

# The Ubiquitous, Anomalous *-om-* Infix in Kankanaey

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Many Philippine languages have the infix *-om-* (or *-um-*, depending on the orthography) in their repertoire of predicate affixes. Kankanaey, a language spoken in communities in northern Luzon, mostly in Benguet Province, is among those languages. This study looks at the range of predicates that are formed with this infix in Kankanaey, and attempts to define the conditioning factors that govern its use.

Kankanaey has lexical roots that may describe nominal entities, attributes, actions, or states. Verbal predicates are formed by combining a lexical root with one of several affixes that cross-reference one argument of the verb, that is, one participant in the state of affairs indicated by the verb. These arguments may be grouped by the macroroles Actor and Undergoer, as defined by their place in the logical structure of the verb. In most cases, a particular verbal affix is restricted to cross-referencing specific semantic roles that group together as either Actors or Undergoers, giving rise to such traditional labels as “actor-focus verb” or “object-focus verb.” This study finds that *-om-* defies this restriction by cross-referencing a special group of Actors and a special group of Undergoers.

In Kankanaey, verbal affixes contribute to the agency implicature of the verb’s Actor. In particular, *-om-* is used to license the Actor status of arguments with low or reduced agency. With stative roots, *-om-* cross-references Undergoer arguments that participate in independent active change-of-state events.

This study concludes that with *-om-*-affixed verbs in Kankanaey, the status of their cross-referenced argument is compromised or modified in some way, occupying a middle ground between typical Actors and typical Undergoers.

## 1.1 Introduction

Kankanaey, a language spoken by 150,000 people in communities in northern Luzon, mostly in Benguet Province, is among the many Philippine languages that count *-om-* (*-um-* in many orthographies) among their verbal affixes. This study looks at the range of verbal predicates that are formed with this affix in Kankanaey, and attempts to define the conditioning factors that govern its use. The theoretical background is compatible with Role and Reference Grammar as presented in *Syntax* by Robert D. VanValin, Jr. and Randy J. LaPolla, 1997 (hereafter VVLP). Data for this study was excerpted from texts gathered in Benguet between 1975 and 1996.

## 1.2 Background

Kankanaey verbal predicates are formed by combining a lexical root with one of several predicating affixes. A lexical root denotes a state of affairs and the possible participants in it. The lexical roots that combine with predicating affixes may be categorized as denoting either dynamic situations (actions), or states, including attributes. In a clause, the predicating affixes cross-reference one argument of the verb, that is, one participant in the state of affairs indicated by the root. Another term for this cross-referencing that has been used in many Philippine studies is “focus.”

In this study, the Logical Structure of each verb will be presented in accordance with the lexical representation of the Aktionsart classification system,<sup>1</sup> which indicates the temporal properties and the participants in the state of affairs. These arguments may be grouped by the macroroles Actor and Undergoer, as defined by their place in the logical structure of the verb<sup>2</sup>. Table 1 shows six types of predicates with their logical structures (LS). Note that Activities are represented by the presence of **do'** and that a change of state may be expressed as an Achievement or Accomplishment depending on the time variable, whether instantaneous (INGR) or requiring time (BECOME). Accomplishments express changes with an end-point while Process Accomplishments (PROC) are open-ended. Combinations of predicates include Active Accomplishments and Causatives of every kind.

**Table 1. Lexical representations for Aktionsart classes**  
(from VVLP page 109 with PROC added)

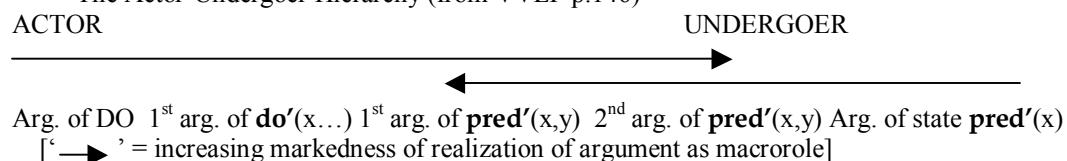
<i>Verb class</i>	<i>Logical Structure</i>
State	<b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x,y)
Activity	<b>do'</b> (x, [ <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x,y)])
Achievement	INGR <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x,y) or INGR <b>do'</b> (x, [ <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x,y)])
Accomplishment	BECOME <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x,y) BECOME <b>do'</b> (x, [ <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x,y)]) PROC <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x,y)
Active accomplishment	<b>do'</b> (x, [ <b>predicate'</b> <sub>1</sub> (x,(y))]) & BECOME <b>predicate'</b> <sub>2</sub> (z, x) or (y)
Causative	$\alpha$ CAUSE $\beta$ where $\alpha, \beta$ are LSs of any type

### 1.2.1 Kankanaey State predicates

Kankanaey state roots denote inherent or unvarying situations or may denote the result of some causative force without specified intentionality. The affixes that combine with these roots inflect for tense, indicating the truth of the situation or the effectiveness of the causative force. The typical Undergoer argument of a state root is inactive, unintentional and totally affected. State predicates may have only an Undergoer, or in perceptive or mental states, an Actor as well.

<sup>1</sup> In this representational system, boldface type with a prime indicates semantic constants, capital letters indicate modifications to the predicate, and normal type in parentheses indicates the argument variables.

<sup>2</sup> The Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy (from VVLP p.146)



### 1.2.2 Kankanaey Activity predicates

Most Kankanaey action roots have lexicalized agency, which typically involves animacy, intention, independent action, and control on the part of the Actor. Exceptions to this general rule include roots that denote physical motion or position. Agency can also include causation, which implies success or effectiveness. Tense corroborates this component of meaning. The Kankanaey array of verbal affixes give choices for expressing varying degrees or aspects of agency. Some may contribute to the agency implicature, others may block it. Activity predicates may have only an Actor, or both an Actor and one or more Undergoer arguments.

### 1.2.3 Kankanaey Achievement and Accomplishment predicates

While Kankanaey state roots denote a non-dynamic ongoing situation, changes of state are a different kind of predicate. As pointed out in VVLP (p. 93), Achievements and Accomplishments are not static. They are “happenings,” but they are not dynamic, in that they do not involve any action on the part of the participant. There is effectiveness, but no intention. These change-of-state verbs have Undergoer arguments.

## 2. Thesis: The role of *-om-* in Kankanaey predicates

In Kankanaey, verbal affixes are restricted to cross-referencing an argument that fills specific semantic roles that group together as either Actors or Undergoers. Examples of Actors include AGENTS, EFFECTORS, and MOVERS, while Undergoers include PATIENTS, THEMES, and GOALS. One affix, the infix *-om-*, does not conform to this restriction, but forms predicates that cross-reference Actors in some contexts, and Undergoers in others. This study looks at representative examples of verbs formed with *-om-* and notes that in each case, the agency of the cross-referenced argument is modified from the default value in some way. These anomalies vary according to the type of roots and type of verbs that are formed; they do not at first seem to form a homogenous group. A careful look at the logical structures of the examples and a consideration of the common thread of atypical features of agency in each of them sheds light on the role of the affix *-om-*.

The following discussion looks first at verbs formed with *-om-* from action roots, then at verbs formed from stative roots. The examples include the Logical Structure of the verb. For ease in understanding the examples, please note that the cross-referenced argument follows the verbal predicate and is an absolutive-case pronoun, or a noun preceded by the absolutive nominal marker *din*. A key to abbreviations is noted below.<sup>3</sup>

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### <sup>3</sup> Abbreviations

A	Absolutive (cross-referenced) case
def*	definite
E	Ergative case
INGR	Ingressive (punctual)
INTENS	Intensive aspect (reduplication)
LK	Linker
LS	Logical Structure
NM	Nominal Marker of cross-referenced NP* (cont.)

## 2.1 Action roots with *-om-*

With action roots, the affix *-om-* forms intransitive Activity predicates (see Table 1 above). The cross-referenced argument of these Activity predicates is the first argument of the **do'** predicate, which is an EFFECTOR with no inherent agency implied (VVLP, p. 118). The following examples reveal the various agency modifications covered by *-om-*.

### 2.1.1 Unintentional Activity predicates

With roots that denote an atelic action or movement, *-om-* forms Activity verbs with inherent or unspecified unintentionality. In example (1), the mass-noun argument (blood) is not intentional, and is moved by uncontrolled natural forces.

- (1) *Omaloyas din dada na.*  
*om-flow NM blood 3sE*  
 'His blood flows down.' **do'** (blood, [**flow'** (blood)])

In (2), the baby is crying uncontrollably or unintentionally. When an older person cries, the root is more likely to be affixed with *man-* (Actor-referencing), or with *i-* or *an-*, which cross-reference other entities related to the crying. The use of *-om-* blocks any agentivity implicature for this verb.

- (2) *Omogaoga din moyang.*  
*om -INTENS-cry NM baby*  
 'The baby is bawling.' **do'** (baby, [**cry'** (baby)])

### 2.1.2 Dual-role Activity predicates

In example (3), *-om-* is used with a transitive root. (The Actor is chosen for cross-reference in this antipassive voice construction because of pragmatic, topical implications in the discourse.) *Onod*, 'to follow someone/thing' is an atelic movement verb with implied intentionality, and the MOVER is also a THEME that is the entity moved by the action. This dual role complicates or reduces the agentivity of the participant, and *-om-* is the Actor-referencing affix chosen.

- (3) *Omonodak en agik.*  
*om-follow-1sA OPNM cousin-my*  
 'I follow/am following my cousin .' **do'** (I, [**follow'** (I, cousin)])

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O(P)NM	Oblique (Personal) Nominal Marker
PROC	Process
Q	Question
s	singular
1,2,3	personal pronouns
	* <i>din</i> (NM) is further analyzed as <i>di-n</i> (NM-def)

### 2.1.3 Inchoative Activity predicates

The root *tayaw* ‘to fly’ most often occurs with *man-*, the unmarked Actor-referencing affix, to indicate the atelic action of birds overhead (*mantayaw*). This root lexicalizes some degree of intention or control (birds can not accidentally fly!). When *-om-* is used instead of *man-*, as in (4), it cannot override the agentivity but rather specifies punctuality, i.e., the moment of inception of the the bird’s activity. This example does not immediately support the “reduced-agency” hypothesis for *-om-*-referenced Actors, and we will return to it shortly.

- (4) “*Wit dokit*” *kanana yan pag tomayaw*.  
*‘wit dokit’ say-3sE and then om-fly (3sA)*  
 ‘Wit-dokit’ he said and then flew away.’ INGR **do’** (3s, [**fly’** (3s)])

#### 2.1.4.1 Antipassive Activity predicates with partial effectiveness

With 2-argument roots, the norm in Kankanaey is to use an Undergoer-referencing affix such as *-en* to form an Active Accomplishment verb as in (5) with the verb *gisgis*, ‘to split something’. When the assertion answers the question “What is he doing?”, Actor-referencing *man-* is the affix used to form an Activity verb as in example (6). Note that the PATIENT, bamboo, is not referential. When the PATIENT is referential but only partially affected, as in example (7), the Undergoer argument can not be cross-referenced on the verb as a full-fledged argument of INGR **split’** because not all of it is affected. The less-than-effective Actor is cross-referenced by *-om-* in an antipassive construction, while the undergoer, still referential, is marked as oblique and definite.

- (5) *Gisgisem din anes ay doy*.  
*split-en.2sE NM bamboo LK that*  
 ‘Split that bamboo.’ **do’** (you, [**split’** (you, bamboo)]) & INGR **split’** (bamboo)

- (6) *Man-gisgisgis si anes*.  
*man-PROG-split (3sA) ONM bamboo*  
 ‘He is splitting bamboo.’ **do’** (3s, [**split’** (3s, bamboo)])

- (7) *Gomisgis ka si-n anes ay doy*.  
*om-split 2sA ONM-def bamboo LK that*  
 ‘Split some of that bamboo.’ **do’** (you, [**split’** (you, bamboo)])

#### 2.1.4.2 Antipassive Activity predicates with agentivity hierarchy inversion

As noted above, 2-argument roots typically take an Undergoer-referencing affix in active voice. This is the case in (8), where the Undergoer (GOAL here) of *ayag* ‘to call someone’ is cross-referenced by the affix *-an*. In (9), *-om-* is used with this root to cross-reference the Actor while the Undergoer is surprisingly implicit but not syntactically expressed. This is the choice of affixation with many verbs when the Undergoer is first person, or when the Undergoer is human and the Actor an animal, as in (10), or even an inanimate entity, as will be seen in (11).

Silverstein<sup>4</sup> has proposed the Inherent Lexical Content Hierarchy such that 1<sup>st</sup> person > 2<sup>nd</sup> person > 3<sup>rd</sup> person > Proper Name > Human > Animate > Inanimate. When *-om-* is used to form antipassives with no expressed oblique second argument, it is only for situations in which the implied Undergoer is higher on the hierarchy than the Actor, with more inherent agentivity. This provides additional evidence that Actors of *-om-* predicates have reduced agentivity.

(8) *Ay ayagam sisya?*

*Q call-an.2sE 3sA*

'Are you calling him/her?' **do'** (you, [**call'** (you, him/her)])

(9) *Ay omayag ka?*

*Q om-call 2sA*

'Are you calling me?' **do'** (you, [**call'** (you, (me))])

(10) *Komat din aso!*

*om-bite NM dog*

'(Careful!) The dog bites!' **do'** (dog, [**bite'** (dog, (people))])

## 2.2 Stative Roots with *-om-*

With stative roots, the affix *-om-* forms several different types of predicates. The cross-referenced arguments of these predicates are atypical in their status as Undergoers. Causative Accomplishments with *-om-* cross-reference unintentional causers of situations. Position changes with *-om-* could be interpreted as Causative Accomplishments in which the Undergoer causes the change, or as Active Accomplishments in which the Undergoer is the Actor. Achievements with their inchoative INGR modification, signalling the sudden beginning of a state, come very close to being dynamic events involving only an Undergoer. Accomplishments and Processes cross-reference Undergoers who are independently participating in non-static situations.

### 2.2.1 Causative Accomplishment Predicates

Typical causatives in Kankanaey are derived with the prefix *pa-* in combination with other affixes. However, some stative and nominal roots form causative verbs with *-om-*. In (11) the inherent nature of wine is seen as causing drunkenness to unspecified arguments. In (12) something about the night or walking abroad at that time is seen as causing the presence of ghosts. These examples are interesting, because although the root is stative and intransitive, the causative introduces a second participant into the logical structure, the EFFECTOR that causes the change of state. This is the participant that *-om-* cross-references. In (11) the CAUSER is inanimate and the PATIENT (the one getting drunk) must be animate. In (12) the CAUSER is a state of affairs, and the THEME (ghost) is perceived as animate. In both examples, the CAUSER is less animate than the affected entity. Thus *-om-* is used to signal an inversion of the agentivity hierarchy with causative predicates.

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<sup>4</sup> Silverstein, 1976. Quoted in VVLP page 365.

(11) *Bometeng din alak.*  
*om-drunk NM wine*  
 ‘Wine is intoxicating.’ [do' (wine, ỳ)] CAUSE [BECOME **drunk'** (ỳ)]

(12) *Adi ka mandan sin labi, tan bomanig.*  
*neg 2sA man-walk ONM night because om-ghost*  
 ‘Don’t walk at night, because it will make ghosts come out.’  
 [.....] CAUSE [BECOME **be.present'** (ghost)]

## 2.2.2 Causative Accomplishment or Active Accomplishment Predicates

In (13), the state root *tokdo* ‘seated’ when affixed with *-om-* means ‘to sit down.’ This could be interpreted as a Causative Accomplishment, in which one does something to assume a seated position. Alternatively, this predicate could be seen as an Active Accomplishment, as represented in the example. The single argument is both MOVER (Actor) and the THEME (Undergoer) of the resultant state. In example (3) above with *onod*, ‘to follow someone or thing’ there was no question of assigning Undergoer status to the MOVER/THEME, due to the presence of a second argument of the root. With an intransitive stative root like *tokdo*, there is a tension between assigning Undergoer or Actor to the single argument. In these cases, the Actor-referencing option is handled with *-om-*.

(13) *Tomoktokdoak..*  
*om-PROG-sit-1sA*  
 ‘I am (in the act of) sitting down.’ do' (I, [sit' (I)] & BECOME **seated'** (I)

## 2.2.3 Achievement and Accomplishment Predicates

Roots that express a static condition or a resultant state after some action typically form verbs with *ma-* (completive aspect *na-*). The actual moment (INGR) or process (BECOME or PROC) of changing a state, however, is not static but active. When these modifications appear in the logical structure, *-om-* is used with many roots.

In (14) and (15), the State and Achievement (instantaneous change-of-state) uses of *b(e)tak* ‘to burst’ are compared. Example (14) shows the static situation of a flat tire. When *-om-* is used, in (15), the predicate describes an active event as the participant independently begins to be in the state denoted by the lexical root.

(14) *Nabtak din goma na.*  
*na-burst NM innertube 3sE*  
 ‘Its innertube is burst/flat.’ **burst'** (innertube)

(15) *Bomtak din goma na.*  
*om-burst NM innertube 3sE*  
 ‘Its innertube will burst/pop.’ INGR **burst'** (innertube)

(16) is an example of an Accomplishment verb formed with *-om-*. The progressive aspect supports the durative non-static interpretation. The THEME (bus) that moves toward the “arrival” state is participating in a active event. A more subtle example is with Process verbs, open-ended

(atelic) changes of state. (17) shows a Process verb formed by *-om-* with a color-state root, and a participant with no agentivity yet participating in an event that is changing over time.

(16) *Domatdateng din bas.*  
*om-PROG-arrive NM bus*  
 ‘The bus is approaching.’ BECOME **be.at.ref.point'** (bus)

(17) *Ngometit din lokto mo ibilag mo.*  
*om-black NM yam if i(U-ref)-be.in.sun 2sE*  
 ‘The yam will darken if you put it out in the sun.’ PROC **black'** (yam)

### 2.2.4 Return to inchoative Activity predicates

Example (4) may now be compared with other examples in which *-om-* is used when BECOME or INGR is found in the logical structure. Although the argument maintains its inherent agentivity with *tayaw* ‘to fly’, the marked construction with *-om-* indicates the presence of INGR in the Logical Structure, denoting the beginning of the activity. One could argue that more intentionality might be implied by the inceptive aspect, another example of a modification of agentivity, and further study with more inchoative activity verbs (few examples have been noted) would be of interest. On the other hand, perhaps the use of *-om-* with INGR was extended from states to activities at some point in the history of the development of this language.

### 3.1 Conclusion

This study has examined various lexical and grammatical contexts in which the agency of a cross-referenced argument in Kankanaey diverges from the norm or default value when the predicate is formed with *-om-*. The examples include situations in which the Actor argument has no intentionality, or when it does not have full effectiveness. Actors that are both EFFECTOR and THEME of a predicate and Actors that have lower inherent agentivity than the Undergoer also are cross-referenced by *-om-*. In situations where states are changed, the static meaning of the root is changed to an active event, with no other participant than an Undergoer. This study has shown that in Kankanaey, these various complications and modifications of meaning are handled by the verbal affix *-om-*, which legitimizes the anomalous cross-referenced arguments of the predicates it forms.



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The preceding document was presented at the Tenth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics (10-ICAL). To properly reference this work, please use the following format:

<LastName>, <FirstName>. 2006. <PaperTitle>. Paper presented at Tenth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics. 17-20 January 2006. Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, Philippines.  
<http://www.sil.org/asia/philippines/ical/papers.html>

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