relatively **free word order** and verbs must **take one prefix** (Dobson, 1988/2005).
- **Kawaiwete grammar and word order encodes a 1>2>3 person hierarchy.**
 - When a *first person 1sg* argument ("I", "me") is the subject and a *third person 3sg/3pl* ("he", "she", "they") is the object, the hierarchy is **respected**.
 - When 3sg/3pl arguments are the subject to a 1sg argument, the hierarchy is **violated**.
 - **Equally ranked** subjects and object **respect** the hierarchy.
 - In general, if the subject of the sentence is lower on the hierarchy than the object, the verb takes the **special r-** prefix to encode this.
- The **a-** prefix *tends* to be used for 1sg subjects.

Verb	Subject	Object
a-esat	je	miara jemiwara
a-see	I	jaguar eating

(1) 'I see the jaguar eating.'

- The **w-** prefix *tends* to be used for 3sg/3pl subjects.

Subject	Object	Verb
kujã	kunumi 'nga	w-esat
woman	child he (male speech)	w-see

(2) 'The woman sees the child.' (male speech)

- The **r-** prefix *tends* to be used when the object directly precedes the verb.

Object	Verb	Subject
je	r-esak	miara
I	r-see	jaguar

(3) 'The jaguar sees me.'

- The rules of thumb above **do not fully describe** all the variation in the verbal prefixes.

Research Questions:

- What describes the variation between **a-**, **w-** and **r-** verbal prefixes?
- When free word order allows for multiple verbal constructions, which are grammatically correct?

r- PREFIX

Pronouns Always Respect the 1>2>3 Hierarchy:

- The 1sg pronoun **always** precedes a 3sg/3pl pronoun.
- **Word order** must change to allow for this.
- The **r-** prefix is used iff the object directly precedes the verb.

Person Hierarchy Violations:

- The person hierarchy is **violated** when the sentence's subject is lower on the 1>2>3 hierarchy than the object (e.g. 3rd person subject and 1st person object, written 3 > 1).
- When the hierarchy is violated, the **prefix r- must be used** and the **object must be placed before the verb**.
- The pronoun order must still respect the 1>2>3 hierarchy.

Object	Verb	Subject
je	r-esak	'nga
I	r-see	him (male speech)

(4) 'He sees me.' (male speech)

- The **r-** prefix **must** be used for 3 > 1 sentences. No other construction is grammatically correct.

Optional r- Prefixation in 3 > 3 Sentences:

- **r-** may **optionally** be used for 3rd person subjects and objects, if the object precedes the verb.

Object	Subject	Verb
akusia	'nga	r-esak
agouti	him (male speech)	r-see

(5) The agouti sees him

TOPICALIZATION

General:

- Topicalization allows a speaker to move the object to the front of the sentence, **emphasizing it** in the sentence.

Topicalization in 3 > 1 sentences:

- One **exception** to the person hierarchy:
- Topicalized 3rd person objects can be **fronted**,
 - though the sentence's constituents **still** violate the 1>2>3 hierarchy.
- Thus, the **r-** prefix must **still** be used and the 1sg pronoun must be placed before the verb.

Topic (Subject)	Object	Verb
miara	je	r-esak
jaguar	I	r-see

(6) 'The jaguar sees me.' (same meaning as sentence 3)

Topicalization in 1 > 3 sentences:

- Topicalized 3rd person objects can still be fronted, but may not directly precede the verb, since **objects can only directly precede the verb if the verb takes r-**.
- **The verbal prefix varies since the meaning is unambiguous.**

Topic (Object)	Subject	Verb
miara jemiwara	je	w-esak
jaguar eating	I	w-see

(7) 'I see the jaguar eating.' (same meaning as sentence 1)

- Pronouns **may not be topicalized**; in sentences with only pronouns, *je* 1sg always precedes *'nga* 3sg.

1 > 3 FREEDOM OF AGREEMENT

- Since **r-** is used in situations of hierarchy violation, in 1 > 3 transitive sentences, there is **no ambiguity** about the role of the constituents.
- This allows us to use either the **a-** 1sg or the **w-** 3sg/3pl prefix, as it is **syntactically unambiguous** that 1sg is the subject and 3sg/3pl is the object.

Verb	Subject	Object
w-esat	je	'nga
w-see	I	him (male speech)

(8) 'I see him.' (male speech)

- Similarly, for topicalized 1 > 3 sentences, there is no ambiguity about the role of the constituents since the **r-** prefix is not used.
- This allows the verb to **agree with either constituent**, depending on what the speaker wants to emphasize.

Topic (Object)	Subject	Verb
miara	je	w-esak
jaguar	I	w-see

(9) 'I see the jaguar.'

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Discussion:

- The results show that Kawaiwete verbal prefixes **pattern differently** based on whether the sentence's subject and object follow or violate the 1>2>3 person hierarchy.
- 1st person constituents precede 3rd person constituents.
- If the hierarchy is **violated**, then the verb **must take the r-** prefix and the object **must directly precede the verb**.
- If the hierarchy is **respected**, then the verb **may choose to agree** with either constituent since doing so does **not result in syntactic ambiguity**.
- **Third-person non-pronoun** constituents **may be topicalized** and moved to the front of the sentence, if the previous two constraints are respected.

Future Considerations:

- The results here **only draw conclusions** between 1st and 3rd person pronouns.
- How do the prefixation patterns differ with **second person constituents**?
- Do the following prefixation rules apply to sentences containing a **1pl plural pronoun**?

FOR DETAILS ON THE LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION PROCESS, PLEASE VISIT
"PANÁRA AND KAWAIWETE LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION PROJECT"
BY MADDY GRASSY, DAOMING LIU, AND ALISON VAN SHAAR

References:

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