The Proto-Jenu Language

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1 Preface

John will fill this out soon, he has homework to do

2 Phonology

The current reconstruction of Proto-Jenu presents both a small vowel and consonant inventory, with a moderately complex syllable structure. Here we present the phonemes that seem to be present. Within the sections enumerating the phonemes, the Romanization will be in angle brackets to the right after the phoneme.

2.1 Vowels

There are four vowel qualities that seem to show no difference in length, tone, or any other feature. This forms a rough square in the space. There may have been conditions, such as if a syllable was open or closed, surrounding voicing, and so on, that caused the qualities of the vowels to shift in certain ways.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i <i>		
Mid	e <e>		o <o>
Low		a <a>	

2.2 Consonants

	Labial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Plain	p <p>	t <t>	ʧ<c>	k <k>
Voiced	b <b>	d <d>		
Nasal	m <m>	n <n>		
Fricative	f <f>	s <s>		
Approximant		l r <l>	j <j>	w <w>

Proto-Jenu is reconstructred with 13 consonant sounds, most at the labial or alveolar locations. There is a voicing distinction that is not fuly mirrored in the series, and the nasals likewise prefer more common sounds, avoiding anything further back in the mouth and throut. The alveolar approximant cannot be convincingly reconstructed as either a rhotic or a lateral, so it is presented here as varying between the two though this seems not to have been the case as attested in its unusual patterning in daughter languages.

2.3 Syllable Structre

The canonical syllable structure is `(C)V(K)(s)` where `K` is any consonant except \ʧ, b, d, j, w\. There is also an implicit rule that surfaces with affixes that the maximum consonant cluster is 2 consonants long. Vowel - Vowel sequences can occur with a `CV.V` syllable sequence, and in this case it will sound twice as long as a `CV` syllable.

2.4 Allophony

It is suspected that some synchronic sound changes surfaced because of environment in Proto-Jenu ; however, we cannot know for sure. The following sections enumerate what is expected given the relatively small inventory of phonemes overall.

2.4.1 Palatalizing of \n\

/n/ probably surfaced as [ɲ] before \i, e\.

2.4.2 Velarization of \n\

/n/ probably surfaced as [ŋ] before \k\. When this was followed by yet another vowel, it is likely that the \k\ became [g].

2.4.3 Interruptive Glottal Stop

While not present as a distinct phoneme, it is expected that the glottal stop, [ʔ], was inserted to break vowel-vowel sequences across word boundaries.

2.5 Stress

Stress was predictable but not phonemic in Proto-Jenu . When a word ends with a vowel, the stress falls on the penultimate syllable, the second to last syllable. When the word ends with a consonant then the stress is on the ultimate, final, syllable. Morphological suffixes, such as case markers or plural marking, and derivational affixes can cause this stress to shift away from the syllable that would be assumed by a dictionary entry. It is clear that some daughter languages had some vowel loss because of this stress shifting.

3 Grammatical Overview

This section tries to provide a high level view of Proto-Jenu rather than a more fully fleshed out view that will follow. It covers concepts like alignment, reconstructed verb uses and categories, word order, and so on. Sections following this one will give the morphology in much greater depth on a particle by particle and usage by usage basis. Those sections, despite the translations and glosses provided, may require multiple readings of the text or referencing other parts for better understanding.

3.1 Nominative Alignment

Proto-Jenu is a completely nominative language, and frequently the nominative will go unmarked while the accusative is marked. However, this can flip when subjects that normally cannot serve as a subject do so, especially in figurative uses or phrases. There is an implied animacy or volitionality that drives this it seems; this fluidity in marking is lost via case calcification or fusion in daughter languages.

3.1.1 Case Suffixes

There are some 9 case suffixes for indicating different roles in an utterance. It seems that for roles not covered by these cases, the genetive and accusative were often employed in more round about ways to extend meaning where the cases could not supply.

3.2 Word Order

Proto-Jenu seems to have strongly preferred `SOV` word order; however, free word order seems possible so long as verbs remained thoroughly final. This even seems to be the point of syntactic extension of case where a verb of some kind was used to show some role via the accusative but the verb would still follow the accusativized noun.

3.3 Postpositional Creep

While postpositions were truly not known at the period of this reconstruction it seems, the usage of genetive and accusative work arounds for what would be prepositions in English seems to have been the source of postpositions in daughter languages which show a great variety of them.

4 Nominal Suffixes

Proto-Jenu had several morphological suffixes, particularly for nominal case. As a nominative-accusative language, it posseses both markers for these and others for spacial or relational meanings. It also has a plural marker which only is applied to human nouns or references.

4.1 The Plural: `-mu`

Proto-Jenu had a plural marker `-mu`; however, despite its wide spread usage in some daughter languages, plural marking was far less common in the past. Scholastic consensus consistently holds that plural marking has always been mandatory for the first and second person pronouns. Third person pronouns, being the same as the demonstrative pronouns, it would have remained mandatory for human references, but for others it seems unlikely given both plural marking in daughter languages and pronominal systems in them. Likewise, nouns that describe humans of any sort had mandatory plural marking. Some animals may have received plural marking, but it is far harder to discern if it was consistent.

Plural marking, when used was always most closely bound to the noun, coming before both case or disparagement suffixes.

4.2 The Ergative (`-ji/-ne`) and Absolutive Cases (`-`∅)

The Ergative and Absolutive cases are used to indicate the most common nominal arguments to verbs and in utterances in general. They play a role akin to the Nominative and Accusative in many world languages; however, what they mark is dependent on both the transitivity of the verb. The Absolutive case, which is unmarked, indicates the object of transitive verbs and the subject of intransitive verbs regardless of volition. The Ergative case, most often marked with the `-ji` suffix, indicates the subject of transitive verbs, and it has some other syntactic usages as well. The first and second personal pronouns along with a small collection of proper nouns, which seem sporadic in nature, are marked with the `-ne` suffix instead; this different suffix is not used for any extra syntactic roles, but its sound seems more conservative so it is thought it simply fossilized on these particular nominals before the particle as a whole shifted to `-ji`, or it could be the remnant of one dialect pushing on another. It is hard to discern fully.

4.2.1 Historical Relation to the Genetive

As will be read in a later section, the Genetive Case is marked with the `-nye` suffix. Given the similarity in sound both to the general and conservative Ergative suffixes and the tendency of Proto-Jenu to "own" participle verbs in various situations, it feels overwhelmingly likely that the Ergative Case has it's origin in particular usages of the Genetive Case. This may have happened at a time also when an unattested Ablative suffix was fusing with the Genetive seeing how Ablative phrases often manifest with Ergative marking.

4.2.2 Ergative Subject

The Ergative Case has its most obvious use marking the subject of transitive verbs. Here, we provide a rather plain example: `diine raam nyawi` – **1SG.ERG food(ABS) eat** – *I'm eating food*

4.2.3 Instrumental Usage of the Ergative

The Ergative suffix is also used to mark nouns for instrumental usage. Most notably, this happens with the preposition xut which simply means *with* in cases of use but not for accompanyment; however the usage of that preposition seems to have not been mandatory. Often placing an ergative marked noun after the verb was enough.

4.2.4 Ablative Usage of the Ergatives

4.2.5 Ergative Marking for Adverbials

4.3 The Genetive: `-nye`

Genetive marking was used to show possesion by one noun over another, or to mark some other close relationship or association or origin. It is indicated with the `-nye` suffix on the possesee, whic always follows the noun or noun phrase being owned or modified. There is no notion of alienability in this way.

4.3.1 Agentive Usage of the Genetive with Passive Verbs

In Passive constructions, agents of the action can be optionally indicated by a noun marked for the Genetive Case following the verb. Since genetive ordering always has it following the possesum and, internal to the language, since it feels like the passivized verbal phrase is owned by the noun, grammatical pressures make promoting agents of the passive to before the verb or verb phrase feel ungrammatical.

4.4 The Dative: `-wyk`

The Dative Case was marked with the `-wyk` suffix, and it was used to indicate motion towards something or note indirect objects. Promoting a Dative noun to the subject role via passivization of the verb was ungrammatical. Some daughter languages would innovate a genetive use out of the dative, but this seems to not be present in the Proto-language.

4.4.1 Quirky Subjects

A collection of particular verbs expected Dative marked nouns as their subject; when these ones have direct objects they are always in the absolutive case. Many of these verbs have to do with mental activities like thinking or feeling affection. Culturally, this seems to have lead some people to feel that aspects of these things were more spontaneous to the human mind than meditated, which gave rise to a few idioms and collocations which manifest in certain ways in the daughter languages

4.4.2 Absence of Benefactive Usage

Very notably, Proto-Jenu did not make use of the Dative to indicate those who benefitted from an action or state, at least directly. Giving food or affection surely benefits the person, but this was not something overtly indicated by the Dative Case. The Proto-language and almost all of its daughter languages up to the present day use subordination of some kind for benefactive indicators. Those that presently do grammatically use the Dative in a benefactive sense seem to have innovated it through contact with neighboring languages that do.

4.5 The Locative: `-ba`

4.6 The Oblique: `-min`

No clue, quirky subjects I guess too

5 Pronouns

Personal pronouns were rather simple, with the third person pronouns normally being the proximate demonstrative pronouns, though very distant non-moving or conceptual things could be refered to by the other demonstratives. As with the rest of the language, only humans are marked for plurality. This means that multiple people noted via pronoun could be marked plural, but multiple trees or rocks would not ever be plural marked either on the noun or pronouns refering to them. The following sections layout what the pronouns are, though there are few wrinkles in this arena.

5.1 First and Second Person Personal Pronouns

N.B.: John this section and its table will need to be much more fleshed out for case suffix interactions. Return to this soon!!

	First Singular	Second Singular	First Plural	Second Plural
Absolutive	dii	awa	diimu	awamu
Ergative	diine	awane	diimune	awamune
Genetive	diinye	awanye	diimunye	awamunye
Dative	diiwyk	awawyk	diimuwyk	awamuwyk
Locative	diiba	awaba	diimuba	awamuba
Oblique	diimin	awamin	diimumin	awamumin

In this section, we only list the First and Second personal pronouns since the 3rd is the same as the demonstratives, and notes on its use will come in that section. These two pronouns are notably the only ones reconstructed as having mandatory plural marking with `-mu`. Vestiges of this appear in all daughter languages, even ones that did not extend this plural marker much beyond the space present in the proto-language here. It's notably where some of the irregularity in daughter languages can find its source.

6 Human Body Terms

This section provides reconstructions for various Proto-Jenu anatomical terms. These terms were frequently utilized to describe other things in the language, so we're introducing them early in hopes of easing the reader into a gentler time understanding the language. Of note, Proto-Jenu seems to have had a weak distinction between the hand-arm and foot-leg pairs, though it is thought terms like palm could be used to clarify hand or foot when needed explicitly; other evidence suggests a 'big'-'little' contrast for arm or leg and hand or foot respectively.

6.1 General Body Parts

This section will cover general body parts, looking at the whole body. Further sections will focus on terms specific to the face, hand, and others.

- **Head** – `Qhympu`
- **Neck** – `Unle`
- **Shoulder** – `Lekry`
- **Chest** – `Dirwak`
- **Belly** – `Khaama`
- **Back** – `Naga`
- **Arm / Hand** – `Thuu`
- **Leg / Foot** – `Beni`
- **Knee / Elbow** – `Sawak` (**N.B.:** also seems to mean a *bend, crook* in many cases)
- **Finger (Toe)** – `Zu`
- **Bum** – `Rop`

In the case of `Zu` meaning *toe* it seems that the term was more specific to fingers, and in context could be *toe*; however, in isolation it is expected that `Zu Benina`, that is exactly *finger of the foot*.

6.2 The Face

The terms for facial anatomy show some polysemy with non-anatomic elements, but there are not interesting collisions in meaning like seen in the more general anatomy such as 'hand-arm'.

- **Face** – `Hebu`
- **Ajo** – `Eye`
- **Lyek** – `Ear`
- **Nose** – `Nunu`
- **Mouth** – `Nyaam`
- **Lips** – `Marwa`
- **Chin** – `Ipu`
- **Cheek** – `Ek`
- **Hair** – `Xaa`

6.2.1 Inside the Mouth

Cover things like teeth, tongue, etc

6.2.2 The Eye in Focus

Cover things like white (kaolin), iris, pupil, eyelid...