

eeeH

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This paper presents some preliminary explorations into the ideophone *eeeH* and related forms occurring in (at least) three languages of West Papua: Papuan Malay, Ambel (an Austronesian language of Raja Ampat) and Roon (an Austronesian language of the Cenderawasih Bay). Phonetically, *eeeH* consists of an extra-long front mid vowel [e] associated with a high or high falling pitch contour. Semantically, *eeeH* expresses excessivity, typically with respect to literal or metaphorical distance; in addition, it endows the utterance with greater vividness and expressivity.

In Papuan Malay, *eeeH* may occur after scalar adjectives, e.g. *bagus eeeH*, 'good *eeeH*'. Its most common occurrence, however, is in coalesced form with two specific words, *sampe* 'until' yielding *sampeeeH*, and *sana* 'there' resulting in *saneeeH*. In addition, each of the two phonetic elements of *eeeH* occurs independently: *e* as a ubiquitous sentence-final particle one of whose major functions is deixis, and the long H tone as a marker of excessivity, e.g. in the exclamation *anjiiiHng* 'dog'.

In Ambel, the major function of *eeeH* is to indicate extreme distance. This *eeeH* is realized with a high falling pitch, and coalesces with a unit containing a demonstrative or directional element (e.g. deictic determiners, nouns, or adverbs). For example, the deictic noun *lolima* 'the far away place inland' contrasts with *lolimeeeH* 'the extremely far away place inland'. This *eeeH* also can occur after the conjunction *be* 'in order to', giving *beeeH*; this realization of *be* tends to occur at salient moments in discourse, particularly to add vividness to a narrative.

In Roon, the two phonetic elements of *eeeH* have undergone lexicalization and semantic bleaching in the domain of inalienable possession. When the possessor is singular, the expected 1st, 2nd and 3rd person paradigm is replaced by a 2x2 paradigm formed by two elements, the clitic *me* and the long H tone. The possessed noun may be followed by one or both of these elements, each expressing distance, and then a pronominal marker agreeing with the possessed noun, as shown in the following table, for *rovu* 'head' and *ri* '3SG.INAN':

	∅	H
∅	<i>rovu=ri</i>	<i>rovu=H=ri</i>
<i>me</i>	<i>rovu=me=ri</i>	<i>rovu=me=H=ri</i>

While speakers sometimes offer *rovu=ri*, *rovu=me=ri* and *rovu=H=ri* as translations for 'my head', 'your head' and 'his/her head' respectively, the person values are actually flexible: the fundamental semantic feature is that of distance, 'close head' vs. 'distant head'. The distinction between the ∅ and H forms in this paradigm constitutes the only case we are currently familiar with of lexical or grammatical tone in the language.

While the details of *eeeH* differ in each of the three languages considered, sufficient commonalities are in evidence suggesting a common source. In the conclusion we offer some speculations with regard to how *eeeH* might have developed, spread, and become grammaticalized.