

SZ. Third Person Zero of Verbal Person Marking

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1. Defining the values

Map SZ represents the distribution of third person zeroes among verbal person markers of the sole argument of an intransitive clause (i.e. of the S argument). I have chosen to depict the person marking of the S rather than of either of the transitive arguments, as the verbal person markers of the latter are sometimes fused with each other (see chapter SO), which makes it difficult to decide which has a zero realization. The zero realization of third person S markers is captured by means of six values:

@ 1. No person marking of the S	96
@ 2. No zero realization of third person S forms	182
@ 3. Zero realization of some third person singular forms	21
@ 4. Zero realization of all third person singular S forms	45
@ 5. Zero realization of all third person forms/No third person S forms	36
@ 6. Zero realization only of third person non-singular	1
total	381

Most of the languages subsumed under the first value have **no verbal person marking** at all. Some may, however, evince verbal person marking of just the P, as is the case in Palikur (Arawakan; French Guiana) and Yapese (Western Malayo-Polynesian; Caroline Islands) (see chapter SV, value 3).

Given that person markers typically combine person distinctions with those of number and, less often, gender, the size of the inventory of third person S forms of a language

26 depends on how many number and/or gender distinctions in the
 27 third person it exhibits. Thus Kilivila (Western Oceanic;
 28 Trobriand Islands/Papua New Guinea), which has a simple
 29 singular/plural opposition in the third person S possesses just
 30 two forms. Tanimbili (Remote Oceanic; Utupua Island) with its
 31 singular/dual/plural opposition has three forms. And Larike
 32 (Central Malayo-Polynesian; Ambon Island), which exhibits a
 33 singular/dual/trial/plural contrast plus a gender opposition in
 34 the singular and plural, has six basic forms:

35

36 (1) Kilivila (Senft 1986: 46–47)

	SG	DU	PL
1 INCL		<i>ta-</i>	<i>ta- -s</i>
1 EXCL	<i>a-</i>	<i>ka-</i>	<i>ka- -si</i>
2	<i>ku-</i>		<i>ku- -si</i>
3	<i>i-</i>		<i>i- - si</i>

37

38 (2) Tanimbili (Tryon 1994: 628)

	SG	DU	PL
1 INCL		<i>si</i>	<i>misu</i>
1 EXCL	<i>nyi-</i>	<i>me-</i>	<i>misu</i>
2	<i>nu-</i>	<i>mwa</i>	<i>muku-</i>
3	<i>i-</i>	<i>ŋgi(li)-</i>	<i>ŋgu-</i>

39

40 (3) Larike (Laidig 1993: 321)

	SG	DU	TRI	PL
1 INCL		<i>itua-</i>	<i>itidi-</i>	<i>ite-</i>
1 EXCL	<i>au-</i>	<i>arua-</i>	<i>aridu-</i>	<i>ami-</i>
2	<i>a-/ai-</i>	<i>irua-</i>	<i>iridu-</i>	<i>imi-</i>
3.HUM	<i>ma-/mei-</i>	<i>matua-</i>	<i>matidu-</i>	<i>mati-</i>
3SG.NONHUM	<i>i-</i>			<i>iri-</i>

41

42 Languages may also have separate verbal person paradigms
 43 dependent on tense, aspect, mood and even polarity (e.g.
 44 Salinan). Needless to say, this too may result in a greater
 45 number of third person forms. For instance in Amele (Trans-
 46 New Guinea; Madang/Papua New Guinea) there are eight classes
 47 of person markers, used in different tenses aspects and modes.

48 As shown in (4), though in the dual and plural the second and
 49 third person are no-distinct, there are still 12 different third
 50 person forms.

51

52 (4) Amele (Roberts 1987: 277–278)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1SG	<i>-ig</i>	<i>-ig</i>	<i>-ig</i>	<i>-ig</i>	<i>-min</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-em</i>	<i>-em</i>
2SG	<i>-g</i>	<i>-g</i>	<i>-g</i>	<i>-g</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-em</i>	<i>-em</i>
3SG	<i>-i</i>	\emptyset	<i>-igi</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-b</i>	<i>-b</i>	<i>-n</i>	\emptyset
1DL	<i>-w</i>	<i>-w</i>	<i>-w</i>	<i>-w</i>	<i>-hul</i>	<i>-h</i>	<i>-h</i>	<i>-h</i>
2/3DL	<i>-si</i>	<i>-si</i>	<i>-was</i>	<i>-was</i>	<i>-bil</i>	<i>-b</i>	<i>-sin</i>	<i>-sin</i>
1PL	<i>-q</i>	<i>-q</i>	<i>-q</i>	<i>-q</i>	<i>-mun</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-m</i>
2/3PL	<i>-eig</i>	<i>-eig</i>	<i>-qap</i>	<i>-w</i>	<i>-bil</i>	<i>-b</i>	<i>-ein</i>	<i>-ein</i>

53

54 The second value in map SZ represents languages in which **all**
 55 **the third person forms that the language distinguishes are**
 56 **overtly realized**, as is the case in Kilivila, Tanimbili and Larike,
 57 though not Amele.

58 As Amele illustrates, zero realization is primarily
 59 associated with the third person singular as opposed to the
 60 non-singular categories. Languages seen as having a zero for
 61 the third person singular fall into two sub-types. To the first
 62 sub-type, represented by value 3, belong **languages in which**
 63 **only some realizations of the third person singular are zero**
 64 **while other realizations are not**. Amele is a case in point. Lango
 65 (Nilotic, Nilo-Saharan; Uganda), is another. Lango has two
 66 paradigms of S (and A) person markers, an "A" set used in the
 67 perceptive, habitual and subjunctive and a "B" set used in the
 68 progressive. As shown in (5), the third person singular has a
 69 zero realization only in the habitual.

70

71 (5) Lango (Noonan 1992: 91)

	SG		PL	
	Set A	Set B	Set A	Set B
1	<i>ã-</i>	<i>â-</i>	<i>õ-</i>	<i>ô-</i>
2	<i>ĩ-</i>	<i>î-</i>	<i>ĩ-wunu</i>	<i>î-wunu</i>
3	<i>ò-(PERF,SUBJ)</i> <i>∅-(HAB)</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>ĩ</i>	<i>î-</i>

72

73 To the second sub-type, represented by value 4, belong
74 **languages in which the third person singular is always zero**,
75 such as Chepang (Kiranti, Tibeto-Burman; Nepal):

76

77 (6) Chepang (Caughley 1982: 54–55)

	SG	DU	PL
1 INCL		<i>-ŋe-ce</i>	<i>-ŋ-se</i>
1 EXCL	<i>-ŋa</i>	<i>-teyh-c</i>	<i>-teyh-ʔi</i>
2SG	<i>-naŋ</i>	<i>-naŋ-je</i>	<i>-naŋ-se</i>
3SG	∅	<i>-ce</i>	<i>-ʔi/se</i>

78

79 The fifth value represents **languages which do have overt verbal**
80 **person forms for the first and second person but not for the**
81 **third person**, as is the case in Ungarinjin (Wororan; Western
82 Australia).

83

84 (7) Ungarinjin (Rumsey 1982: 83)

	SG	PL
1 INCL		<i>ar-</i>
1 EXCL	<i>ŋa-</i>	<i>njar</i>
2SG	<i>njin-</i>	<i>gur-</i>
3SG	∅-	∅-

85

86 Another way of describing such languages is to say that they
87 exhibit no third person forms at all. The description in terms of
88 zero realization is chosen here because we are comparing these
89 languages with others showing values 2 to 6.

90 The final, sixth value covers **languages which have zero**
91 **marking of the third person solely in some non-singular**
92 **number**. The only instances of such zero marking that I am
93 aware of (apart from languages such as English or Trumai which
94 have overt person marking only in the third person singular)
95 involve also gender distinctions, as in Barasano (Tucanoan;
96 Brazil, Colombia) where there is a zero marker for third person
97 plural inanimates.

98

99 (8) Barasano (Jones and Jones 1991: 73–74)

100	1SG	- <i>ha</i>	1PL	- <i>hā</i>
101	2SG	- <i>ha</i>	2PL	- <i>ha</i>
102	3SG.M	- <i>bō</i>	3PL.AN	- <i>bā</i>
103	3SG.F	- <i>bī</i>	3PL.INAN	-∅
104	3SG.INAN	- <i>ha</i>		

105

106

107 2. Geographical distribution

108

109 Map SZ illustrates that overt realization of third person S
 110 markers is the cross-linguistic norm as nearly two-thirds of the
 111 languages in the sample display such marking. What we also
 112 see, however, is that there are considerable areal differences
 113 with regard to the presence of third person zeroes. In Southeast
 114 Asia, the Pacific and New Guinea, overt third person forms are
 115 clearly favoured over zeroes. This may also be observed in Africa
 116 and somewhat less clearly in Eurasia. In Australia and the
 117 Americas, on the other hand, there are slightly more languages
 118 with some form of zero marking in the third person than
 119 languages with only overt third person forms. Within the
 120 Americas, zero marking is more common in North America than
 121 in South America, and it is particularly frequent in Mesoamerica.

122 Significant areal differences may also be observed in
 123 regard to the type of zero marking displayed. In North America
 124 lack of third person markers altogether is encountered more
 125 frequently than a zero just in the third singular or just a zero
 126 allomorph in the third person. In Australia and Eurasia, the
 127 converse is the case. And in South America the instances of zero
 128 marking are more or less evenly distributed over three types of
 129 zero marking, absence of third person forms, zero in third
 130 singular and only a zero allomorph.

131

132 3. Theoretical issues

133

134 Several lines of explanations have been advanced for the
 135 existence of third person zeroes. Some scholars treat the issue
 136 as an instance of loss and/or reanalysis of previously overt

137 markers, others as a case of failure of the third person markers
138 to develop.

139 The most widely accepted explanation of the first type
140 attributes the zero marking of third person verbal forms to the
141 principle of economy. The principle of economy favours one of
142 the exponents of a paradigm being non-overt. That this should
143 be the third person rather than the second or the first is seen to
144 follow from the higher frequency of third person verbal forms in
145 discourse than of second or third person forms. The effect of
146 frequency on the form of linguistic expressions has long been
147 recognised and is captured in what is commonly referred to as
148 Zipf's law, i.e. "high frequency is the cause of small magnitude"
149 (Zipf 1935: 29). In other words, it is the tendency for speakers to
150 shorten the linguistic expressions used most commonly that
151 motivates the existence of zero realizations of the third person.
152 For some discussion of this position, see Haiman (1985) and
153 Croft (1990).

154 An alternative explanation for third person zeroes has
155 been developed by Koch (1995) who argues that there is a
156 strong tendency in languages to reinterpret third person verbal
157 forms as part of the stem or as tense markers. This tendency he
158 claims is due to the pressure of iconicity, i.e. for morphological
159 structure to mirror cognitive structure. Adopting the view, most
160 strongly articulated by Benveniste (1971), that the third person
161 is cognitively a "non-person", and therefore unmarked vis-à-vis
162 the first and second person, he argues that it should therefore
163 be also morphologically unmarked.

164 In contrast to the above two explanations, Ariel (2000)
165 attributes third person zeroes to the fact that third person
166 forms, unlike first and second person ones, simply did not
167 develop. In accessibility theory, which constitutes the context of
168 her explanation, the coding of discourse referents is seen to
169 reflect speakers' assumptions as to the degree of accessibility of
170 the referents in the memory store of the addressee. The claim is
171 that the higher the accessibility of the referent, the more
172 attenuated its encoding. Verbal person markers are considered
173 to be high accessibility coding devices, second only to zero and
174 reflexives. Thus, according to accessibility theory they should be

175 used as the sole means of referent encoding, only in the case of
 176 highly accessible referents. According to Ariel, first and second
 177 person pronouns meet this criterion, but third person pronouns
 178 do not. In other words the referents of third person pronouns
 179 tend not to be highly accessible enough to warrant phonological
 180 reduction, cliticization and affixation. Consequently, third
 181 person verbal markers, in contrast to first and second person
 182 ones, tend not to arise. A critical assessment of this view, based
 183 in part on the fact it is primarily the third person singular that is
 184 non-overt, rather than the third person in general, as the
 185 accessibility explanation would lead one to expect, is provided
 186 in Siewierska (2002).

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