

# Metathesis in Helong

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# Metathesis - definition

- 'Metathesis is the process whereby in certain languages the expected linear ordering of sounds is reversed under certain conditions. Thus, in a string of sounds where we would expect the ordering to be ... *xy* ... we instead find ... *yx* ...'

Hume (2004: 203)

# Metathesis in Austronesian languages – a small sample of languages

Rotuman (Central Pacific)	Kwara'ae (Solomon Islands)
Cebuano (Philippines)	Atayal (Taiwan)
Chamorro (Micronesia)	Dehu (New Caledonia)
Hiligaynon (Philippines)	Ilokano (Philippines)
Lenakel (Vanuatu)	Losiwoi (Vanuatu)
Lodang (Vanuatu)	Mokilese (Micronesia)
Mota (Vanuatu)	Nengone (New Caledonia)
Ririo (New Caledonia)	Sissano (PNG)
Taba (Halmahera)	Tagalog (Philippines)
Leti (SW Maluku)	Uab Meto (West Timor)
Mambae (East Timor)	Helong (West Timor)

# Metathesis in Timor area

- Widespread metathesis reported in a number of languages: Helong, Uab Meto, Leti, Mambae
- Many historically metathesised forms in other languages too, e.g. Tetun

PMP	Tetun	English
*tuduh	<i>tuur</i>	'knee'
*kekul	<i>kleuk</i>	'crooked'
*ma-lampu	<i>mpula</i>	'mad'
*tenaR	<i>natar</i>	'enclosure'

# The Helong language

- The former language of the Kupang region
- Once the language of Raja of Kupang
- Approx. 15,000 speakers
- Melayu Kupang largely replaced Helong in Kupang
- Still spoken a little in Bolok (port area on mainland)
- Most active speakers on Semau island

# INDONESIA NUSA TENGGARA AND SOUTHWESTERN MALUKU



Language Families

Malayo-Polynesian

Other

East New Guinea



Some areas are sparsely populated or uninhabited.  
Dotted lines show overlap of language areas.

# Metathesis in Helong

- Metathesis affects nearly every word in Helong
- Applies to major categories of verbs, nouns
- Also applies to minor categories such as prepositions, adverbs
- Doesn't apply to interjections

<b>Root</b>	<b>Metathesised form</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>ana</i>	<i>aan</i>	body
<i>apin</i>	<i>aip</i>	recently
<i>asa</i>	<i>saa</i>	what
<i>atuli</i>	<i>atuil</i>	person
<i>baba</i>	<i>baab</i>	with
<i>bane</i>	<i>baen</i>	pay
<i>blahen</i>	<i>blaeh</i>	weak
<i>blane</i>	<i>blaen</i>	sibling
<i>lelo</i>	<i>leol</i>	sun
<i>lokase</i>	<i>lokaes</i>	sweet potato
<i>Lote</i>	<i>Loet</i>	Roti
<i>lulu</i>	<i>luul</i>	roll
<i>mali</i>	<i>mail</i>	smile
<i>mana</i>	<i>maan</i>	place
<i>moledame</i>	<i>moledaem</i>	harmony
<i>muki</i>	<i>muik</i>	there
<i>nabale</i>	<i>nabael</i>	still
<i>sapa</i>	<i>saap</i>	spouse
<i>simu</i>	<i>siim</i>	accent



# Metathesis in linguistic theory

- A wide number of approaches have been used
- All approaches that I know of are purely phonological in nature though
- Helong poses a major problem for linguistic theory because conditions for triggering metathesis are in part syntactic
- Same applies in some other Timor languages too

# Metathesis in Uab Meto

- Syntactic triggering of metathesis

- a. *ume*      *bubu*  
house      round  
'The house is round.'

- b. *uem*      *bubu*  
house      round  
'the round house'

# Metathesis in Helong – some sentential examples

- a. *auk mali*  
1sg smile  
'I smile.'
- b. *Auk mail lahin*  
1sg smile yesterday  
'I smiled yesterday.'
- c. *Auk mali*  
1sg smile  
'I smile.'
- d. *Ku mail nol aku*  
2sg smile with 1sg  
'You smile with me.'

# Metathesis and other phonological rules

- Metathesis occurs after suffixation

- a. *maa laok se ia*  
come go at PROX

'Come here.'

- b. *Oen lako-s uma-s*  
3pl go-GOAL house-3pl

'They went to their houses.'

# Helong metathesis rules

## Rules

## Examples

Metathesised	Unmetathesised	Metathesised	Unmetathesised
C1V1C2V2	C1V1V2C2	<i>lako</i>	<i>laok</i> 'go'
C1V1C2V2C3	C1V1V2C2	<i>pukun</i>	<i>puuk</i> 'forest'
V1C2V2C3V3	V1C1V2V3C2	<i>atuli</i>	<i>atuil</i> 'person'

# Further research

- More detailed intonational research needed to see whether phonological conditioning from intonation might provide a possible analysis
- Preliminary indications are that some rules need to be based on syntax
- Interesting phenomenon at interface of syntax and phonology