

## Apical obstruents in pre-*proto-Tangkic* and the origins of the non-zero absolutive

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In this paper I present an extract from a larger project reconstructing the history of nominal morphology in the Tangkic languages of Queensland, Australia (non-Pama-Nyungan). Here I follow one of the subplots that runs through the long term evolution of the system, namely the disappearance and then reappearance of non-initial apical oral stops, [t] and [t̪]. The story of word-medial [t] is particularly interesting because its reappearance occurs during a sequence of events which culminates in the emergence of the young, non-zero Tangkic absolutive marker – a marker whose historical origins have proven elusive for a number of decades now.

The story begins with the lack of final [t] and [t̪] on Tangkic nominal stems. The absence of these segments from the inventory of stem-finals is typologically irregular, given that non-apicals do occur (Hamilton 1996). Under an areally sensitive version of the uniformitarian hypothesis (that we should reconstruct languages that are typologically regular in the region), this leads one to question whether this gap is due to historical loss, and indeed good evidence can be amassed to show that it is. I reconstruct that original, stem final [t] and [t̪] collapsed with stem final trilled [r], most likely via flapping, accounting for the preponderance of [r]-finals in Tangkic and also a number of apparently very old compounds where [r] appears in phonotactically anomalous positions, where one would expect [t] or [t̪]. Of interest for the second half of the talk is that *tayka*, which in modern Tangkic means ‘person; man’, or rarely ‘thing’, turns up in one such old compound meaning ‘thing’.

The second part of the talk shifts to a period in late pre-*proto-Tangkic*. My claim here is that an old hypothesis, suggested along with doubts as to its validity by Hale (1973), is in fact the correct one: the system of truncation for which Lardil is famous was mostly in operation already in *proto-Tangkic*, but has subsequently largely been lost in Kayardild, entirely so in Yukulta. This system had been set up by a series of domain-final consonant deletions for which independent evidence is available. The crucial difference is that while Lardil truncates all underlying final vowels and does so word-finally, pre-*proto-Tangkic* truncated only final [a], and did so phrase-finally (as does modern Kayardild). Recognising this leads with only a few assumptions to an almost complete account of the complex allomorphy of the young, non-zero Tangkic absolutive marker, via a process of diachronic rule inversion: whereas truncation originally deleted certain syllable types at phrase edges, ongoing restructuring of the Tangkic sentence (Evans 1995) led to optional, phrase-medial truncation, which was reinterpreted not as optional deletion, but merely as optional presence of certain final syllables. This in turn led to the augmentation of shorter words, including nominals in the absolutive case, which until this point had simply been bare stems. The only piece of the puzzle not yet supplied by this account is the syllable [-ta] which attaches to coronal-final stems.

The source of [-ta], I argue, is the morpheme *tayka* which attached to other nominal stems in right-headed compounds, N-*tayka*. Here it meant ‘thing/one’, e.g. *kalkan-tayka* ‘sick (one)’. Now, according to the synchronic rules of the time, this would be regularly truncated to [kalkan-ta]. In predicative nominal sentences such as [[<sub>N</sub>kunawuna] [<sub>N</sub>kalkan-ta]] – [[child] [sick(-one)]] ‘the child is (a) sick (one)’, this [-ta], with virtually no semantic content, was reanalysed as the ‘missing’ coronal augment, and was spread from there to other coronal final stems.

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