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7 Komnzo demonstratives and intersubjectivity

Abstract: This chapter describes three linguistic devices in Komnzo, a language spoken in southern New Guinea, for encoding intersubjective parameters such as the attention or knowledge states of the speech actors. I show that all three devices are formally related to the demonstrative system of the language, but that their function is not spatial in nature. The description is based on a corpus of 12 hours of natural speech. The present study contributes to the ongoing investigation of intersubjective markers in Komnzo and to the typology of epistemic grammar.

Keywords: Demonstratives, intersubjectivity, epistemics, Papuan languages, Yam languages

7.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses the demonstrative system of Komnzo, a language of the Yam family spoken in the south-west of Papua New Guinea.[1] I focus here on various functional and formal extensions of demonstratives, especially those that do not refer to spatial configurations, but rather involve intersubjective factors such as the attention or knowledge states of the speech act participants. Recently, such intersubjective functions have been subsumed under the label of "engagement" by Evans, Bergqvist, and San Roque (2018a,b). For this chapter, I draw on corpus data from natural recordings and from a stimulus picture task.

1 ISO 639-3: tci, Glottocode: komn1238.

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As an initial example, consider the four Komnzo statements in (1a-d), which are quite similar in their propositional content. Note that all four sentences were constructed for expository purposes.

(1) a. *zane* *kar=fo* *sa\thor/a*
PROX village= ALL 3SG.M:PST:PFV/arrive

b. *zane* *kar=fo* *sa|thor/a* *z=|yé/*
PROX village=ALL 3SG.M:PST:PFV/arrive PROX=3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be

c. *zane* *kar=fo* *zf* *sa|thor/a*
PROX village=ALL ZF 3SG.M:PST:PFV/arrive
(a-c): 'He arrived in this village.'

d. *zane* *bäne=fo* *sa|thor/a* *(kar=fo)*
PROX PH=ALL 3SG.M:PST:PFV/arrive (village=ALL)
'He arrived in this whatchamacallit (in the village).'

Examples (1a)–(1d) could be uttered as part of a narrative about a man arriving in a particular village. Note that all examples contain the proximal demonstrative *zane* 'this', and thus they make a verbal pointing gesture to a location near the deictic centre. Examples (1a)–(1c) are identical in their English translation, but their appropriate use is conditioned by differences in discourse situation. Example (1a) is unmarked and could be used in a neutral setting. By contrast, (1b) adds a demonstrative identifier (cf. Diessel 1999:10): a copula with a deictic proclitic. I refer to this as the "presentational construction" in Komnzo. It is appropriately used in situations in which both the speaker and hearer have access to the state of affairs, for example because they are looking at the same entity. In (1b), they would both know about the village and its location, and they would both expect that the man arrives there. (1c) contains the particle *zf*, which is used in situations of (supposed) epistemic asymmetry. The speaker claims priviledged knowledge of some state of affairs. This could be uttered because the speaker wants to draw the hearer's attention to something, or because they want to defend the statement against contradictory claims. Thus, the context is such that the events are somewhat unexpected. Example (1d) has a different translation because it contains the placeholder *bäne*, which is used mainly in disfluency situations when the speaker has problems in word-finding, hence the optional self-repair in brackets. However, *bäne* is also used in situations in which the speaker assumes sufficient common ground, that is in situations of "recognitional deixis" (Enfield 2003). Example (1d) could be uttered (without the self-repair) in a context in which the speaker can safely rely on the hearer's knowledge to fill in the blanks. What is important for this chapter, is the fact that all three marking strategies, the presentational construction, the particle *zf*, and the placeholder *bäne* can be linked more or less directly to the system of demonstratives.

Situations in which intersubjective factors involving knowledge and joint attention are crucial for understanding such linguistic structures. They have been subsumed under the supercategory "engagement" by Evans, Bergqvist, and San Roque (2018a,b), who define the term as "the relative accessibility of an entity or state of affairs to the speaker and addressee" (Evans, Bergqvist, and San Roque 2018a:118). Evans et al. present Andoke, an isolate language of the Colombian Amazon (Landaburu 2007), as a canonical example. In Andoke, all declarative and interrogative sentences are marked with one of the four prefixes in Table 1, which encode epistemic access for speaker and addressee.

Table 1: Andoke markers for epistemic access.

	+ Speaker knowledge	**− Speaker knowledge**
+ Addressee knowledge	*b-*	*k-/d-*
– Addressee knowledge	*kẽ-*	*bã-*

The prefixes in Table 1 are attached to an auxiliary base in preverbal position. The system exhausts all four logically possible configurations, and can therefore be regarded as perfectly symmetrical. Moreover, this marking strategy is obligatory in the language. Taking Andoke as a point of departure, Evans, Bergqvist,and San Roque (2018a,b) show that engagement marking is found in many languages around the world. These systems draw from a variety of linguistic subsystems and vary in their degree of grammaticalisation. Deictic systems play a prominent role among the sources of grammaticalisation.

Recent publications have revealed a rich diversity in the grammatical devices that encode engagement. For example, Olsson (2019) describes the system for Marind, an Anim language spoken in the South of New Guinea, in which there is a special inflectional form of the verb to signal that the state of affairs is outside the addressee's current focus of attention. Mansfield (2019) describes for Murrinhpatha, an Australian language of the Northern Territory, an initial *k*-alternation in verbs that signals the speaker's epistemic primacy over the addressee. Knuchel (2019) investigates the system of demonstratives in Kogi, a Chibchan language of Northern Colombia, concluding that certain (ad)nominal forms that were initially associated with addressee proximity cannot be accounted for in merely spatial terms.

The present chapter follows this line of research taking Komnzo demonstratives as an example. The remainder of this section is dedicated to some preliminary topics, such as the sociolinguistic background (Section 7.1.1), the text corpus (Section 7.1.2) and a brief typological overview of the language (Section 7.1.3). Section 7.2 introduces the demonstrative system of Komnzo. The main body of the chapter discusses three grammatical devices, namely the presentational construc-

tion in Section 7.3, the particle *zf* in Section 7.4 and the placeholder *bäne* in Section 7.5. I summarise my thoughts in Section 7.6.

7.1.1 Sociolinguistic background

Komnzo is a small language even by the standards of Papua New Guinea, where language communities tend to be small. Komnzo is spoken by approximately 200–250 speakers in the village of Rouku and Morehead Station. Genetically, the language belongs to the Tonda subgroup of the Yam languages (Döhler 2018:36ff.). Figure 1 shows a map of the language family with Komnzo in the centre.

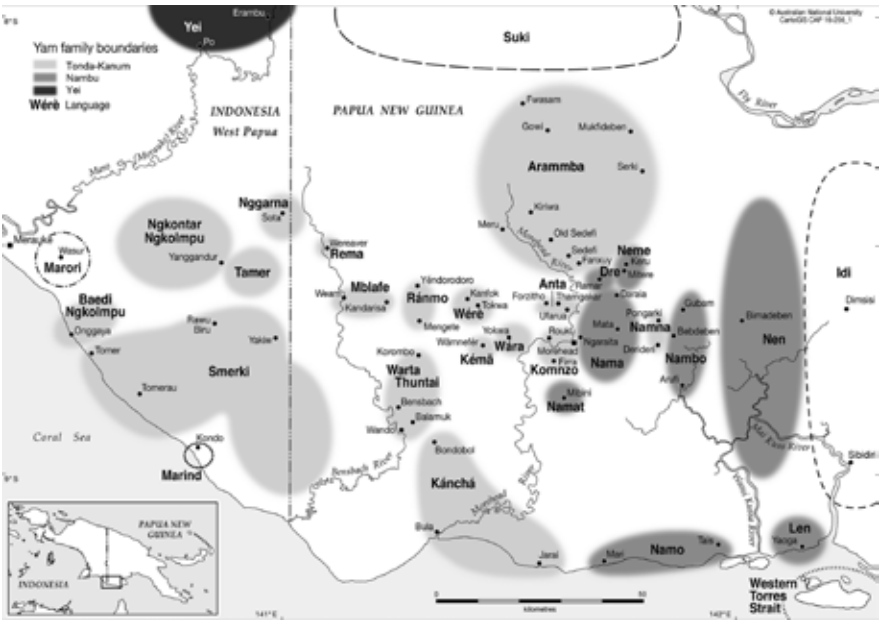

Figure 1: The Yam language family.

Komnzo speakers live in a highly multilingual society (Döhler 2018:34ff.). Due to a marriage pattern of sister-exchange with exogamous groups based on clan, place, and (epiphenomenally) on language variety, virtually all children grow up with at least two languages. In reality, the repertoire of most children includes 4–5 languages by the time they reach adulthood.

Komnzo speakers live in a small-scale traditional society, i.e., what has been called a “society of intimates” (Givón 2018, Givón and Young 2002). In this type of

social setting all generic knowledge is shared and almost all daily interactions take place between individuals who have known each other for a long time. It seems reasonable to assume that this results in a high degree of common ground, thus, leading to higher informational predictability in face-to-face conversation.

7.1.2 Text corpus

The data discussed in this chapter is based on recordings made between 2010 and 2015, archived as Döhler (2021). The corpus used here comprises around 12 hours of various text genres, including both natural and stimuli-based narratives and conversations (Table 2). 34 speakers of both sexes (9 women and 25 men) and various ages (20 to 68) are featured in the corpus. The overall size is around 55,000 word tokens, which makes the Komnzo text corpus a typical "language documentation corpus" (Mosel 2012).

Table 2: Corpus overview.

Text type	hh:mm:ss
Conversations	01:01:55
Conversational tasks	01:49:51
Narratives	06:40:18
Procedural texts	02:11:36
Public speeches	00:42:38
Total	12:26:18

All corpus examples are referenced with a source code of the following format: [tci-YYYYMMDD-NN SSS ##].[2] Example (9) in this chapter has the source code [tci20121019-04 ABB 96–98]: It is the fourth recording made on October 19th 2012. The speaker is Abia Bai (ABB). The example shows annotation units 96 to 98. All files have been archived at Zenodo, where the file names of the corresponding source files follow the same format, e.g. ELAN transcription file (tci20121019-04.eaf), audio-file (tci20121019-04.wav), and video-file (tci20121019-04.mpeg).[3]

2 The first part identifies the transcription file. Each session and the included files start with the ISO 639-3 code for Komnzo: tci. Next comes the date of the recording (YYYYMMDD) and the session number on that date (NN). The second part identifies the example within the transcription file. Transcription tiers are sorted by speaker (SSS). Annotation units on the respective transcription tiers are numbered (##).

3 While the ELAN transcription files are stored in a single zip-file (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1306246), the audio/video files can be found in the Komnzo "community" as separate archive items: https://zenodo.org/communities/komnzo.

7.1.3 Typological overview

Komnzo is a double-marking language, in which the verb indexes core arguments and noun phrases are flagged for case. The basic word order is Actor-Undergoer-Verb. The case marking is organised in an ergative-absolutive system. In addition to four core cases (absolutive, ergative, dative, possessive), there are 13 semantic cases. Nominal morphology is agglutinative, while verb morphology is highly synthetic. Verbs are by far the most complex part of speech in the language. Verbs mark person, number and gender of up to two participants, 18 TAM categories, valency, directionality and deictic status. Complexity lies not only in the amount of grammatical categories that can be expressed morphologically, but also in the way these categories are encoded (Döhler 2018:175ff.). This is best described by the term "distributed exponence" (Carroll 2016), a subtype of multiple exponence (Caballero and Harris 2012) in which the information needed for a specific value (e.g. number, aspect, tense) is distributed over several morphological slots.

This aspect of the language is not the topic of this chapter, but it has a practical effect on the presentation of example sentences, in that I do not show the morpheme segmentation of verbs. Instead, I apply the word-and-paradigm approach (Matthews 1974): In the morpheme tier, I separate the verb stem from affixal material by placing it between \slashes/. In the gloss tier, I list the relevant grammatical categories (argument structure, TAM, directionality) followed by the lexeme translation, for example *e|mar/wé* [1SG>2|3PL:NPST:IPFV/see] 'I see them'.

7.2 Demonstratives

Before we proceed it is worth presenting the paradigm of Komnzo demonstratives. As a definitional point of departure, I follow Diessel (1999:2ff.) in assuming that the most basic function of demonstratives is a spatial (or situational) use, but see Himmelmann (1996) and De Mulder (1996) for a critique of this view. Based on this definition, we can identify the forms given in Table 3 as demonstratives.

Table 3: Demonstratives in situational uses.

	PRONOUN / DETERMINER	ADVERB			CLITIC
		NEUTRAL	ALLATIVE	ABLATIVE	
PROX	*zane*	*zä*	*zbo*	*zba*	*z=*
MED		*bä*	*bobo*	*boba*	*b=*
DIST		*fä*	*fobo*	*foba*	*f=*

The paradigm is subdivided into three categories – proximal, medial and distal – which are formally signalled by the initial consonant: /z/ for proximal, /b/ for medial and /f/ for distal.[4] The three categories of spatial deixis are also linked to personal deixis, in that the personal pronouns begin with the same phoneme. For the first person, Komnzo obscures the connection a little, since the first person singular pronoun does not begin with /z/, like the proximal series, but with /nz/, as in *nzä* [1SG.ABS]. However, this is clearer in closely related varieties such as Wära and Anta, which all begin with /z/, as in *ze* [1SG.ABS] in Wära. For the second and third person, the initial consonants of Komnzo personal pronouns match the /b/-initial medial and the /f/-initial distal demonstratives, as in *bä* [2.ABS] and *fi* [3.ABS]. In sum, there is a clear formal connection between the proximal and 1st person, the medial and 2nd person, and the distal and the 3rd person.

Syntactically, the demonstratives in Table 3 belong to different parts of speech, which aligns with Diessel's classification as pronouns, determiners, adverbs, and identifiers. The elements shown in the leftmost column can be used both pronominally and adnominally, as in *zane=me* [PROX=INS] 'with this one' and *zane garda=me* [PROX canoe=INS] 'with this canoe'. Adnominal demonstratives are almost always preposed to the noun. The forms in the middle column function as adverbs, as in *zä* 'here', *zbo* 'hither', and *zba* `hence'. They occur most frequently in preverbal position, but are otherwise fairly flexible in their syntax. The proclitics in the rightmost column can attach to any inflected verb. Their most frequent use is as part of the so-called "presentational construction", which I describe in Section 7.3.

There are two noteworthy gaps in Table 3, namely the medial and distal forms in the first column. Based on the paradigm, one would predict the forms *bane* and *fane*, which do not exist in Komnzo. Instead, there are the forms *bäne* and *ane*, which do fit into the paradigm but require further explanation because none of these forms are used situationally, i.e. they never point to something in space.

For *ane*, there is evidence from recordings made in the 1980s by the anthropologist Mary Ayres that it has developed from an older form *fane* (cf. Döhler 2018:110). *Ane* no longer has the (distal) spatial reference that its position in the paradigm suggests. Instead, it is used anaphorically for referents or sometimes for a whole proposition established in the preceding discourse, i.e., it is used for "tracking" (cf. Himmelmann 1996). Syntactically, *ane* functions as a pronoun, as in *ane=ma* [ANA=SOURCE] 'because of this' or 'therefore', and adnominally as a determiner, as in *ane kar=ma* [ANA village=SOURCE] 'from that village'. As a determiner it

4 There is an additional set of forms, all /m/ initial, which constitute spatial interrogatives: *mane* 'which (one)', *mä* 'where', *mobo* 'whither', and *moba* 'whence'. I did not include these in the table because they are not demonstratives.

stands in opposition to the indefinite pronoun *nä*. Hence, *ane ŋare* [ANA woman] is 'that woman (who was mentioned earlier)', whereas *nä ŋ are* [INDF woman] is 'some woman (about whom we don't know much)'.[5]

Bäne on the other hand is analysed as a placeholder filler with recognitional deixis (Enfield 2003), much like English 'watchamacallit' or 'thingamajig'. Such uses are always cataphoric in that they occur often on first mentions of a particular referent, and there is a need to fill them in with a target word, as in *bäne=me . . . giri=me* [PH=INS (.) knife=INS] 'with the thingamajig . . . with the knife'. Note that I have analysed the placeholder use as an extension of the situational (medial) function in the past (cf. Döhler 2018:112). Recently, I have argued that the placeholder use is the only function of *bäne* (cf. Döhler 2025). I address *bäne* below in Section 7.5.

There is a third form that has its origin in the demonstratives, but fits neither with the situational uses of demonstratives nor with the forms in the paradigm. This word is the particle *zf*, which I analyse historically as a contraction of the adverb *zä* [PROX] 'here' and the emphatic particle *fof*. *Zf* is the topic of Section 7.4.

7.3 The presentational construction

This section is dedicated to the demonstrative clitics in Table 3. I first describe how they attach to fully inflected verbs adding a deictic component to the utterance. Further below, I describe how they are used in the so-called "presentational construction".

A typical example is given in the passage in (2) where the demonstrative clitics occur three times (printed in **bold front**). The context of the example is that Marua Bai and his son Moses show me an eelfish that Marua found in his fishing net. They explain to me that the eel is a totem of their Mayawa clan and that they are not allowed to hunt it, let alone eat it. As Marua points out, he will give away the eel to members of the Bagu clan. In (2), Marua demonstrates how he carried his catch, which consisted of two catfish and the eel, back to the village and what he intends to do with the eel. Note that he frames his intention to call people of the Bagu clan in the recent past, i.e., as if he has talked to them already.

(2) a. *thwä* ***f=e|mi/thgrn***.
catfish **DIST=3DU:NPST:STAT/hang**
'The two catfish were hanging there.'

5 The indefinite *nä* most likely has its origin in the numeral *näbi* 'one', which is a common source of grammaticalization of indefinite markers (Haspelmath 1997:183ff.).

b. *zane* . . . *zaza=me* *nwan|wä/gr* . . .
PROX (.) carrying_stick=INS 1SG:IO:NPST:STAT/be_up_high (.)
fatr=en.
shoulder=LOC
'I had them on this . . . with the carrying pole . . . on this shoulder.'

c. *zä* *zf* *thä|mir/é.*
PROX ZF 1SG>3PL:RPST:PFV/hang
'That's where I hung them.'

d. *thä|s/é* *bagu* *mane* *e|rä/* "*benme* *dagon=ma*
1SG>3PL:RPST:PFV/call bagu who 3PL:NPST:IPFV/be 2PL:POSS food=PURP
z=y|mi/thgr:
PROX=3SG.M:NPST:STAT/hang
'I called (the people from) the Bagu clan (and said) "Your food hanging here.'

e. *thzé* *sa|na/the!*
whatever 2PL>3SG.M:IMP:PFV/eat
'You eat it! (or do whatever you want with it)'

f. *nzone* *thwä* *nima* ***b=e|rn/.***
1SG.POSS catfish like_this **MED=3DU:NPST:IPFV/be**
'My two catfish are (hanging) there."' [tci20121008-03 MAB 13–17]

For the present purposes, it is worth taking a look at clitic demonstratives in conjunction with co-speech gestures, which are shown in Figure 2. First, Marua mentions that the two catfish were hanging on the end of the carrying pole (2a), while he points with his finger to the far end of the pole. Note that this part of the pole and the two catfish are just off screen in the video (Figure 2a). In (2a), the verb 'hang' is marked with the distal clitic. Next, he explains how the carrying pole was resting on his shoulder (2b), while tapping on his right shoulder (shown by the white arrow in Figure 2b). In (2c), he makes a summarising statement accompanied by a downward sweeping gesture with his arm (shown by the white arrow in Figure 2c). The gesture is less iconic as it does not point to any particular object in the situation. In (2d-f), he mentions that he summoned people from the Bagu clan, and then re-enacts a conversation with them in which he quotes himself in direct speech. First, he tells them that the eel is theirs to eat (2d). While pointing at the eel (Figure 2d), the verb 'hang' is marked with the proximal demonstrative. Next, he tells them to eat the eel (2e), making an upward movement with his hand as if he wants to wipe the eel away (shown by the white arrow in Figure 2e). Finally, he tells them that he is already well supplied with his share of the catch (2f). While pointing to the two catfish (Figure 2f), he uses the copula inflected with the medial demonstrative. We find that all parts of (2) are accompanied by co-speech gestures. However, pointing

gestures only occur in conjunction with the clitic demonstratives (cf. 2a, 2d, and 2f). I therefore analyse the clitic demonstratives as identifiers based on Diessel's terminology (1999).

Figure 2: Co-speech gestures in (2a-f).

While clitic demonstratives always occur in contexts in which the speaker wants to identify something, it is not always clear whether this information is supposed to be something new for the hearer. This subtle ambiguity is resolved in the presentational construction, in which the information provided is never news to the hearer. In other words, the speaker states something that is obvious in a given context. In this construction, the clitic demonstrative attaches to the copula in postposed position. It follows the main verb, but is part of the same intonation phrase.

Consider example (3), which comes from a conversation between Steven Karémbu and Caspar Mokai that took place in Caspar's garden. In (3), Steven is making the point that the men are doing all the hard work like cutting down trees and building fences. In (3c) Steven uses a presentational construction to point out

Caspars work to me. This is supported by a pointing gesture (Figure 3). Steven points to the visible result of the gardening work, which was the subject of the preceding conversation. Steven knows that I had made recordings of Caspar and his garden work immediately beforehand. We might rephrase the translation in (3c) as 'He worked that (garden plot), as we can all see there.'

(3) a. *srak=é* *mane* *wä|fiyok/wrth* *znsä*
boy=ERG.NSG who 3PL>3SG.F:NPST:IPFV/make work
'(It is we,) the young men, who do the work.'

b. *Kwa* *za|mar/!*
FUT 2SG>3SG.F:IMP:PFV/see
'Look at it!'

c. *ane* *fof* *zu|bzn/wr* ***b*=|*rä/***
ANA EMPH 3SG>3SG.F:RPST:IPFV/work **MED=3SG.F:NPST:IPFV/be**
'He worked that (garden plot) there.' [tci20130823-06 STK 113-114]

Figure 3: Steven Karémbu (on the right) pointing to Caspar Mokai's (on the left) garden work.

Another example comes from a session in the garden, when Abia Bai and myself were cleaning freshly dug yam tubers. Abia talked about customs surrounding yam cultivation. In (4), he uses a presentational construction that makes reference to the kind of tubers that are laying right in front of us, and that we have been working on over the last hour. As he utters the sentence, he makes a hovering hand movement over the tubers (Figure 4). The different sizes of yams and the importance of large tubers were the subject of the previous conversation.

(4) *nima* *wark* *kwa\fsi/nzrmth* ***z=e\rä/*** *. . .* *kafar.*
like_this size 3PL:PST:DUR/count **PROX=3PL:NPST:IPFV/be** (.) big
'They were counting (yam tubers) of this size . . . the big ones.'
[tci20120805-01 ABB 417]

Figure 4: Abia Bai talks about yam cultivation.

A final example comes from a procedural recording in which Kaumb Bai shows me how he fastens a new bowstring on his bow. In example (5), which contains a presentational construction, he puts down the bowstring to measure the correct length (Figure 5). He had already mentioned the point on the bow to which the string should reach in the previous explanation. The statement in (5) therefore merely repeats this statement while making the actual measurement.

(5) *kwot* *fthé* *z\mar/wé* *ŋatr* *nima*
properly when 2SG>3SG.F:IMP:PFV/look bowstring like_this
z\nak/wé ***b=\yé/***
2SG>3SG.F:IMP:PFV/put_down **MED=3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be**
'You have to watch carefully! You put down the bowstring there!'
[tci20130914-01 KAB 23]

With a total number of 1059 tokens, demonstrative proclitics are quite frequent in the corpus. As expected, they occur particularly in face-to-face conversations and procedural texts, which fits their function to identify something in the situation. The presentational construction adds to this general function a special intersubjective aspect, namely the expectation on the side of the speaker that the informa-

tion is already in the awareness of the hearer. A reviewer of an earlier version of this chapter has pointed out that the link to epistemics – in the sense of "state of knowledge at the time of speaking" or "relative right to know or claim" – is rather weak for the presentational construction. While I agree with this, especially with the absence of any claim to knowledge, I do argue for an intersubjective function of the construction, because the speaker is indeed monitoring the hearer's attentional state. For example, I have not found corpus examples of the presentational construction, in which the hearer does not have access to the relevant state of affairs.

Figure 5: Kaumb Bai prepares a bowstring.

7.4 The particle *zf*

I analyse the particle *zf* as a marker of epistemic primacy, which expresses the speaker's subjective perception of their "relative right to know" (Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig 2011:13), and also to claim such knowledge.

Historically, *zf* has probably developed from a contraction of the adverbial proximal *zä* 'here' followed by the focus marker *fof*. Evidence comes from syntactic distribution. Firstly, the combination of proximal adverbial followed by the focus marker (*zä fof*), although judged by informants to be grammatically correct, is vanishingly rare in the corpus with only two occurrences.[6] Secondly, the particle *zf*

6 Compare this to 212 occurences of *zä* followed by something else, and 1999 occurences of *fof* preceded by something else.

is never followed by the focus marker *fof*. The particle *zf* has inherited some the syntactic properties of *fof* in that it always occurs after a nominal element. *Fof* has scope over the preceding element, but the functional scope of *zf* extends to the clause, or sometimes an entire utterance.

Example (6) is a typical example of the usage of *zf*. The utterance was made by Daure Kaumb during a hike in the area surrounding the village of Rouku. Daure told me an episode from the creation myth of the Bagu clan and how their ancestor, a crocodile, was looking for a place to settle. As the crocodile crawled up from the river, it heard voices that indicated that this place was already inhabited by someone else. In its attempt to turn around, the crocodile created a mud pit that later became the swamp.[7] Thus, example (6) presents a kind of narrative climax of the story, because it reveals that the origin of the swamp is connected to the movement of the crocodile. Supported by a gesture (Figure 6), he uses the particle *zf* in this part of the story. The intersubjective aspect of this descriptive speech act is one in which Daure claims this piece of knowledge. Below, I provide further examples for this function of *zf*.

(6) a. *tarku* *zane* ***zf*** *za|fiyoth/a*
mud_pit PROX **ZF** SG>3SG.F:PST:PFV/make
'(The crocodile) made this mudhole.'
b. *zra~zra=r* *zane* ***zf*** *zä|tnoth/a*
REDUP~swamp=PURP PROX **ZF** SG:PST:PFV/change
Later it turned into this little swamp here.' [tci20120922-09 DAK 22]

Example (7) comes from a story about a young woman who was killed by a crocodile the previous year. The speaker Sékri Karémbu reports on how the villagers searched the steep riverbanks trying to recover her body. In (7c), he informs the people that he is ready to retrieve the body from the river. Note that this is not just a statement about his ability to do this, but also about knowledge because Sékri was the one who found the body. He uses *zf* in (7c) to emphasise his intention: *nzä zf* 'I'm the one who'. In this (and the next) example, we also see that *zf* inherits some of the focus function of *fof*. Hence, we could interpret *nzä fof* as `it is me, and not you'. I argue, however, that the focus function is not sufficient to describe the function of *zf*, and that a claim to knowledge is always at play.

7 Southern New Guinea is part of the dry tropics, and thus, shaped by the annual monsoon cycle. Large parts of the land are inundated by rising water during the wet season. Stagnant pools, which dry up only during the height of the dry season are referred to as *zra*, which I translate with 'swamp', but maybe the term 'billabong', commonly used in Australian English, is more fitting.

Figure 6: Daure Kaumb explains how this swamp hole was formed.

(7) a. *nzä* *thä|kor/a* *“ra* *miyo* *e|rä/?*
1SG.ABS SG>3PL:PST:PFV/speak what desire 3PL:NPST:IPFV/be
‘I told them: “What do you want (to do)?’

b. *keke* *zrä|fref/e* *no=f*
NEG 1PL>3SG.F:IRR:PFV/come_up water=ERG.SG
zrä|thor/
3SG>3SG.F:IRR:PFV/carry
‘If we don’t take her (body) out, the water will carry her away.’

c. *nzä* ***zf*** *ŋa|frez/é”*
1SG.ABS **ZF** 1SG:NPST:IPFV/come_up
‘I’ll bring her up!”’

d. *kabe* *fafä* *wtri* *thf|rä/rm* *nümgar=ma*
people after_this fear 3PL:PST:DUR/be crocodile=SOURCE
‘The people were afraid of the crocodile after this (incident).’

[tci20150916-03 SKK42-45]

Example (8) is part of a public speech made at an all-night dance. The speaker Ako Koko is angrily calling out to a man, Abia Bai, in the audience. He addresses him with a teknonym (*alice täw* ‘Alice’s father’) because the two are in a taboo relationship in which it would not be appropriate to use the personal names. Abia answers from the background and jokingly calls Ako *nane* ‘older brother’. Pragmatically, Abia uses *zf* to claim epistemic primacy over the state of affairs, i.e., over the fact that he is indeed listening to Ako. It would not be sufficient to analyse *zf* as a focus

marker contrasting either the speaker ('I'm listening, not the others') or the state of affairs ('I'm listening and I'm not doing something else').

(8) a. AKK: *mobo* *n|rä/?* *bä* *z* *ŋa|riz/r* *alice*
Where 2SG:NPST:IPFV 2SG.ABS already 2SG:NPST:IPFV/hear PN
täw?
father
'Where are you? Are you listening, Alice's father?'

b. ABB: *o* ***zf*** *ŋa|riz/é* *nane* *ke|nafthm/*
oh **ZF** 1SG:NPST:IPFV/hear older_brother 2SG:IMP:PFV/speak
'Yes, I'm listening, brother. Speak up!' [tci20131103-08 AKK 57-59 ABB 8]

Example (9) is from the introduction speech for another all-night dance. Such introductions are often used to announce some of the rules and regulations that apply to such events. The speaker Abia Bai positions himself as one of the elders of his clan, and also as being in charge of the event. He does this by recounting an imagined meeting with two of his ancestors on the previous day. He explains that they have instructed him to take good care of everyone in (9a). His use of the particle *zf* in the following clause (9b) is meant to underscore his authority as he was the one who met the ancestors.

(9) a. *nzä* *nima* *zu|kor/th* *"be* *fafä* *zane*
1SG.ABS like_this 3DU>1SG:RPST:PFV/speak 2SG.ERG after_this PROX
nagayé *fäth* *zä* *tha|moneg/wé!"*
children DIM PROX 2SG>3PL:IMP:IPFV/look_after
'They said to me: "You will take care of these children!"'

b. *watik* *nze* *zena* ***zf*** *ä|moneg/wé*
well 1SG.ERG today **ZF** 1SG>2PL:NPST:IPFV/look_after
b=e|rä/
MED=2PL:NPST:IPFV/be
'Well, now I am looking after you!' [tci20121019-04 ABB 96-98]

From the preceding examples, we see that the intersubjective function of *zf* is to claim epistemic primacy. This function is always "self-centered", and there are no corpus examples in which *zf* is used to attribute epistemic primacy to someone other than the speaker themself. This might be explained by the etymological source of *zf*, which is the proximal deictic, which is in turn formally linked to the first person category.

In a final part of this description of *zf*, I want to show its usage in a stretch of conversation in a stimulus task. Below in (10), I present a longer excerpt from the

"family problems picture task" (San Roque et al. 2012). Thematically, the picture task deals with situations of alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Procedurally, two speakers are presented with picture cards in a pseudo-random order, which they should later arrange in a coherent narrative.

In the first part of the task, the two participants are asked to describe what they see on each picture. In the excerpt in (10), the two participants Taylor Abia (TSA) and Riley Abia (RMA) are discussing the scene portrayed in picture card #5. The card and the recording setup are shown in Figure 7. Depicted on the card is a scene with three men sitting at a table. One of them is wearing a kind of uniform, while the other two are taking notes. A woman with a bandage around her head is sitting next to them. A speech bubble over her head indicates that she is reporting something. Inside the bubble, a man can be seen hitting a woman with his fist. In the foreground, a man facing away is sitting with his head bowed and a chain around his ankle.

(a) (b)

Figure 7: Tayler and Riley discussing the picture card, Card #5 ('In court') from the picture task.

At this point in the stimulus task, Taylor and Riley have already seen a few other relevant picture cards from which they draw inferences. For example, the preceding card showed an angry man sitting and drinking with his mates. In his first turn, Taylor [TSA] makes a connection to this card by stating that these are the same people (10b). Riley [RMA] on the other hand starts with an introductory overview, in which he identifies the scene as taking place in a police station (10c-10e). He then notices that the man in the foreground is tied up at the feet (10f). The next few turns, Riley and Taylor are trying to identify the perpetrator and the victim as shown in the speech bubble (10g-10j). This first part contains a number of tokens of

zf – each time supported by a pointing gesture. Gestures are described in the interlinearization in [square brackets] on the translation line. After this, they speculate about the relationship between the perpetrator and the woman (10k-10o). Finally, they wonder about the role of the man in uniform (10p-10q). In the second-last turn, Riley summarises the content of the scene as he interprets it (10r), and Taylor signals approval (10s).

(10) a. RMA: *okay* *zane* *mane* *|rä/*
okay PROX which 3SG.F:NPST:IPFV/be
'Okay, as for this one . . .'

b. TSA: *zane* ***zf*** *e|rä/* *ane* *fof* *wri* *kabe*
PROX **ZF** 3PL:NPST:IPFV/be DEM EMPH drunkenness men
mane *e|rä/ra*
which 3PL:PST:IPFV/be
'Here they are again. Those are the drunkards from before.' [points at the man cuffed-up in front]

c. RMA: *polis* *station* *ane* *fof* *e\rä/*
police(E) station(E) DEM EMPH 3PL:NPST:IPFV/be
b=e|rä/
MED=3PL:NPST:IPFV/be
'They are at the police station there.'

d. RMA: *zane* ***zf***
PROX **ZF**
'This (whole picture) here.' [taps with his fingers on the picture card]

e. RMA: *okay* *frisman* *b=ya|m/nzr*
okay(E) police_man(E) MED=3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/sit
'The policeman is sitting there.'

f. RMA: *zane* *kabe* ***zf*** *sun|rzar/wrth* *polis*
PROX man **ZF** 3PL>3SG.M:RPST:IPFV:VENT/tie police(E)
'This man here was handcuffed by the police officers.' [taps on the man in front]

g. TSA: *fi* *mon?* *zane* *emoth* ***zf*** *w|fnz/rath* *o*
but how PROX girl **ZF** 3PL>3SG.F:PST:IPFV/hit or
'But what (is going on)? They beat this girl here or . . .' [points at the woman in the speech bubble]

h. RMA: *zane* ***zf*** *w|fnz/a* *wri=n* *fof*
PROX **ZF** 3SG>3SG.F:PST:IPFV/hit drunkenness=LOC EMPH
'He hit this (woman) while he was drunk!!' [points at the woman on the chair]

i. TSA: *wri=n* *w|fnz/a*
drunkenness=LOC 3SG>3SG.F:PST:IPFV/hit
'He hit her while he was drunk.'

j. RMA: *watik* *ane=ma* *fof* *y|sz/r*
then DEM=SOUCE EMPH 3SG>3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/call
b=|yé/
MED=3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be
'That's why he is called there (to appear in court).'

k. TSA: *nafane* *emoth* *|rä/* *zane*
3SG.poss sister 3SG.F:NPST:IPFV/be PROX
'Is this one his sister?'

l. RMA: *emoth* *o* *ŋare* *nafane?* *ra* *kwa* *nm* *|rä/*
girl or wife 3SG.POSS what FUT maybe 3SG.F:NPST:IPFV/be
nnzä?
perhaps
'Sister or his wife? Perhaps that's who she is?'

m. TSA: *zane* *\rä/* */z=|rä/*
PROX 3SG.F:NPST:IPFV/be PROX=3SG.F:NPST:IPFV/be
'This (woman) here.'

n. RMA: *ane* *w|fnz/a*
DEM SG>3SG.F:PST:IPFV/hit
'He hit this (woman).'

o. TSA: *naf* *nm* *w|fnz/a* *o* *maf*
3SG.ERG maybe SG>3SG.F:PST:IPFV/hit or who.SG.ERG
w|fnz/a?
SG>3SG.F:PST:IPFV/hit
'Did he hit her or who hit her?'

p. RMA: *zane* *kabe* *ka* *nm* *ra* *|yé/?* *mäzistret*
PROX man FUT maybe what 3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be magistrate(E)
|yé/ *o?*
3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be or
'What sort of man is this? Is he a judge, or?'

q. TSA: *mh*
INTERJ
'Yes'

r. RMA: *naf* *zane* ***zf*** *wn|sz/r* *naf* *ane*
3SG.ERG PROX **ZF** 3SG>3SG.F:NPST:IPFV:VENT/call 3SG.ERG DEM

ŋa|trik/wr *naf* *mon=me* *zu|fnz/rm*
3SG:NPST:IPFV/tell 3SG.ERG HOW=INS SG>3SG.F:PST:DUR/hit
'He called this (woman) here and now she's telling how he was beating her.' [points at the woman on the chair]

s. TSA: *mh* *zane* *z* *nnzä* *|yé/*
INTERJ PROX already perhaps 3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be
z=|yé/
PROX=3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be
'Yes, this is probably the one here.' [tci20111004 RMA 51-67 TSA 51-60]

The entire conversation in (10) can be described as an attempt to disambiguate the scene and to clarify the facts: Who is who? And who is doing what to whom? Since both speakers are making claims about their respective interpretation, it is not surprising that the particle *zf* occurs more often at the beginning than later on in the conversation. More importantly, they are in disagreement about some aspects and make competing claims as to the correct interpretation. It is noteworthy that the use of *zf* decreases as soon as they have solved the question of how the man and woman in the speech bubble should be matched against the people in the police station in (10j). In the following part, they continue to discuss certain aspects of the picture, but there is less disagreement.

In summary, the particle *zf* is a grammatical device encoding epistemic proximity. Its function is to claim privileged knowledge of a certain state of affairs. The particle is not in functional opposition to the presentational construction, but it can be added to it. Such combinations are not very frequent in the corpus, but I provide one example below. In (11), Lucy Abia shows me a lizard that she has caught in her garden. She concludes the episode describing how she chased and finally caught the animal with the words in (11). The use of both the presentational construction and the particle *zf* can be explained by the fact that the dead animal was lying right next to her and that she claims epistemic authority over the state of affairs.

(11) *zena* *zane* ***zf*** *dö* *sa|kwr/é* ***z=|yé/***
now PROX **ZF** lizard 1SG>3SG.M:RPST:PFV/kill **MED=3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be**
'Now I have killed this lizard here.' [tci20120821-01 LNA 67]

7.5 The placeholder *bäne*

This section describes the placeholder *bäne*. In a previous description (Döhler 2018:112ff.), I have analysed the placeholder function as an extension of the spatial function of *bäne* as a medial demonstrative pronoun. Despite this etymological

origin (cf. Table 3), I have revised this analysis, concluding that *bäne* is not used spatially at all, i.e., the placeholder function is the main function of *bäne* (Döhler 2025). I argue here that there are several pragmatic uses of the placeholder that are related to intersubjectivity.

In example (12) below we find a typical placeholder use of *bäne*. In this context it is translated with English expressions such as 'whatchamacallit' or 'thingamajig'. In (12), the speaker Maembu Kwozi talks about hunting for fish along the riverbank. In a moment of disfluency, he inserts a placeholder filler, then pauses for a moment, and then produces the target word.

(12) *zöbthé* *zwa|wärez/é* ***bäne=me*** *. . .* *kofä* *tot=me*
first 1SG>3SG.F:RPST:PFV/aim **PH=INS** (280ms) fish spear=INS
'First I aimed at it **with the whatchamacallit** . . . with the fish spear.'
[tci20130905-02 MKW 41–42]

In the example, *bäne* is inflected with the instrumental case (*bäne=me*) which mirrors the inflection of the target word (*köfä tot=me*). In fact, *bäne* can be inflected for all case markers, making it the "most prototypical pronominal" in the language. Table 4 shows all the forms below, and compares them to the proximal demonstrative pronoun *zane* and the second person singular pronoun.

Table 4: Case inflections on *bäne.*

	PLACEHOLDER			DEM	PERS. PRON
	INANIM	**ANIM (SG)**	**ANIM (NSG)**	**PROX**	**2SG**
ABS	*bäne*	*bäne*	*bäne*	*zane*	*bä*
ERG	–	*baf*	*baf-a*	–	*bné*
DAT	–	*baf-an*	*baf-anm*	–	*bun*
POSS	–	*baf-ane*	*baf-anme*	–	*bone*
SOURCE	*bäne=ma*	*baf-ane=ma*	*baf=anme=ma*	*zane=ma*	*bone=ma*
LOC	*baf=en*	*bafa-db=en*	*baf-anme-db=en*	–	*bun-db=en*
ALL	*bäne=fo*	*bafa-db=o*	*baf-anme-db=o*	–	*bun-db=o*
ABL	*bäne=fa*	*bafa-db=a*	*baf-anme-db=a*	–	*bun-db=a*
IC	–	*baf=rr*	*baf=ä*	–	*bn=rr*
INS	*bäne=me*	–	–	*zane=me*	–
PURP	*bäne=mr*	–	–	*zane=mr*	–
PROP	*bäne=karä*	–	–	*zane=karä*	–
PRIV	*bäne=mär*	–	–	*zane=mär*	–

Table 4 shows a second stem, which is *baf*, and therefore it would be more appropriate to speak of the "placeholder *bäne/baf*", but for reasons of brevity I shall stick

with *bäne*. Also recall that – based on the initial /b/ consonant – the medial category in the demonstrative system is linked to second person pronouns. For an in-depth discussion of the placeholder *bäne* and its various extensions, I refer the reader to (Döhler 2025). For the remainder of this section, I want to delve into its pragmatic uses and discuss its underlying intersubjective functions.

Taking a pragmatic perspective, placeholder fillers like *bäne* can be interpreted as a signal that the speaker cannot think of the right word in a particular moment. In (12), the speaker is able to be more specific a moment later when the word comes to mind. However, there are also examples of *bäne*, especially in conversations, where the speaker does not produce the target word. One such example comes from a conversational narrative and a short exchange between Marua Bai (MAB) and Caspar Mokai (CAM) in (13). Caspar interrupts Marua's story about a visit to the Fly River that took place a long time ago. He asks him whether Marua and his friends were married at the time (13a), to which Marua replies "We were just boys". He tries to clarify his age at the time by adding that his beard had only just begun to grow at the time (13b). For this, he uses *bäne* and a pointing gesture to his left cheek, but he does not produce the target word *fäk thäbu* 'beard'. Caspar infers the correct referent from context and from the gesture and signals agreement (13c).

(13) a. CAM: *bä* *fthé* *ŋare=märe* *thf\rn/m?*
2.ABS when women=PRIV 2DU:PST:IPFV/be
'This was when you two were not yet married?'

b. MAB: *srak* *. . .* *komnzo* *kwa* *zane* *-/nzä/-* ***bäne*** *. . .*
boy (.) just FUT PROX FS **PH** (.)
thf\rfik/wrm.
3PL:PST:DUR/grow
'(I was just a) boy . . . **These watchamacallit** were just about to start growing.'

c. cam: *mh*
INTJ
'Yes.' [tci20130927-06 MAB 186-187 CAM 25-26]

Another example comes from a botanical expedition in the area around Rouku with Janet Abia and Nakre Abia. During a walk along the riverbank, the two women identified a number of plant species and mentioned their various uses. In example (14), Nakre talks about a tree species called *kemäri*.[8] After talking about the flowers and various other aspects of this plant, she mentions that it is also used for its strong

8 *Kemäri* is an unknown species of the myrtle family (*Xanthostemon sp*).

timber. In (14a), she uses *bäne* without producing the target word, which could be *fr* `trunk' or the English loan *temba* `timber' in this context. Apparently, she is relying on the hearer (myself) to fill in the blanks correctly.

(14) a. *nafane* ***bäne*** *b=|yé/* *far=ma* *|yé/*
3SG.POSS **PH** MED=3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be post=PURP 3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be
mnz *far*
house post
'Its **thingamajig** there is (used) for posts, for house posts.'

b. *thkarthé* *|yé/*
hard 3SG.M:NPST:IPFV/be
'It is strong.' [tci20130907-02 RNA 338-339]

On the surface, the only difference between the uses of *bäne* in (12) versus (13) and (14) is whether or not the speaker produces the target word. At the same time, I argue here that in (13) and (14) the speakers do not produce the target word because they rely on their interlocuters' knowledge about the world, in other words they do not need to bother to produce the target word. In such instances, *bäne* should be paraphrased as 'that thing which I know you know about'. Note that in some cases, speakers deliberately avoid pronouncing the target word for reasons of cultural sensitivity. For example, for people in a taboo relationship, one should not use personal names.

The reliance on common ground is best grasped by the notion of "recognitional deixis", a concept that is at work if the hearer may be supposed to know what is being referred to. The concept has surfaced in a number of linguistic studies, e.g. in a study on the use of personal names in conversations (Sacks and Schegloff 1979), as a dinstinct type of use for demonstratives (Himmelmann 1996), and for analysing placeholders (Enfield 2003). For the Komnzo placeholder *bäne*, it is best modelled by assuming that the speaker disclaims epistemic proximity in the case of disfluency situations. Additionally, the speaker projects epistemic authority on the addressee in cases that involve recognitional deixis.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the demonstrative system of Komnzo and its various intersubjective uses. I have focussed on three grammatical devices: (1) the presentational construction that is used in discourse situations in which the speakers assumes that some entity or state of affairs is known to the hearer, (2) the

particle *zf* that is used in discourse situations in which the speaker wants to claim epistemic proximity, and (3) the placeholder *bäne* in its recognitional use, in which the speaker assumes sufficient knowledge on the part of the hearer.

By comparison to Andoke, the grammatical devices for expressing engagement in Komnzo are non-canonical in that they are not as grammaticalised, nor are they obligatory. The three devices do not fit into a neat paradigmatic opposition as in Andoke. Instead they are expressed by very different means, namely a syntactic construction, a particle, and a pronominal. These grammatical devices, on the other hand, all originate in the demonstrative system of Komnzo. However, they are rather contingent in their pragmatic function, as they mix and blend notions of access to knowledge, knowledge claim and situational awareness.

Abbreviations

(.)	pause
ABL	ablative case
ABS	absolutive case
ALL	allative case
ANA	anaphoric
ANIM	animate
DAT	dative case
DIM	diminutive
DIST	distal
DU	dual
DUR	durative
(E)	loanword from English
EMPH	emphatic
ERG	ergative case
F	feminine
FUT	future
FS	false start
IMP	imperative
INANIM	inanimate
INS	instrumental case
INTERJ	interjection
IC	inclusory case
IO	indirect object
IPFV	imperfective
IRR	irrealis
LOC	locative
M	masculine
MED	medial

NEG	negator
NPST	non-past
NSG	non-singular
ONLY	exclusive (‘only X’)
PFV	perfective
PH	placeholder
PL	plural
PLN	place name
PN	proper noun
POSS	possessive
PROP	proprietive (‘having’)
PROX	proximal
PRIV	privative (‘lacking’)
PURP	purposive case
REDUP	reduplication
RPST	recent past
SG	singular
SOURCE	source case
STAT	stative
VENT	venitive (‘hither’)
ZF	particle *zf*

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