

VARIATION IN NALIK GRAMMAR

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

Nalik belongs to the Lavongai/Nalik Network of Austronesian languages of northern New Ireland (Ross: 1988:291; see map). It is spoken in villages on both the east and west coasts of the island and is bordered by Kara, another Austronesian language, to the north, and by Kuot, the only non-Austronesian language in New Ireland, to the south. The Nalik language has also been referred to as Lugagon, Fesoa and Fessoa (Grimes 1988:528) – all names of Nalik-speaking villages.

There are four geographic dialects of Nalik distinguished by relatively minor lexical variation: Northern East Coast, Southern East Coast, West Coast and Laefu Village. There is a strong tendency towards dialect levelling, especially among young speakers. There are quite noticeable lexical and phonological differences between these four dialects and the transitional dialects along the Nalik-Kara border, which may form a separate language. Data from these transitional dialects have not been used in this paper.

Recent census reports have regrettably not included data on non-urban language use, and recent and reliable information about the number of Nalik speakers is not available. However in the mid-1990 census a total of 3,210 people were recorded as living in villages in the Nalik area, with an additional 796 living in areas where transitional dialects linking the Nalik and Kara languages are spoken (PNG National Statistical Office 1992). This totals 4,006 persons. It can be reasonably assumed that about the same number of Nalik people live outside the Nalik area as do non-Nalik people in the Nalik area, so three to four thousand can be taken as a very rough approximation of the total Nalik population.

Today there are no monolingual Nalik speakers. All Nalik children attend English-medium primary school for six years. A more influential contact language, however, is Tok Pisin, which all Nalik speakers know. Indeed, for an increasing number of Nalik speakers this is the dominant language, especially in settings outside the home, and some younger ethnic Nalik use Tok Pisin to the exclusion of Nalik. Because many people now living in Nalik villages are not ethnic Nalik and do not understand the language well, it is rare to have public meetings which are entirely in Nalik. At weekly Monday morning village meetings, for

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example, the most important announcements are made in Tok Pisin, although often they are repeated and discussed in more detail in Nalik. Many other important public activities, such as school and religious meetings, are held entirely in Tok Pisin or English.

The mixed background of most families today plays an important part in this decrease in the use of Nalik. In a survey of students at one Nalik primary school, less than half the students reported that both their parents were Nalik.

In such a situation it is not surprising that the Nalik lexicon has been heavily influenced and, in the opinion of most older speakers, impoverished by Tok Pisin. At the same time, there is noticeable grammatical variation between different groups of speakers. This paper will examine nine types of grammatical variation found and discuss the possible motivation for this variation.

2. VARIATION INVOLVING VERBAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Four types of variation involving verbal constructions can be found in Nalik, dealing with passives, comparative constructions, negation and the choice of durative markers. The first three types of variation are between the speech of older traditional men and that of all other speakers, while in the choice of durative markers, it is between the speech of young and middle-aged men and that of all other speakers.

2.1 PASSIVE

The only people using passive constructions are older men with strong ties to traditional culture, usually *maimai* (clan orators). The formation of passives resembles that of English. Nalik is an SVO language. When a sentence undergoes passivisation, the underlying direct object becomes the surface subject, while the underlying subject is moved to the end of the sentence and marked by the oblique preposition *pa(n)*. The verb takes a passive participle form.

The following two sentences illustrate this. The first is non-passive with the subject *a vaat* 'the stone' and the direct object *a laplap* 'the sarong':²

- (1) *A vaat ka taar a laplap.*
 ART stone 3SG tear ART sarong
 The stone is tearing the sarong.

² The following abbreviations are used in this paper:

ADJ	adjectival verb	NP	noun phrase
ART	article	NSG	non-singular
CAUS	causative	OBL	oblique marker
COM	comparison	PASS	passive
DU	dual	PL	plural
DUR	durative	RED	reduplicated syllable
EXC	exclusive	SG	singular
FUT	future/irrealis	SM	subject marker
IN	inalienable	SPC	specific article
LOC	locative	TR	transitive
NEG	negative	; and ; are used to distinguish any two non-identical constituents	
NOM	nominalisation		

The second sentence is the passive equivalent of the first. With passivisation the underlying direct object *a laplap* 'the sarong' moves to the sentence underlying subject position, the verb *taar* takes the participial form *raamataar*, while the underlying subject is in the sentence-final position as the head of a prepositional phrase beginning with the oblique marker *pa(n)*:

- (2) *A laplap ka raamataar pan a vaat.*
 ART sarong 3SG PASS.tear OBL ART stone
 The sarong is being torn by the stone.

This passive construction may be nominalised, as in the following sentence in which *gu lis* 'you give' has undergone passivisation and subsequent nominalisation, becoming *a telasing sunum* 'your kindness':

- (3) *Ka doxo marazat pan a telasing sunum.*
 3SG good much OBL ART PASS.give-NOM of.you.SG
 Thank you very much for your kindness (lit. that which was given by you).

Neither of these constructions was recorded in the speech of women or younger or middle-aged men. Indeed, some younger men judged sentences such as the two above to be ungrammatical. This is done even by speakers who are familiar with the passive construction in English.

Instead, younger speakers use direct object fronting to place focus on direct objects. Thus, to emphasise the direct object *a laplap* 'the sarong' in (1) a younger speaker produced the following sentence with the direct object fronted and no change in the verb:

- (4) *A laplap a vaat ka taar.*
 ART sarong ART stone 3SG tear
 The sarong, the stone is tearing.

The motivation for the loss of passive constructions appears to come from both Tok Pisin and, somewhat surprisingly, English. Tok Pisin does not have a passive construction and direct object fronting is a strategy used by many Tok Pisin speakers to emphasise the direct object. Although the English passive construction is very similar to that of Nalik and primary education in English has been universal in New Ireland for over a generation, this English construction is still not accessible to most Nalik speakers. It is usually not taught until high school, which less than half of all Nalik children are able to attend, and even there it is usually taught by Papua New Guinean teachers who themselves rarely use it. The relatively few Nalik speakers who have a sufficient command of English to be able to understand and use English passives with ease tend to be members of the national elite under forty years of age who live in urban areas outside New Ireland. Because of their isolation from other Nalik speakers and their subsequent linguistic insecurity regarding Nalik, they have little influence on the use of Nalik in its homeland.

2.2 COMPARATIVES

To form comparatives, older men with high traditional status use one of two constructions with either an adjectival verb followed by the comparative verb *paamu* or the comparative verb *vu* followed by an adjectival verb. In either case the second verb in this serial construction has the transitive suffix *-ing*, so that the noun phrase being used as a point of comparison is a direct object.

Traditional comparative construction A:

NP _i	SM	ADJ	<i>paamu-ing</i>	NP _j
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- (5) *A vaal zunum ka vaaxor paamu-ing a vaal zina.*
 ART house of.you.SG 3SG new COM-TR ART house of.he
 Your house is newer than his house.

Traditional comparative construction B:

NP _i	SM	<i>vu</i>	ADJ-ing	NP _j
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- (6) *Ali ka vu brav-ing John.*
 Ali 3SG COM tall-TR John
 Ali is taller than John.

Today most speakers replace the comparative verb *vu* by the Tok Pisin / English loan *moa* 'more', with the oblique marker *pan* replacing the transitive suffix *-ing*.

Innovative comparison construction:

NP _i	SM	<i>moa</i>	ADJ	OBL	NP _j
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- (7) *Ali ka moa brav pan John.*
 Ali 3SG COM tall OBL John
 Ali is taller than John.

As with the passive construction, the motivation for this innovation appears to be the result of a conspiracy between grammatical influences from both Tok Pisin and English being brought into Nalik along with the loan *moa*. Whereas in the traditional Nalik constructions the noun phrase which is the measure of comparison has a direct object grammatical relation, in both Tok Pisin and English it has an oblique grammatical relation, marked by *long* and *than* respectively. The innovative Nalik construction is a calque of the Tok Pisin equivalent with the oblique preposition *long*:

Tok Pisin comparison construction:³

NP _i	SM	<i>moa</i>	ADJ	OBL	NP _j
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- (8) *Ali i moa bikpela long John.*
 Ali SM COM tall OBL John
 Ali is taller than John.

³ Although Tok Pisin *i* is usually analysed as a verbal marker, Keesing's (1988) analysis of it as a "subject reference pronoun" (i.e. subject marker) brings out the identical grammatical structures of the Tok Pisin and innovative Nalik comparative constructions.

The English equivalent of this construction uses *more* and *than*. English *than* not only reinforces the oblique grammatical relation of the noun phrase which is the measure of comparison, but also influences both the choice of the oblique marker *pan* rather than the oblique marker *ku(n)*, which is also available in Nalik, and the unusual form of *pan* which is used in comparative constructions. Elsewhere *pa(n)* is like other Nalik prepositions ending in *-n*, deleting the final *-n* when the following word begins with a consonant. In comparative constructions *pan* always has a final *-n*, even when the following word begins with a consonant, such as *John* in the example above. With this final *-n*, Nalik *pan* resembles and even rhymes with its English equivalent *than*.

2.3 NEGATION

As with passives and comparatives, there is variation in the use of negation between older Nalik men with traditional ties and other speakers. For most speakers, the use of the future marker *na* is obligatory in all sentences in which negation is expressed by the negative marker *pen/wen*,⁴ as in the following sentence:

- (9) *Ga na wen faral.*
 1SG FUT NEG write
 I won't write (anything).

While older men with high traditional status were likewise recorded using the future marker with the negative marker, they also produced sentences such as the following, with a negative marker, but no future marker:

- (10) *A rapti di bur naan l-a rabarau, ka pen*
 ART man 3NSG consecrate he LOC-ART fence 3SG NEG
do-dor ausait.
 RED-speak outside
 The man whom they consecrate in the sacred enclosure may not speak outside
 (about the details of his consecration).

Sentences such as these were judged ungrammatical by younger speakers.

The motivation for this variation appears to be a shift in the meaning of *na* from being a future to an irrealis marker.⁵ Among older speakers a negated activity may or may not involve future activity, so the use of *na* is optional. For younger speakers all negated activity is irrealis, so the use of *na* is obligatory.

2.4 DURATIVE MARKERS

Nalik has two preverbal durative markers, *-t* and *i*. For most speakers *-t* is used with transitive verbs, and *i* is used with intransitive verbs. Their use can be seen in the following two sentences, with transitive *firing* 'yell' and intransitive *viang* 'ascend', respectively:

⁴ Negation in Nalik can also be expressed by prefacing the sentence with *kavit* 'no'. Unlike sentences with the negative marker *pen/wen*, these sentences are grammatical either with or without the future marker *na*.

⁵ I am indebted to Nicholas Faraclas for this observation.

- (11) A *rapti ka-t fir-ing fa-wut maam.*
 ART man 3SG-DUR yell-TR CAUS-come we.EXC
 A man was yelling out to us.
- (12) A *ravin ka i viang.*
 ART woman 3SG DUR ascend
 The woman is ascending (i.e. heading south-east).

These two durative markers can differentiate between the transitive and intransitive use of the same verb. For example, in the first of the following two durative sentences, *naxaam* 'think' has a direct object *nu* 'you', so transitive *-t* is used, while in the second there is no direct object, so intransitive *i* is used:

- (13) Uwe, *ga-t naxaam buling nu.*
 ah 1SG-DUR think always you.SG
 Ah, I'm always thinking of you.
- (14) Ga *i naxaam be.*
 1 SG DUR think only
 I'm just thinking.

While the preceding explanation is true for most speakers, among many young and middle-aged men this distinction between the two durative markers is being reinterpreted. Instead of differentiating transitivity and intransitivity, they differentiate degrees of duration, with *i* being stronger than *-t*. Thus, for these speakers example (14) is a stronger (i.e. longer) version of example (13). No speakers who make this innovative distinction make it with all verbs. No two innovative speakers have exactly the same verbs which are marked for this innovation, but high frequency verbs, such as *naxaam* 'think', are more likely to have this innovation than low frequency verbs. Thus, the innovation is spreading throughout the lexicon at the same time that it is spreading throughout the population.

The motivation for this innovation appears to come from Tok Pisin, albeit in an indirect fashion. Tok Pisin has only one durative marker, *save*. It also has an invariable subject marker *i*, which comes immediately before the verb. Younger Nalik speakers appear to draw an analogy between the Tok Pisin *i* and the Nalik *i*, even though they have different grammatical functions in the two languages. At the same time, the fact that Tok Pisin has only one durative marker influences bilingual Nalik speakers to have only one durative marker in Nalik as well. The result of these two influences from Tok Pisin is that Nalik *i* is becoming used in environments where before *-t* would have been used. For example, both of the following sentences with durative markers and a direct object *ni* 'I,' were accepted by many younger speakers, with the first, using *i*, being judged as 'stronger' than the second, with *-t*:

- (15) Ka *i ngot-ngot ni.*
 3SG DUR RED-mock I
 He's mocking me.
- (16) Ka-t *ngot-ngot ni.*
 3SG-DUR RED-mock I
 He's mocking me.

Although there are not yet any speakers who use *i* to the exclusion of *-t*, this can be expected to be the next logical development in the use of duratives in Nalik.

3. VARIATION INVOLVING NOUN PHRASES

Three types of variation involving noun phrases were recorded among different Nalik speakers. These involve the use of plural and dual markers and the marking of inalienable possession. In all three cases, the innovation involves the loss of a marked feature. Influence from English and Tok Pisin is also evident, particularly regarding inalienable possession.

3.1 THE PLURAL MARKER

The regular marking of plural in Nalik uses the plural marker *mun* between the article and noun. For example:

- | | | | |
|---------|--------------|----|------------------|
| (17) a. | <i>a yai</i> | b. | <i>a mun yai</i> |
| | ART tree | | ART PL tree |
| | the tree | | the trees |

Two words describing female humans use the irregular plural marker *fu* rather than *mun*:

- | | | | |
|---------|----------------|----|-------------------|
| (18) a. | <i>a ravin</i> | b. | <i>a fu-ravin</i> |
| | ART woman | | ART PL-woman |
| | the woman | | the women |
-
- | | | | |
|---------|-----------------|----|--------------------|
| (19) a. | <i>a fnalik</i> | b. | <i>a fu-fnalik</i> |
| | ART girl | | ART PL-girl |
| | the girl | | the girls |

Many younger and middle-aged speakers use both the regular and the irregular plural markers together with these words, as in the following sentence. Even speakers who do not use these redundant plural forms themselves usually judged them grammatical. Only older men judged them ungrammatical.

- (20) *a mun fu-ravin, a mun fu-fnalik*
 ART PL PL-woman ART PL PL-girl
 the women, the girls

This innovation results in the loss of a marked irregularity. One would expect that the redundant *fu-* would be absorbed into the noun. As yet, however, this has not happened, so that all speakers judged noun phrases such as the following, using *fu-* with a singular noun, ungrammatical:

- (21) **a fu-ravin azaxei*
 ART PL?-woman one
 one woman

One might also expect that there would be speakers who leave out *fu-* with these words and use only the regular plural marker *mun* (i.e. **a mun ravin*). There are not, at least not yet, many speakers for whom this is grammatical.

3.2 THE DUAL MARKER

Normally, all Nalik noun phrases begin with the article *a*. An exception is when the dual marker *uru* or its short form *u* is used. For example:

- | | | | |
|---------|------------------|----|----------------|
| (22) a. | <i>uru nalik</i> | b. | <i>u nalik</i> |
| | DU boy | | DU boy |
| | two boys | | two boys |

The long form of the dual marker, *uru*, is homophonous with the numeral 'two'. Like other indigenous numerals (as opposed to Tok Pisin loan numerals), the numeral *uru* follows the noun, which is preceded by the article. For example:

- (23) *a nalik uru*
 ART boy two
 the two boys

A number of speakers were recorded using *uru* after the article *a*, but before the head noun. For example:

- (24) *a uru nalik*
 ART DU boy
 the two boys

Most of the speakers using this form were children or teenagers, although a few were in their twenties. None of these speakers was recorded using the short form of the dual marker *u*, either preceding or following the head noun.

Since Tok Pisin does not have an article, the influence of Tok Pisin on this construction can only be indirect. Tok Pisin numerals are in common use in Nalik and, as in Tok Pisin itself, they precede the head noun they modify. For example:

- (25) *a sikis nalik*
 ART six boy
 the six boys

A more likely source of this innovation is a conspiracy between the tendency among young bilingual Nalik speakers to drop marked grammatical features, together with the English use of the article before a numeral (e.g. *the two boys*). In this regard it is noteworthy that all the speakers using this innovation have received primary school education in English.

The fact that none of the speakers using this innovation used the short form of the dual marker *u*, either with or without a preceding article, indicates that these speakers now analyse *uru* only as a numeral, not as a dual marker which also has a shortened form. This is consistent with the hypothesis that this innovation represents a convergence with English, which has neither a dual grammatical category nor a shortened form of *two*.

3.3 ALIENABLE AND INALIENABLE POSSESSION

The distinction between alienable and inalienable possession is a well-known characteristic of Oceanic languages. For this reason, perhaps the most surprising variation between the speech of different groups of Nalik speakers is the lack of distinction which many speakers are now beginning to make between alienable and inalienable possession.

Traditionally, Nalik has used either a possessive pronoun or the preposition *si* 'of' to mark alienable possession. For example:

- (26) a. *a baxot saraga*
 ART money of.I
 my money
- b. *a vaal si Tahirih*
 ART house of Tahirih
 Tahirih's house

The inalienable possession of body parts (including spiritual body parts such as soul, shadow and name) and family members (including the Deity and inalienable customary land) is traditionally expressed with inalienable possessive suffixes. For example:

- (27) *a mit-nagu*
 ART hand-my.IN
 my hand
- (28) *a iza-gu*
 ART name-my.IN
 my name
- (29) *a yaya-naande*
 ART grandparent/child-their.IN
 their grandparent/child

Today there is a continuum of use ranging from the most conservative speakers who follow the patterns described above to the most innovative speakers, who seldom use the marked inalienable forms. Innovative speakers, for example, were recorded using alienable possessives with all three of the inalienable nouns in the examples above:

- (30) *a mit saraga*⁶
 ART hand of.I
 my hand
- (31) *a iza zaraga*
 ART name of.I
 my name
- (32) *a yaya zi naande*
 ART grandparent/child of they
 their grandparent/child

⁶ The alternation between /s/ in (30) *saraga* 'my' and /z/ in (31) *zaraga* 'my' (and between *si* 'of' in (26) and *zi* 'of' in (32)) is not significant; under most circumstances fricatives are voiced when immediately preceded by a vowel or liquid.

In this continuum there is so much variation that it is rare for any two speakers to agree on the use or non-use of inalienable possessives with all words. In addition to variation between speakers, the loss of markedness for inalienable possession seems to spread item by item through an individual's lexicon, rather than being lost all at once as a grammatical category. Inalienable forms tend to be retained less with common words than with relatively uncommon words. For example, in the following sentence inalienable possession is used with the infrequent kinship term *moro* 'maternal relative', but not with the more common *nalik* 'boy, son':

- (33) *Masingkarei ga saxot ga na bur ta moro-gu*
 but 1SG like 1SG FUT consecrate SPC maternal.relative-my.IN
o ta nalik surago...
 or SPC boy of.I
 But (if) I want to consecrate a certain maternal kinsman or a certain son of mine...

The younger and less traditionally-oriented speakers are, the more likely they are to use alienable rather than inalienable forms with body parts and kinship terms. In any age group, males are less likely to use inalienable forms than females. Moreover, this trend is more pronounced among Northern East Coast dialect than West Coast dialect speakers. This can be seen in the difference in the speech of grade five and six children aged ten to thirteen from West Coast dialect speaking Luapul village and Northern East Coast dialect speaking Madina village, all of whom attend Madina Community School. When asked to introduce themselves in Nalik, Luapul children invariably used the conservative inalienable form shown in example (28), while Madina children invariably used the innovative alienable form shown in example (31). This indicates that the centre of this innovation has been with young males from the Northern East Coast dialect who are not traditionally oriented.

The motivation for this innovation is threefold. In addition to the trend in Nalik to discard marked grammatical constructions such as the inalienable possessives, neither Tok Pisin nor English has such forms. In this regard it is noteworthy that the only high schools in the Nalik area are two boarding schools, each with two or three hundred predominantly non-Nalik boarders. Both are located in the Northern East Coast dialect area. Northern East Coast children are therefore exposed to a greater amount of Tok Pisin and, to a lesser extent, English, from teenage role models than children in other areas.

4. VARIATION WITH THE PREPOSITION *feraxei*

To express 'with', most speakers use the preposition *feraxei* followed by the oblique marker *pa(n)* (usually realised as *wa(n)* for phonological reasons). For example:

- (34) *A rate xa dor-dor feraxei wan a ravin.*
 ART man 3SG RED-speak with OBL ART woman
 The man is chatting with a woman.

But a number of younger and middle-aged speakers, as well as a few older speakers with weak traditional ties, shorten *feraxei* to *fexei* (or *vexei*) and use it without *pa(n)*. For example:

- (35) *Ga zi-zir vexei naande.*
 1SG RED-sit with they
 I'm sitting down with them.

One loquacious teenager who is a popular leader in his peer group was recorded using a different shortened form of this preposition, *fara*, together with the transitive suffix *-ing* instead of the oblique marker *pa(n)*, as in the following sentence. It is not clear if this is a personal idiosyncrasy at this stage or whether it is used by other speakers.

- (36) *naanda vaagdul fara-ing John*
 they all with-TR John
 all of them (together) with John

These innovations seem to reflect a feeling that, for many speakers, the use of *pa(n)* with *feraxei* is at least old-fashioned, and possibly ungrammatical. This is undoubtedly due to the influence of Tok Pisin *wantaim* and English *with*, neither of which is followed by an oblique marker, such as Tok Pisin *long*. The lack of agreement about the 'correct' form of the innovation may reflect insecurity about the grammatical relation which the noun phrase following *feraxei* should have once the oblique marker has been discarded. The second innovation, with a transitive marker identifying it as a direct object, may be the result of interpreting Tok Pisin *wantaim* as a stem ending in *-a*, *wanta*, so that it resembles Nalik *fara*. The final *-im* of *wantaim* is then analysed as the Tok Pisin transitive suffix *-im*, the equivalent of Nalik *-ing*. Such an interpretation would result in a clearly marked direct object grammatical relation of a noun phrase following both Tok Pisin *wantaim* and Nalik *fara(-ing)/feraxei*.

5. CONCLUSION

The nine innovations resulting in the variation discussed in this paper are summarised in Table 1. These innovations are the result of bilingualism in Tok Pisin among all speakers and widespread knowledge of at least basic English among even some older speakers. Both of these have been caused by the great social change which Nalik society has experienced in this century. The increasing dominance of Tok Pisin has resulted in linguistic insecurity among some speakers which may be an early indication of language death.

As one would expect, the centres of innovations are generally younger speakers and/or speakers who have relatively weak traditional ties and status. The centre for at least one innovation, the loss of marked inalienable possessive forms, is in the Northern East Coast dialect area. Just as the innovations spread through the population at an uneven rate, so too do they spread unevenly through the lexicon of each individual speaker.

For the most part the language is changing at its weakest points, which are its marked features. This is especially so where the loss of a marked feature is reinforced by Tok Pisin or English forms. This represents the convergence of the grammars of the two or three languages which bilingual and trilingual Nalik speakers use. Since this convergence is in the direction of Tok Pisin and English away from traditional Nalik forms, one must conclude that Tok Pisin and English are dominant in relation to Nalik.

TABLE 1: RECENT INNOVATIONS IN NALIK

INNOVATION	USED ESPECIALLY BY WHOM?	POSSIBLE MOTIVATION
1. no passive	all but older traditional men	Tok Pisin, PNG English loss of marked feature
2. <i>moa</i> comparatives	all but older traditional men	English, Tok Pisin
3. future with negation	all but older traditional men	reinterpretation of future marker as irrealis
4. <i>i</i> durative with transitives	young and middle-aged men	Tok Pisin loss of marked feature
5. use of <i>mun</i> plural marker with irregular <i>fu</i> -	all but older traditional men	loss of marked feature
6. article with dual marker	teens and children	English loss of marked feature
7. no alienable / inalienable distinction	younger speakers, men, North East Coast	English, Tok Pisin loss of marked feature
8. no oblique marker after <i>feraxei</i> 'with'	teens and children	Tok Pisin, English
9. transitive marker after <i>feraxei</i> 'with'	male teenager	reinterpretation of grammatical relation

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