Chapter 8

That placeholder in Komnzo

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Speakers of Komnzo have a number of conventionalised devices for situations of disfluency. In addition to silent pauses, there are hesitative and placeholder fillers. This contribution places a focus on the placeholder *bäne* which is a pronoun, or pro-form in the language. The chapter consists of a description of the form, distribution, functions, functional extensions, frequency, and multimodality of *bäne*. It therefore contributes to the emerging typology of placeholders.

1 Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses fillers in Komnzo, a language of the Yam family spoken in the south-west of Papua New Guinea.[1] Fillers are linguistic devices that are used in situations of disfluency, i.e., they are filling a silent pause. They can be divided into hesitative fillers (e.g. English *uhm*, Komnzo *a*) and placeholder fillers (e.g. English *whatchamacallit*, Komnzo *bäne*). The former are non-referential and not syntactically integrated, while placeholders are referential and syntactically integrated (Hayashi & Yoon 2010).[2]

While I touch on hesitative fillers only in passing, the main focus of the chapter is on the placeholder *bäne*/*baf*. I show that this placeholder is best analyzed as a pro-form which has developed from a medial demonstrative. I argue that the use of *bäne*/*baf* goes well beyond filling a silent pause. It is used intentionally with communicative goals such as signalling a taboo context, or discourse managing

[1]ISO 639-3: tci, Glottocode: komn1238

[2]Previous classifications have defined hesitative fillers as non-lexical but nonetheless conventionalized sounds, while placeholder fillers are lexical items (cf. Amiridze et al. 2010).

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goals such as gaining the floor. Moreover, I show that certain inflections of *bäne* have evolved into conventionalized connectors for adverbial clauses.

In the remainder of this section, I introduce the sociolinguistic situation (Section 1.1), the text corpus (Section 1.2), and some typological features of the languages (Section 1.3 and Section 1.4). Section 2 provides an overview of hesitative and placeholder fillers in Komnzo. The main body focusses on the placeholder *bäne*/*baf*, for which I describe its form (Section 3.1), distribution (Section 3.2), functions (Section 3.3), functional extensions (Section 3.4), and multimodal aspects (Section 3.5). After addressing the problems in measuring the frequency of *bäne*/*baf* (Section 3.6), I close with some final comments (Section 4).

1.1 Sociolinguistic background

Komnzo is a small language even by the standards of Papua New Guinea, where language communities tend to be rather small. Komnzo is spoken by approximately 200–250 speakers in the villages of Rouku and Morehead Station. Genetically, the language belongs to the Tonda subgroup of the Yam languages. Figure 1 shows a map of the language family.

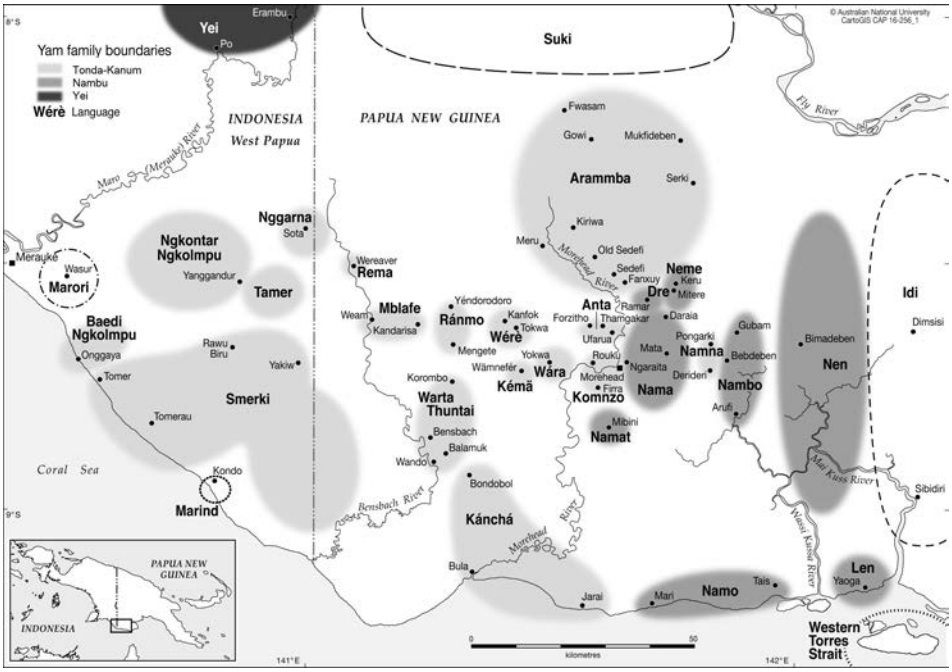

Figure 1: The Yam language family

Komnzo speakers live in a highly multilingual language ecology. 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 portfolio 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 "society of intimates" (Givón 2018, Givón & 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. This results in a large degree of common ground, thus, leading to higher informational predictability in face-to-face conversation.

1.2 Text corpus and methodology

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 1). The overall size is around 55,000 word tokens, which makes the Komnzo text corpus a typical "language documentation corpus" (Mosel 2012).

Table 1: 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 examples are referenced with a source code of the following format: [tci-YYYYMMDD-NN SSS ##]. 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). Intonation units on the respective

transcription tiers are numbered (##). Thus, example (1) in this chapter has the source code [tci20150906-10 ABB 303–306]: it is the tenth recording session on September 6th, 2015, the speaker is Abia Bai (ABB), and on the speaker's text tier, the example shows the annotation units 303–306. The corpus of transcribed and interlinearised texts has been archived as (Döhler 2021).[3]

Most examples in this chapter include a figure showing the wave file, the pitch contour, and the transcription. Pauses in the example were measured in ELAN and are shown with three dots on the text tier (...) and in milliseconds on the gloss tier (ms). For producing the figures, the wav-files were exported from ELAN, normalized and converted to mono track files in Audacity, and finally imported to Praat.[4] All processed wav-files, Praat pictures, and video screenshots can be downloaded from: https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.12032997.

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 case marking is organised in an ergative-absolutive system. In addition to four core cases (absolutive, ergative, dative, possessive), there are 13 semantic cases. 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" (Caballero & Harris 2012, Carroll 2016), a subtype of multiple exponence.

This aspect of the language is not the topic of this chapter, but it has a practical effect for 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.

[3] While (Döhler 2021) contains a zipped file of all transcriptions, the audio-visual footage of each session can be found under: https://zenodo.org/communities/komnzo

[4] ELAN (version 6.7): https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan, Audacity (version 2.4.2): http://audacity.sourceforge.net/, Praat (version 6.4.04): https://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat

1.4 Demonstratives

Before we proceed it is worth defining the notion of demonstratives adopted in this chapter and presenting some basics about the system of demonstratives in Komnzo. As a 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 functional definition, we can identify the forms given in Table 2 as demonstratives.

Table 2: Demonstratives in situational uses

	PRONOUN /	ADVERB			CLITIC
	DETERMINER	NEUTRAL	ALLATIVE	ABLATIVE	
PROX	*zane*	*zä*	*zbo*	*zba*	*z=*
MED	(*bäne*)	*bä*	*bobo*	*boba*	*b=*
DIST	(*ane*)	*fä*	*fobo*	*foba*	*f=*
Q	*mane*	*mä*	*mobo*	*moba*	*m=*

The demonstrative paradigm is organized in a four-way split into proximal, medial, distal, and (spatial) interrogative.[5] Table 2 shows that the distinction is signalled by the initial consonant: /z/ for proximal, /b/ for medial, /f/ for distal, and /m/ for interrogative. In this aspect, demonstratives are related to person deixis, i.e. personal pronouns. The first person singular pronouns start with /nz/ (*nzä* 1SG.ABS)[6], second person pronouns with /b/ (*bä* 2SG.ABS), and third person pronouns with /f/ (*fi* 3.ABS). The implications of this link, especially between second person and the placeholder *bäne*, are addressed in Section 3.1.

Syntactically demonstratives belong to different parts of speech, which align with Diessel's classification: pronouns, determiners, adverbs, and identifiers (Diessel 1999). The elements shown in the leftmost column can be used both adnominally and pronominally, i.e. they function as determiners (*zane mni=me* [PROX fire=INS] 'with this fire') and pronouns (*zane=me* [PROX=INS] 'with this one'). The elements in the middle of the table function as adverbs (*zä* 'here',

[5]The latter category is glossed as Q, and it is used for questions that pertain to space: *mane* 'which one', *mä* 'where', *mobo* 'whither', and *moba* 'whence'.

[6]Note that the Komnzo first person pronoun starts with /nz/, and not /z/. This is different in closely related varieties such as Wära, Anta, and Wèré where first person pronoun all begin with /z/.

zbo 'hither', *zba* 'hence'). The elements in the right column are verbal proclitics, and their most frequent use is as part of a presentational (or identificational) construction.[7]

In the remainder of this section, I will focus on the forms in the leftmost column of Table 2. There are two elements in the table, namely *bäne* and *ane*, which formally belong in this paradigm, but are never used situationally, i.e. they do not point to something in space. The first is the anaphoric *ane*, for which there is evidence that is has developed from an older form *fane* (Döhler 2018: 110ff.). *Ane* no longer has the (distal) spatial reference that is suggested by its position in the paradigm. Instead, it is used anaphorically for referents or sometimes for a whole proposition that has been established in the preceding discourse, i.e. it is used for "tracking" (cf. Himmelmann 1996). This is shown with both tokens in (1). Note that, unlike *ane*, the proximal *zane* can be used both anaphorically and cataphorically. Syntactically, *ane* functions as a pronoun (1) and adnominally as a determiner (3).

(1) *ruga nzmär=me, yti* ***ane*** *thf\konzr/mth* *fof, yti,* ***ane=me*** *za\nänzütham/ath*
pig grease=INS PN DEM 3PL>3PL:PST:DUR\speak EMPH PN DEM=INS
3PL>3SG.F:PST:PFV\paint
'with pig grease. They were really calling **this** *yti*. They painted her **with this**.' [tci20150906-10 ABB 303-306]

The second element is the placeholder *bäne/baf*. It has lost the spatial function that is suggested by its position in the paradigm (medial). Moreover, *bäne/baf* is almost never used adnominally, i.e. as a determiner. Such examples were not only assessed as ungrammatical during elicitation, but the corpus also points in this direction. Example (16) is the only example (out of more than 700 tokens in the corpus) that could be argued to be an adnominal use. This confirms Hayashi & Yoon (2010), who mention that the majority of placeholder uses of demonstratives in their comparative study of Japanese, Korean and Mandarin were pronominal rather than adnominal. Note also that *bäne/baf* is never used anaphorically in Komnzo. For further elaboration on *bäne/baf*, I refer the reader to Section 2.2 and Section 3.

[7] The proclitics can attach to any inflected verb. In the presentational construction, they attach to the copula which follows the main verb of the clause (cf. Döhler 2018: 109ff., 288).

2 Overview of hesitators and placeholders

This section describes hesitative fillers (Section 2.1), placeholder fillers (Section 2.2) and other fillers (Section 2.3). In the section on placeholder fillers, I introduce three devices: the placeholder *bäne*/*baf*, the light verb *-rä* 'do', and the manner demonstrative *nima*. These can be used to replace nominal elements, verbs or entire sections of discourse.

2.1 Hesitative fillers

Disfluency in the speech of Komnzo speakers can manifest itself as a stretch of silence, or it can be filled by a hesitator.[8] Hesitators are usually pronounced as open vowels of variable length, often [æ]~[ɐ]. The hesitator is usually followed by a very short pause before fluent speech continues. Examples from the Komnzo text corpus confirm what has been written about disfluencies elsewhere; e.g., Clark & Fox Tree (2002) schematize disfluencies into three phases: first, a *suspension* of fluent speaking; secondly, a *hiatus* in speaking, which may contain a stretch of silence or a hesitative filler (accompanied by other collateral actions like gestures); and thirdly, a *resumption* of fluent speaking.

Example (2) shows a clause initial hesitator, produced as [æ]. The pause between the hesitator and the following NP *no mni* is very short (70ms), the same length as the pause between the clause and the postposed NP *kafsin* (cf. Figure 2).

(2) ***ä*** *...* *no* *mni* *f=\rä/* *...* *kafsi=n.*
HES (70ms) water hot DIST=3SG.F:NPST:IPFV\be (70ms) cup(E)=LOC
'uh there was tea there in a cup.' [tci20120924-01 TRK 44]

Another hesitator is shown in example (3), produced as [ɐ], which is followed by a pause and a relative clause. The pause following the hesitator is much longer (320ms) than the pause in the previous example, but relatively speaking, it is still very short (cf. Figure 3). This becomes evident when we compare it to the pause following the placeholder *bafen* in the same example, which is twice as long (660ms).

[8] I use the term "hesitator" and "hesitative filler" interchangeably.

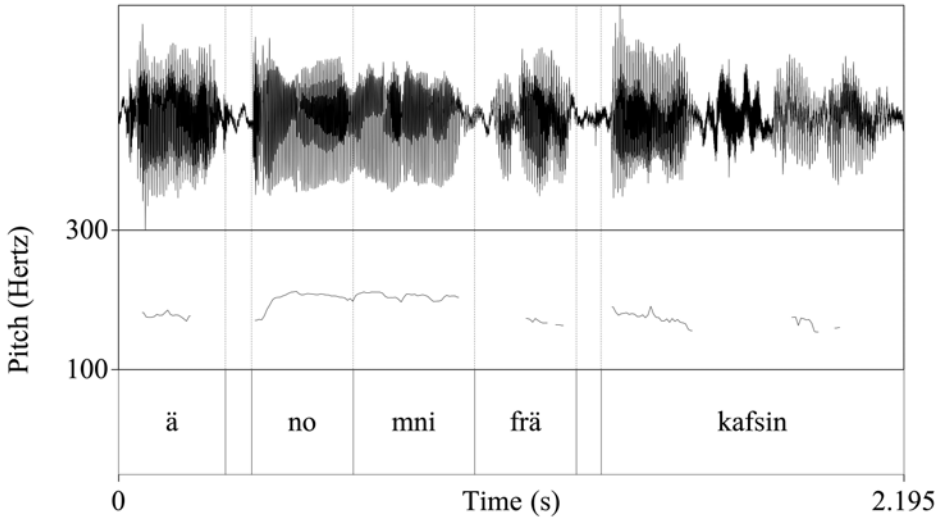

Figure 2: Audio analysis of [tci20120924-01 TRK 44]

(3) *ane fam fof ŋa\rä/r* ***a*** *... monme*
DEM thought EMPH 3SG:NPST:IPFV\do HES (320ms) how
san\thb/ath bobo ***baf=en*** *...* *sel=en.*
3PL>3SG.M:PST:PFV:VENIT\put_in MED:ALL PH=LOC (660ms) cell(E)=LOC
'He is thinking of, uhm, how they put him **into the whatchamacallit**, into the cell.' [tci20111004 RMA 414–416]

2.2 Placeholder fillers

There are three kinds of placeholder fillers in Komnzo: the placeholder *bäne*/*baf*, the light verb *-rä* 'do', and the manner demonstrative *nima*. These can be used to replace nominal elements, verbs or entire sections of discourse. I follow Hayashi & Yoon (2006) in their definition of placeholders as referential expressions that are used as a substitute for a specific lexical item. Under this definition, placeholders occupy "a syntactic slot that would have been occupied by the target word" (2006: 490). For the present chapter, I expand the definition to include larger units, e.g. a whole clause or a proposition.

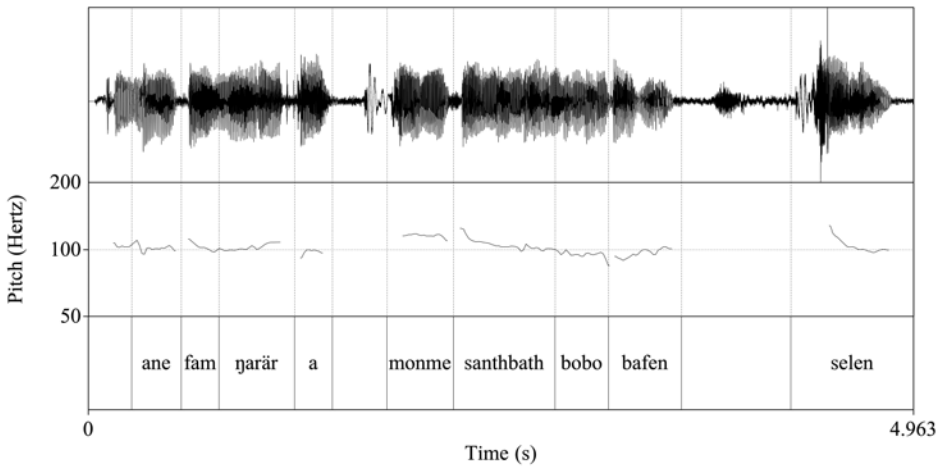

Figure 3: Audio analysis of [tci20111004 RMA 414–416]

2.2.1 The placeholder *bäne/baf*

The word that follows the above definition most closely is the placeholder *bäne/baf*. We have seen a rather typical example of the placeholder in (3), in which the speaker has problems finding the appropriate word, and finally uses an English loan *sel* 'prison cell'. The placeholder is flagged with the locative case (=*en*), and after a short pause the speaker produces the target *sel* with the appropriate case flag. Thus, the placeholder *bäne* is used pronominally. We will see in Section 3 that there are a number of functional extensions of this pattern.

Before moving on to introduce the other types of placeholders, I want to point to a recent change in my analysis of *bäne*. Formally, *bäne* patterns with the demonstratives (cf. Table 2), and based on its initial consonant /b/ it belongs in the medial category. Such a link is not surprising from a cross-linguistic perspective. Hayashi & Yoon (2006) report for Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and Indonesian that certain demonstratives also function as placeholders. This is akin to the analysis that I have adopted in the past, i.e., there is a distinction between the demonstrative *bäne* and the placeholder *bäne* (Döhler 2018: 112). The analytic criteria for setting up this distinction were based on prosody and syntax. For example, a break in the intonation contour through a short pause signals a disfluency situation and following from this such examples were analysed as placeholders (e.g. *bäne (.) kabe* 'who's-that ... the man'). If there is no disfluency situation, *bäne* is analysed as a demonstrative (e.g. used adnominally: *bäne kabe*

'that man'). Based on a rigorous inspection of corpus examples, I have now abandoned this analysis.

Despite its etymological origin in the system of demonstratives, I have come to the conclusion that *bäne* is not used as an (exophoric/situational) demonstrative at all. The prosody of all inspected tokens points to disfluency situations, and what seemed like adnominal uses of a demonstrative can be accounted for by assuming a nominal compound in which the first noun is filled by a placeholder, as in example (4) below. I put this here as a first introduction to *bäne*, and as a disclaimer, before we delve into the details in Section 3.

(4) *kwras nima kam zä\kwthef/a* ***bäne zawe*** *...* *töna*
brolga like_this back SG:PST:PFV\turn PH side (1350ms) high_ground
zawe.
side
'The brolga turned its back to the **what's-that side** ... to the land side.'
[tci20130923-01 ALB 51–52]

2.2.2 The manner demonstrative *nima*

The second element in Komnzo to be discussed here is the manner demonstrative *nima*, which I translate as 'like this'. Sometimes it occurs with the instrumental case as *nima=me* [like_this=INS].

This word is not a placeholder per se, but it can be used as a placeholder in certain contexts. *Nima* is used to further elaborate on the manner in which some event was carried out. The manner component is understood from context in most corpus examples, i.e. it is often not spelled out. Additionally, it can be accompanied by a gestural component, as in (4) above, in which the speaker turns her body away to reenact the movement of the brolga. However, the manner component can also be verbalized, which provides a bridging context for the placeholder use of *nima*. This is also a bridging context for another use of *nima*, namely as a quotative marker. Especially in this latter function, *nima* shares some characteristics with English *like*. In its placeholder use, but also in the use as a quotative marker, *nima* is always followed by a pause, as in (5).

There are two differences to the placeholder *bäne*. First, *nima* never substitutes a nominal element. As a manner demonstrative, it is used in place of a more complex event, often a stretch of discourse. What follows *nima* in speech is usually a more fine-grained elaboration. In example (5), the speaker elaborates on the people who were present in the situation. In this placeholder use of *nima*, there is a long pause (1060ms) followed by a whole clause (cf. Figure 4).

(5) *wati, ä\kwa/thake* ***nima*** *... sitau=aneme afa*
then 1PL>3PL:PST:IPFV\cut_meat like_this (1060ms) PN=NSG.POSS father
kwark b=ya\r/a nafanm ä\kwa/ne,
deceased MED=3SG.M:PST:IPFV\be 3NSG.DAT 1PL>3DU:NPST:IPFV\cut_meat
nzenm=wä.
1NSG.DAT=EMPH
'Then, we cut the meat **like this** ... Situau's late father (and his wife) were there. We cut some for them, and also some for us.'
[tci20120821-02 LNA 95–97]

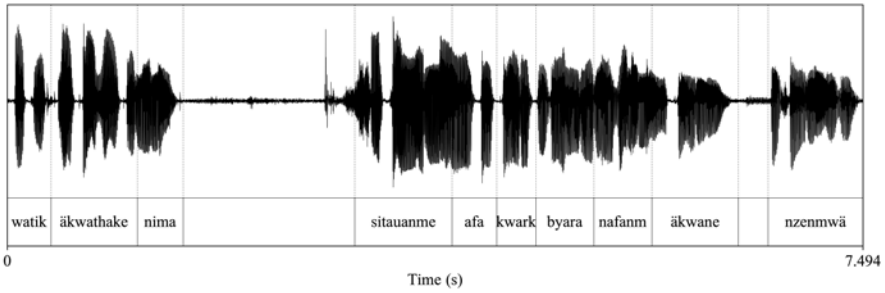

Figure 4: Audio analysis of [tci20120821-02 LNA 95–97]

Secondly, *nima* can be used anaphorically and cataphorically. Example (6) shows a cataphoric use of *nima*. In the text example, a man suddenly realises that his visiting relative has actually come as the vanguard of a group of headhunters. The cataphoric use (6) and the placeholder use (5) of *nima* can be distinguished by the fact that only the latter occurs in disfluency situations. In the placeholder example (cf. Figure 4), there is a significantly longer pause than in the cataphoric example (cf. Figure 5): 1060ms versus 280ms.

(6) *fi miyatha sf\rä/rm* ***nima*** *... zan=r zä*
3.ABS knowledgeable 3SG.M:PST:DUR\be like_this (280ms) kill=PURP PROX
zf swan\yak/
EPS 3SG.M:PST:IPFV\come
'He knew **it**: he had come here to kill (people).' [tci20111119-01 ABB 98–98]

(7) is a typical example of anaphora with *nima*. The speaker makes a resumptive comment summarizing a description of how to catch fish in the swamp. There is no pause or any other sign of disfluency in the audio of this example.

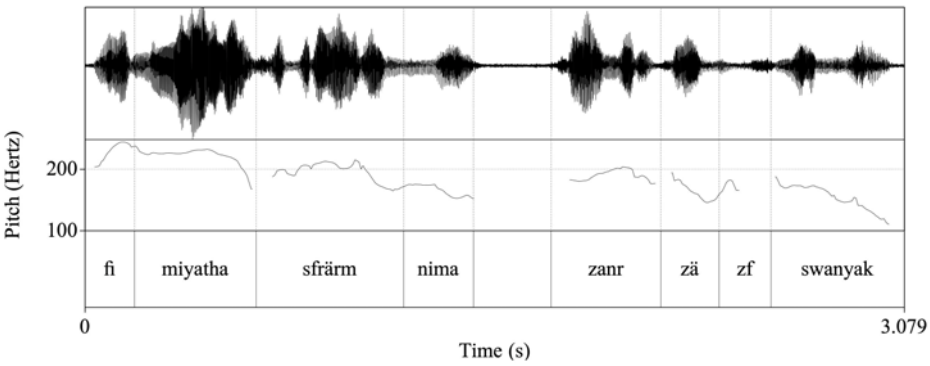

Figure 5: Audio analysis of [tci20111119-01 ABB 98–98]

(7) *zra=ma* *trikasi* ***nima=me*** *fof* *\rä/*
swamp=CHAR story like_this=INS EMPH 3SG.F:NPST:IPFV\be
'The story about the swamp is **just like this**.' [tci20120922-09 DAK 48]

2.2.3 The light verb *-rä*

The third element that can be used as a placeholder is the light verb *-rä* 'do'.[9] Komnzo has a number of light verbs, e.g. *fiyoksi* 'make', *-kor* 'become', *wäsi* 'happen'.[10] These are used in light verb constructions in which the verb carries the inflectional information, while a nominal element expresses the verbal semantics (cf. Döhler 2018: 304). A typical context for such constructions is the integration of borrowed nouns (from a verb in the source language), as in (8) below.

(8) *no=r* *bobo* ***zek*** ***krä\r/é***
water=PURP MED:ALL check(E) 1SG:IRR:PFV\do
'I would (go) there and check for water.' [tci20130903-03 MKW 146]

There are certain contexts in which a speaker uses the verb *-rä* not in a light verb construction, but because s/he has trouble finding the correct lexical entry. In corpus examples of this type, there is usually a short pause after the light verb, and then the correct full verb follows, sometimes the entire clause is repeated with the full verb. We can see this in examples (9) and (10) below. In both examples

[9]The verb 'do' is heterosemous (cf. Lichtenberk 1991 and Evans 2010) with the copula verb 'be'. In one type of inflectional pattern *-rä* means 'do', and in another pattern it means 'be' (cf. Döhler 2023).

[10]Some verbs lack an infinitival form. These are given here with a hyphen.

the light verb and the full verb carry the identical inflectional pattern in terms of alignment and TAM categories.

In example (9), the speaker describes the final stage of the ritual destruction of a grave site. Since he has trouble finding the correct verb for 'levelling the ground', he pauses (550ms), and then uses the light verb. After a longer pause (1800ms), he continues with the full verb *frmzsi* 'prepare, straighten' (cf. Figure 6).

(9) *wati ane bad kwot we ... **zf\rä/rme** we*
then DEM ground(ABS) properly also (550ms) 1PL>3SG.F:PST:DUR\do also
... zwa\frmnzr/me nima.
(1800ms) 1PL>3SG.F:PST:DUR\straighten like_this
'Then we were properly doing the ground ... we were levelling it like this.'
[tci20120805-01 ABB 831–832]

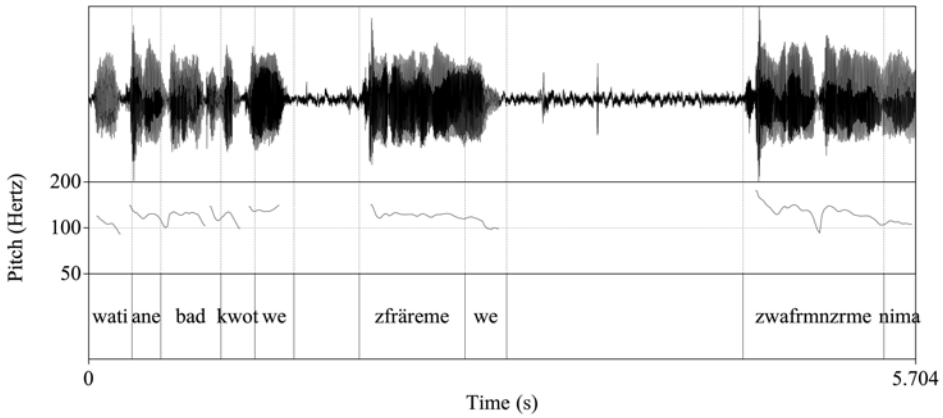

Figure 6: Audio analysis of [tci20120805-01 ABB 831–833]

Example (10) comes from the afterword of a recording. The speaker explains that his story is not a fictional story, but a real story. He substitutes the target word *kwthenzsi* 'change, turn' with the light verb *-rä*. In this example, there is no pause preceding the light verb, and the following pause (550ms) is rather short (cf. Figure 7).

(10) *kabe zokwasi aha nzürna trikasi **za\r/ath** ...*
man story yes spirit story 3PL>3SG.F:PST:PFV\do (550ms)

za\kwthef/ath
3PL>3SG.F:PST:PFV\change
'A real story. Yes, they made it into a spirit story ... they changed it.'
[tci20111119-06 MAB 146–147]

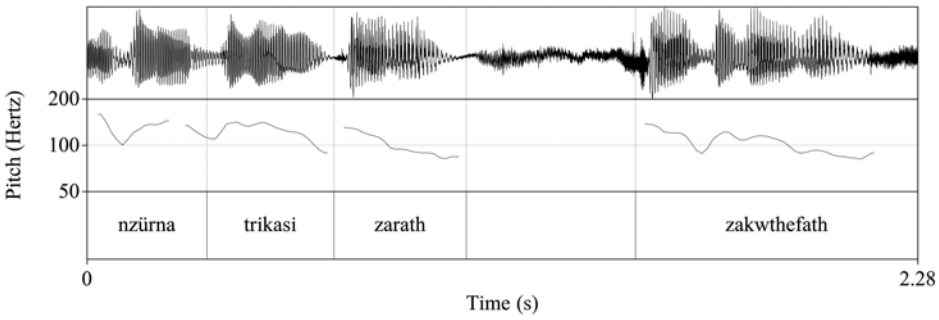

Figure 7: Audio analysis of an excerpt of [tci20111119-06 MAB 146–147]

While Komnzo utilizes light verbs to function as placeholders, there are other Papuan languages that have dedicated placeholder verbs, for example *məgi-* 'to do whatever' in Manambu (Aikhenvald 2008: 576).

2.3 Other fillers

There is another element in Komnzo that can be used as a filler, but its main function is connected to narrative style rather than disfluency. Especially the passing of time or the distance that one has travelled is often indicated with a long stretched *e*, realized as [ɛ:], which I gloss as 'until'. While this function is not a case of disfluency, the long stretched *e* is sometimes used like a hesitator, and it is the specific context that facilitates this use. In most corpus examples, the long stretched *e* is followed by a place name, as in (11) and (12). But there is nothing in the prosody that would differentiate its use for narrative style from a disfluency situation. The fact that the speaker was indeed searching for the place name in the two examples below, only became clear during the transcription of the texts, in which the speakers themselves explained it in this context.

The stretched *e* can be quite short. In example (11) it is 200ms long (cf. Figure 8), not much longer than the pause between the clause and the postposed noun (180ms).

(11) *fi we krän\brim/ **e** masu … garda=me=nzo*
3.ABS also SG:IRR:PFV:VENIT\return until PLN (180ms) canoe=INS=ONLY
'He returned to Masu by canoe.' [tci20100905 ABB 81–82]

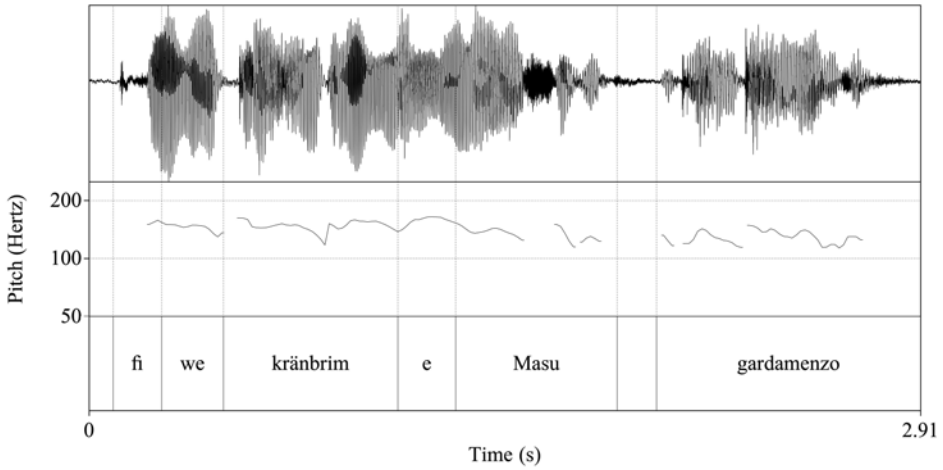

Figure 8: Audio analysis of [tci20100905 ABB 81–82]

It can also be very long, as in example (12), where it is 1600ms and takes up almost half of the length of the intonation unit (cf. Figure 9).

(12) *foba fof kre\far/é wi\yak/ **e** büdisn*
DIST:ABL EMPH 1SG:IRR:PFV\set_off 1SG:NPST:IPFV\walk until PLN
'From there I set off and walked until Büdisn.' [tci20130903-03 MKW 23]

3 The placeholder *bäne/baf*

This section describes the placeholder *bäne/baf* in its form (Section 3.1), syntactic distribution (Section 3.2), its various functions (Section 3.3) and extensions thereof (Section 3.4). I show three examples of accompanying gestures in Section 3.5 and discuss the problems of measuring the frequency of the placeholder in Section 3.6.

I adopt the terminology of "delayed constituent" and "target" for the word or larger unit which the placeholder substitutes. In examples, I print the placeholder (and sometimes a larger unit to which the placeholder belongs) in **bold font** and the delayed constituent or target in underlined font, as in (13) below.

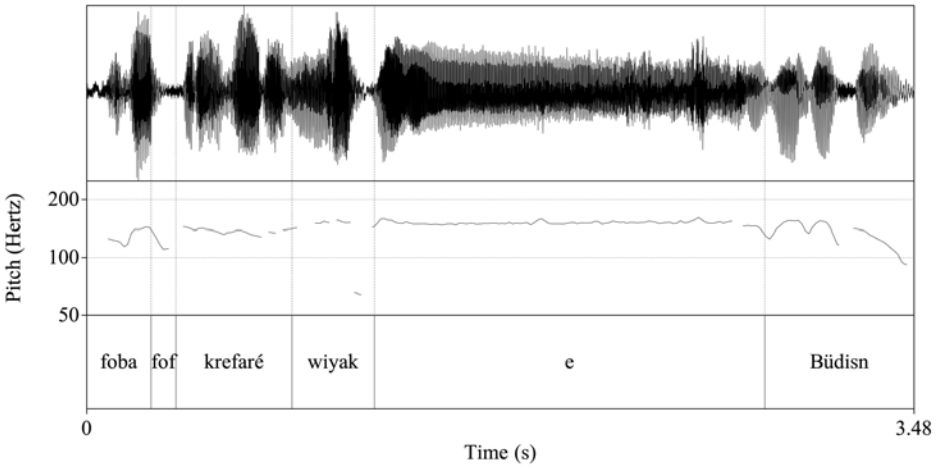

Figure 9: Audio analysis of [tci20130903-03 MKW 23]

(13) *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]

3.1 Form

As I have argued in Section 2.2.1, the word *bäne* belongs formally in the paradigm of demonstratives, more specifically in the medial category (cf. Table 2). Demonstratives in Komnzo can be used pronominally, and in this syntactic position they can be flagged with a subset of case markers, as is shown in Table 3 for the proximal demonstrative *zane*.

The placeholder *bäne* is much more active in this respect. As can be seen in Table 3, it can also be flagged for the three spatial cases (LOC, ALL, ABL) with inanimate referents. More importantly, *bäne* has a second stem, *baf*, which can be flagged for all cases that encode animate referents with the standard number distinction. In the Table, we can see some spillover of the two stems, i.e. *bäne* for animates and *baf* for inanimates, which I take as evidence that the two stems belong to the same underlying form. For example, *bäne* appears as the absolutive case form for animate referents, while all other forms are built from *baf*.[11]

[11]The lack of a number distinction is found with all absolutive case forms, e.g. personal pronouns and nominal enclitics.

Conversely, the locative case form for inanimate referents is built from *baf*, not from the expected *bäne*.

In terms of possible case flags, *bäne*/*baf* is not only more active than the demonstratives, but also more active than the person pronouns, which in turn cannot be flagged for cases that encode inanimate referents. In Table 3, I show the possibilities of personal pronouns with the 2SG in the rightmost column. Thus, one can say that the placeholder *bäne*/*baf* is the "most prototypical pronoun" in the language because it can substitute all nouns inflected for all cases. However, the agnostic term "pro-form" is more suitable, since *bäne*/*baf* can also replace longer stretches of discourse.

Table 3: Different case inflections

	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*
CHAR	*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*	-

While it is clear from the paradigm in Table 2 that *bäne* has developed directly from the demonstratives, we can only speculate on the origin of the second stem *baf*. One hypothesis is that *bäne* first merged with the ergative case enclitic *=f* [ERG.SG], and then developed the case forms shown in Table 3. Also recall that – based on the initial /b/ consonant – the medial category in the deictic system is formally (and historically) related to second person pronouns. Therefore, there is a historical link between the second person pronouns, the medial category in the deictic system, and the placeholder. Synchronically, I do not analyse deixis in Komnzo as a person-based system in the sense of Keenan & Anderson (1985).

3.2 Distribution

The placeholder can substitute any noun or noun phrase, whether it be case marked or zero marked (i.e. absolutive). A typical example is given in (14), where the speaker uses *bäne* followed by a very short pause of 160ms (cf. Figure 10), and then continues with the delayed constituent *zaru yawi*, on which he further elaborates.[12] *Bäne* here substitutes the whole nominal compound.

(14) *fi* ***bäne*** ... *zaru yawi* ... *zaru yawi mane*
but PH(ABS) (160ms) PN nut (2200ms) PN nut which(ABS)
y\konz/rth ... *nimä=wä* *we* *fof.*
3PL>3SG.M:NPST:IPFV\speak (1200ms) like_this=EMPH also EMPH
'But **whatchamacallit** ... the *zaru* nut ... (that) which they call *zaru* nut.
(They did) the same thing (with it).' [tci20120818 ABB 36–38]

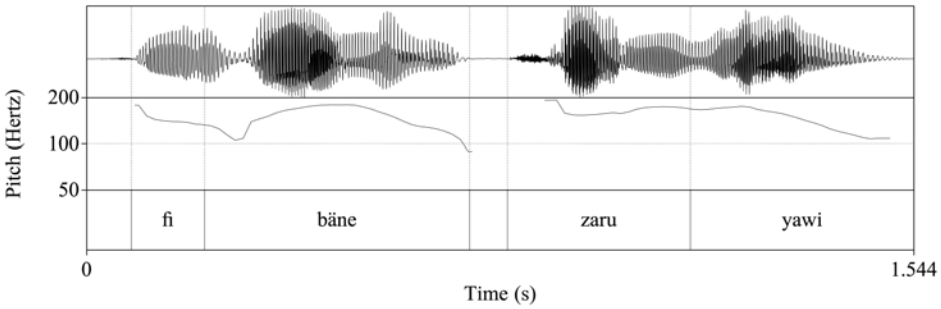

Figure 10: Audio analysis of an excerpt of [tci20120818 ABB 36]

In example (15), the placeholder occurs in the position of the head of a nominal compound ('house whatchamacallit' > '(house) platform').[13] In the delayed constituent only the head noun is repeated, not the whole compound. There are no measureable pauses in the example, but there is a break in the pitch contour before the delayed constituent.

(15) ***mnz*** ***baf=en*** *boba* *skiski=n* *y\rakth/kwa.*
house PH=LOC MED:ABL platform=LOC SG>3SG.M:PST:IPFV\put_on_top
'I put it on top of **the house whatchamacallit**, the (house) platform.'
[tci20111119-03 ABB 34]

[12] *Zaru* is the candlenut tree (*Aleutrites mollucana*) and its fruit is a stone fruit. The speaker refers to the hard kernel in the example.
[13] Houses are built on posts with a sitting platform called *skiski* underneath.

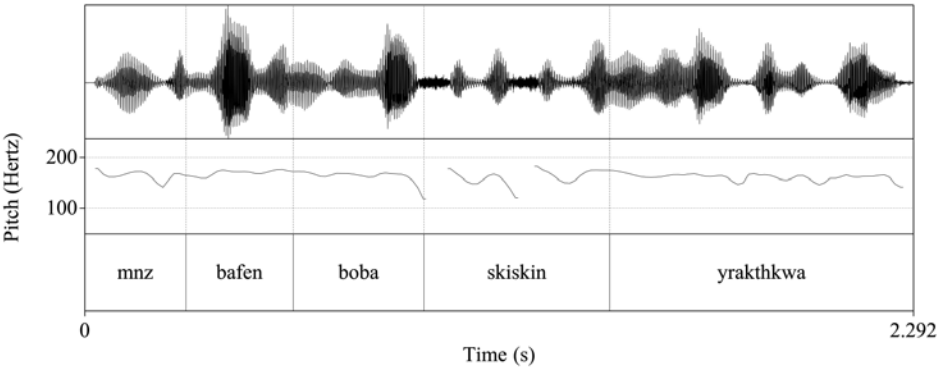

Figure 11: Audio analysis of [tci20111119-03 ABB 34]

In example (16), the speaker searches for the name of a particular fish species. Since the pause following the placeholder is very short (70ms), I analyse the placeholder as the first element (i.e. the modifying element) of a nominal compound (*ane bäne kofä* > *gastol*),[14] rather than as a separate noun phrase (*ane bäne* > *kofä* > *gastol*). After a pause of 470ms, the speaker provides the name of the fish species *gastol* (cf. Figure 12), but the anaphoric demonstrative *ane* and the noun *kofä* 'fish' are not repeated (not: *ane gastol kofä*).

(16) *komnzo thu\kwthe/nzrm* ***ane bäne*** ... ***kofä*** *fof* ...
only SG>3PL:PST:DUR\turn DEM PH (70ms) fish EMPH (470ms)
gastol.
gastol(MA)
'I was just turning **those whatchamacallit fish** ... (those) gastol (fish)'
[tci20130903-03 MKW 125–126]

Example (17) is clearer because all parts of the complex noun phrase are repeated (*ane bäne* > *ane trikasi*). At the same time, the example is interesting because the pause of 820ms (cf. Figure 13) comes after the anaphoric demonstrative, i.e. in the middle of the delayed constituent. It is cross-linguistically common to have hesitation pauses after preposed function words (Himmelmann 2014: 935).

The structure of (17) is suggestive of another kind of analysis, namely a combination of the placeholder *bäne*/*baf* and a light verb placeholder ('be' in this case). The two clauses in (17) are hanging topic constructions that I translate with 'as

[14] *Gastol* is the striped snakehead (*Channa striata*), which is an invasive species to the region. Hence, the word *gastol* is a loanword from Papuan Malay.

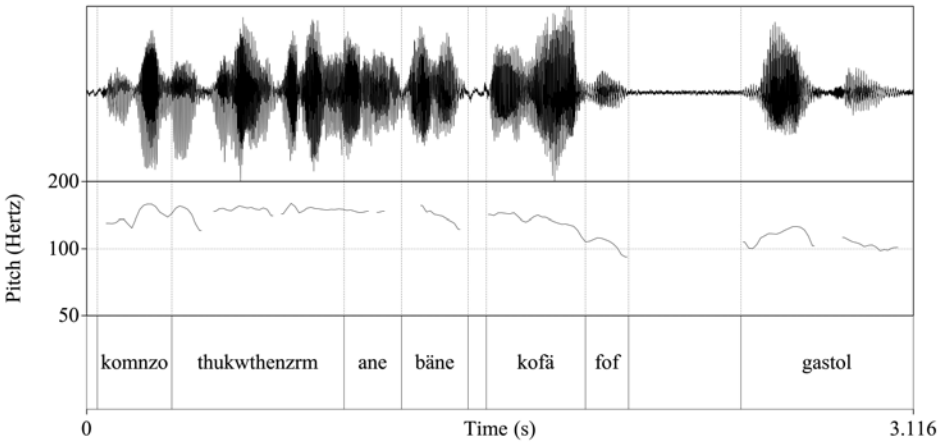

Figure 12: Audio analysis of [tci20130903-03 MKW 125–126]

for ...' (cf. Döhler 2018: 337), and in the corpus the speaker continues to explain how the story was passed down from the ancestors. A more suitable analysis might be that the entire topic construction acts as a placeholder substituting the following clause which is also a topic construction (*ane bäne mane rera* > *ane trikasi mane nŋatrikwé*).

(17) *watik* ***ane bäne mane re\r/a*** *ane ... trikasi mane*
then DEM PH which 3SG.F:PST:IPFV\be DEM (820ms) story which
n=ŋa\trik/wé *fof*
IPST=1SG:NPST:IPFV\tell EMPH
'Well, **as for this whatchamacallit**, as for this ... story that I've just told'
[tci20131013-01 ABB 401–403]

In longer stretches of discourse, there is a framing structure in which the placeholder appears in an opening part, then there is some elaboration that reveals the substituted referent, and finally there is a closing part that repeats the structure of the opening part. An example of this is given in (18) below. The speaker talks about a man who has no children of his own, but he has adopted the children of his wife, whose former husband died many years ago. The context here is one of taboo, because the speaker is in a taboo relationship with the deceased man, which means that he should not utter his name. We will see in Section 3.3 that this framing strategy is often used in taboo contexts.

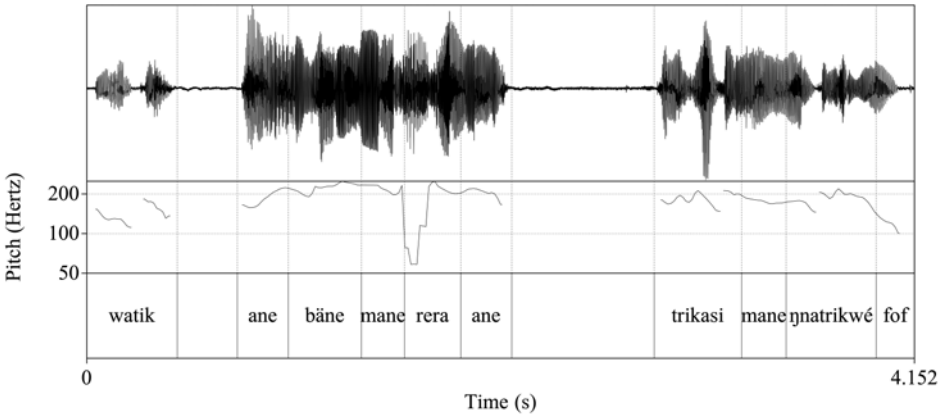

Figure 13: Audio analysis of [tci20131013-01 ABB 401–403]

(18) ***wati baf=ane=nzo nagayé ä\moneg/wr*** ...
then PH=POSS.SG=ONLY children 3SG>3PL:NPST:IPFV\look_after (2000ms)
mabata-a-fis kwark zöbthé mane ya\r/a, kabe fof
PN-POSS-husband deceased first who 3SG.M:PST:IPFV\be man EMPH
... *nafane kabe ...* *masen ...* *wati nafane*
(1650ms) 3SG.POSS man (600ms) PN (1450ms) then 3SG.POSS
nagayé=nzo ä\moneg/wr.
children=ONLY 3SG>3PL:NPST:IPFV\look_after
'**Well, he looks after whatsisname's children** ... Mabata's late, first husband ... her man ... Masen ... Well, he looks after only his children.'
[tci20120814 ABB 217–221]

The repeated part may involve more that just the delayed constituent. In example (19), the copula clause is repeated several times by two speakers who are trying to find and negotiate the correct expression for 'mixed' or for 'random order'. The example comes from a stimulus task, in which two speakers are asked to arrange a set of pictures into a story. In the final part of the task, the story is presented to a third participant. In (19), speaker RMA explains to the third participant that the set of pictures came in random order. He cannot think of the right word immediately and therefore uses a placeholder in a copula clause (*bäne thfrä ane*). He then corrects himself and uses an English insertion (*mix thfnrä ane*). Speaker TSA corrects RMA by using a Komnzo verb instead of the English insertion (*thafraksikaf thfrä ane*), and speaker RMA repeats this.[15]

[15]Note that in (19), RMA's response to TSA is not a perfect repetition, because there is a different

(19)

RMA: *nzäthe zöbthé mane nzwan\ri/n* ***bäne***
namesake first which 3SG>1DU:RPST:IPFV:VENIT\GIVE PH(ABS)
thf\rä/ ***ane*** ... *mix* *thfn\rä/* *ane*
3PL:RPST:IPFV\be DEM (.) mix(E) 3PL:RPST:IPFV:VENIT\be DEM
'When (our) namesake first gave us the (pictures), they were whatchamacallit ... they came mixed.' [tci20111004 RMA 305–307]

TSA: *thafrak-si=kaf* *thf\rä/.*
mix-NMLZ=PROP 3PL:RPST:IPFV\be
'They were mixed.' [tci20111004 TSA 206]

RMA: *thafrak-si=karä* *thf\rä/.*
mix-NMLZ=PROP 3PL:RPST:IPFV\be
'They were mixed.' [tci20111004 RMA 308]

The placeholder and the delayed constituent do not need to be adjacent. A frequent pattern in the corpus is that the placeholder remains in-situ, while the delayed constituent is postposed to the clause. One example is shown in (20) below. Note that there is a pause of 760ms between the clause and the delayed constituent (cf. Figure 14).[16]

(20) *kofä* *mane* ***baf=en*** *kwa\thor/thrmth* ... *gufiyar=en.*
fish(ABS) which PH=LOC 3PL:PST:DUR\enter (760ms) fish.trap=LOC
'and the fish was going **into the whatchamacallit** ... into the fish trap.'
[tci20110802 ABB 64–65]

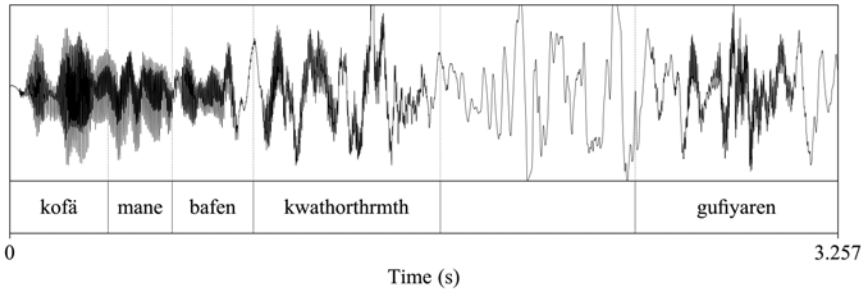

Figure 14: Audio analysis of [tci20110802 ABB 64–65]

proprietive case marker. The two variants, *=karä* and *=kaf*, however, do not differ in their semantics (Döhler 2018: 161ff.).

[16]The audio quality of the example was not good enough to produce a meaningful pitch graph.

3.3 Functions

Most of the examples of *bäne/baf* that we have seen so far involved cases of memory lapse or problems of accessing a lexical entry. It is those "tip-of-the-tongue" disfluency situations that are characteristic of placeholder uses. Hence, it is no surprise that many corpus examples also involve repair situations, as in (21). The speaker first produces a false start, the target of which is *mobilema* 'because of the mobile phone'. Next she inserts a placeholder (*bänema*), and after a brief pause of 150ms (cf. Figure 15) she produces the delayed constituent: *radioma* 'because of the radio'.

(21) *watik -/mo/-* ***bäne=ma*** *...* *radio=ma* *noku=karä=nzo*
then FS PH=CHAR (150ms) radio(E)=CHAR anger=PROP=ONLY
kwa\fark/wrmth
3PL:PST:DUR\set_off
'So they were leaving in anger because of the mo... **because of the whatchamacallit** ... because of the radio.' [tci20131004-05 RNA 39]

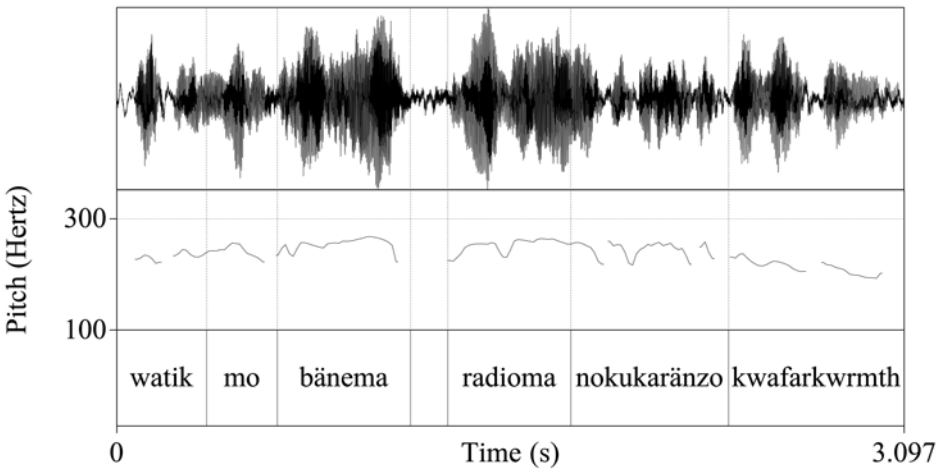

Figure 15: Audio analysis of [tci20131004-05 RNA 39]

The above example shows a context that is typical of placeholder uses, namely the occurrence of loanwords or ad-hoc insertions. This might be due to the fact that in some cases the speakers wish to express something for which there is no single word in the Komnzo lexicon, such as 'radio' (21), 'prison cell' (3) or 'Gastol

fish' (16). Finding an ad-hoc insertion can lead to disfluency. An additional factor can be linguistic purism, in the sense that speakers try to avoid using words from another language. This is an important part of the linguistic ideology of Komnzo speakers. An example is (19) where the speaker is corrected by his interlocutor after using an ad-hoc insertion from English 'mix'.

Another context for using placeholders is to hint at certain cultural sensitivities such as avoidance, taboo, or face-saving. This has been reported in the literature for different languages such as Lao (Enfield 2003: 108ff.), Mandarin (Cheung 2015), Korean, and Japanese (Hayashi & Yoon 2006: 502ff.). For Komnzo speakers, such sensitivities may be triggered by topic (e.g. substance abuse or sexual relationships) or more commonly by certain kinship relations which dictate name avoidance. Especially for affinal kin, name avoidance is seen as a way of showing respect, and therefore one should not pronounce the personal names of certain individuals. It follows that name avoidance can clash with the need to identify a particular individual. Komnzo speakers solve this problem by employing teknonyms ('X's father' or 'X's husband') or by using the placeholder *bäne*/*baf*. While this strategy works well when interacting with people who share sufficient common ground, it is more difficult in recording situations that involve an outsider: a linguist fieldworker.

Consider example (22). The speaker talks about his sister, whose husband had died in an accident some 30 years ago. The speaker was in an avoidance relationship with the deceased husband, because he was his brother-in-law. On first mention, he uses a placeholder (*bafane mezü* 'whatsisname's widow'). After a pause of 1350ms, he pronounces the name (*Masenane mezü* 'Masen's widow'), and adds a teknonym (*albertaŋafe kwark* 'Albert's late father') for further elaboration. After another pause of 1580ms, he closes with a phrase that mirrors exactly the opening phrase (*nafaŋafane mezü* 'his father's widow'). The closing phrase is all the more peculiar, because he could have said simply *nafane ŋame* 'his mother' (i.e. 'Albert's mother').

(22) *mabata fi* *mezü* *zwa\m/nzrm* ... ***baf=ane*** ***mezü***
PN 3SG.ABS widow 3SG.F:PST:DUR\stay (1350ms) PH=POSS.SG widow
re\r/a ... *masen=ane* *mezü* ... *albert-a-ŋafe*
3SG.F:PST:IPFV\be (370ms) PN=POSS.SG widow (1580ms) PN-POSS-father
kwark ... *nafa-ŋaf=ane* *mezü*
deceased (2300ms) 3SG.POSS-father=POSS.SG widow
'Mabata stayed as a widow. She was **whatsisname's widow** ... Masen's widow ... Albert's late father ... his father's widow.' [tci20120814 ABB 39]

Examples (22) and (18) come from different sections of the same text. In both examples the speaker talks about his brother-in-law, and both examples show a striking similarity in that there is a kind of bracket structure with an opening and a closing part. The first mention of the brother-in-law is a placeholder in both examples, presumably signalling that this a taboo context.[17] What follows is a careful elaboration during which the name to be avoided is in fact uttered. Finally, the bracket is closed with a phrase in (22) – or with a clause in (18) – that exactly mirrors the opening part. In Komnzo speech, this bracket structure is frequently found when talking about sensitive topics. It follows that the placeholder is used with a communicative goal rather than filling a disfluency. Figuratively speaking, the placeholder and the bracket structure set a stage on which is it permissible to break with the taboo.

Another use outside of disfluency is for managing turn-taking, more specifically for "gaining the floor", which relates to conversational dynamics rather than conveying some communicative goal. Example (23) shows a short exchange from the picture task, in which speaker RMA comments on a picture card showing a man being dragged off by two police officers. The speaker TSA adds his own thoughts on the state of affairs, which RMA agrees with.

(23)

RMA: *aiwa ... frisman=é kabe*
oh_no (500ms) policeman(E)=ERG.PL man(ABS)
y\thärku/nth.
3DU>3SG.M:NPST:IPFV\drag
'Oh no, the two policemen are dragging away the man.'
[tci20111004 RMA 109–111]

TSA: ***bäne=ma*** *y\thärku/nth ŋare mane*
PH=CHAR 3DU>3SG.M:NPST:IPFV\drag woman(ABS) which
nz=ü\fn/zro.
IPST=SG>3SG.F:NPST:IPFV:ANDAT\hit
'**That's why** they are dragging him away: It was the woman who he hit just before.' [tci20111004 TSA 89]

RMA: *mh.*
INTERJECTION
'mh (okay).' [tci20111004 RMA 112]

[17] A similar context is found in Kalamang (Visser 2025 [this volume]) and Besemah (McDonnell & Billings 2025 [this volume]).

TSA's sucessful interruption is achieved by starting his turn with the placeholder *bänema* 'that's why' that has the entire following clause as its delayed constituent, as is indicated by the underlined font in (23). The initial placeholder creates a moment of anticipation that further elaboration is to come, thus, enabling TSA to take over the floor. There are no pauses in TSA's turn, but there is a break in the intonation contour with a falling pitch on the last word of the first clause (*ythärkunth*) and a rising pitch on the first word of the second clause (*ŋare*), which separate the two clauses prosodically (cf. Figure 16).

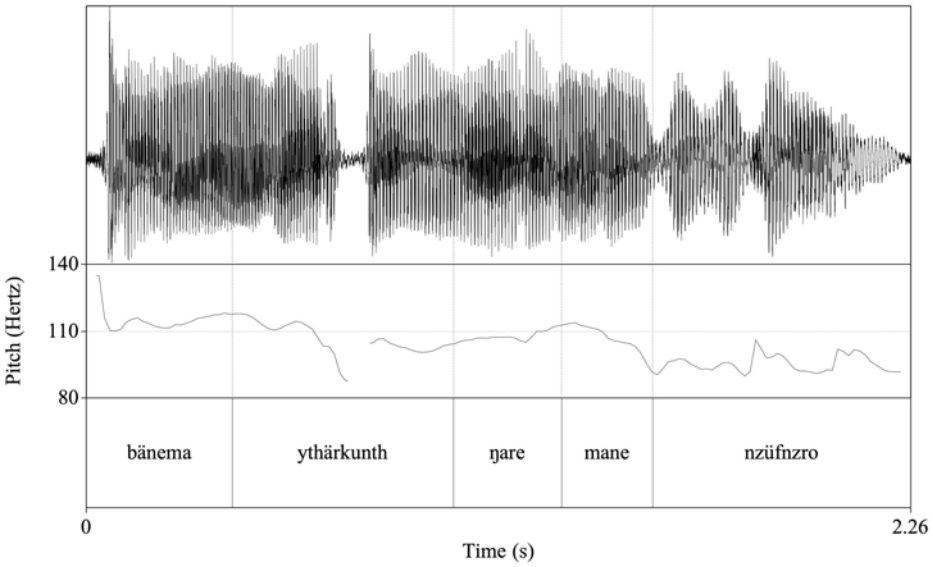

Figure 16: Audio analysis of [tci20111004 TSA 89]

3.4 Functional extensions

In most of the preceding examples, the placeholder mirrored the delayed constituent in its syntactic position and case marking. In this section, I argue that some of the inflected forms of *bäne* have widened their functional scope to include a non-placeholder function, namely they are used as clausal connectors for adverbial clauses.

Consider example (24), in which the speaker explains how he stores different species of yam in his storage house. The placeholder *bäne* is inflected with the purposive case (*bänemr*), which has a temporal meaning in this example ('until').

The placeholder functions as a connector of two otherwise independent clauses. There is no sign of disfluency in the example. The falling pitch on *bänemr* and subsequent reset of the pitch level separate the two clauses (cf. Figure 17). Thus, prosodically *bänemr* belongs to the first clause.

(24) *ane fof e\mig/wre* ***bäne=mr*** *fobo kwa*
DEM EMPH 1PL>3PL:NPST:IPFV\hang PH=PURP DIST:ALL FUT
thra\rfik/wr.
3PL:IRR:IPFV\grow
'We hang them up **until** (the shoots) will grow from there.'
[tci20121001 ABB 24]

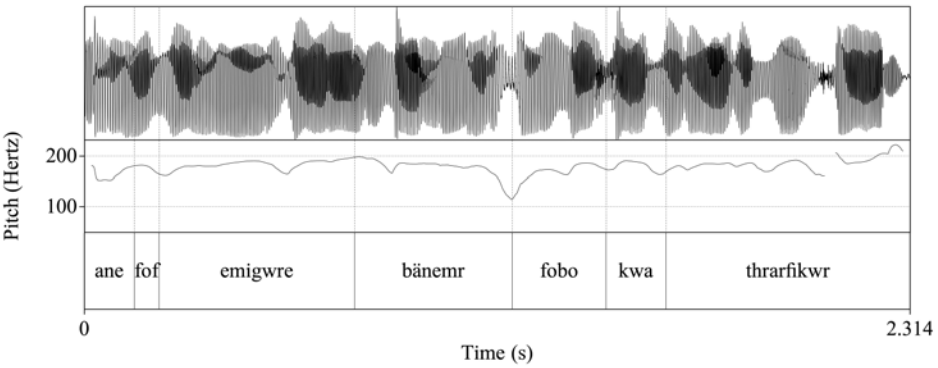

Figure 17: Audio analysis of [tci20121001 ABB 24]

Tokens of *bäne* such as (24) cannot be analysed as placeholders, nor can the following clause be analysed as a delayed constituent. Instead, they are part of a grammatical construction that connects two independent clauses, and it is the case marker on *bäne* that signals the semantic relation that holds between them. There are adverbials of reason (*bäne=ma* [PH=CHAR] 'because'), manner (*bäne=me* [PH=INS] 'thereby'), and purpose/time (*bäne=mr* [PH=PURP] 'in order to'/'until'). Note that Komnzo has additional strategies for adverbials including other types of connectors (e.g. *fthé* 'when', *monme* 'how') or nominalised verbs for non-clausal adverbials (Döhler 2018: 321ff.).

(25) is a second example of *bäne* as a clausal connector. This time it is inflected with the characteristic case, which I translate as 'because'. Like in (24), *bänema* has a falling pitch and the following clause resets the pitch level (cf. Figure 18).

Note that there is a second token of *bäne* in the first clause of (25), inflected with the instrumental case (*bäneme*). This one ticks all the boxes for a placeholder: there is a short pause (after the verb) signalling a disfluency, the placeholder mirrors the delayed constituent in terms of case marking and syntactic position. Note that there is no falling pitch on *bäneme*.

(25) *zöbthé* ***bäne=me*** *kwa w\rthaku/nzr* ... *zzarfa=me*
first PH=INS FUT 3SG>3SG.F:NPST:IPFV\sprinkle (200ms) ginger=INS
bäne=ma *gatha miyosé \rä/.*
PH=CHAR bad taste 3SG.F:NPST:IPFV\be
'First, he will sprinkle it with **whatchamacallit** ... with ginger, **because** it has a bad taste.' [tci20130903-04 RNA 63–64]

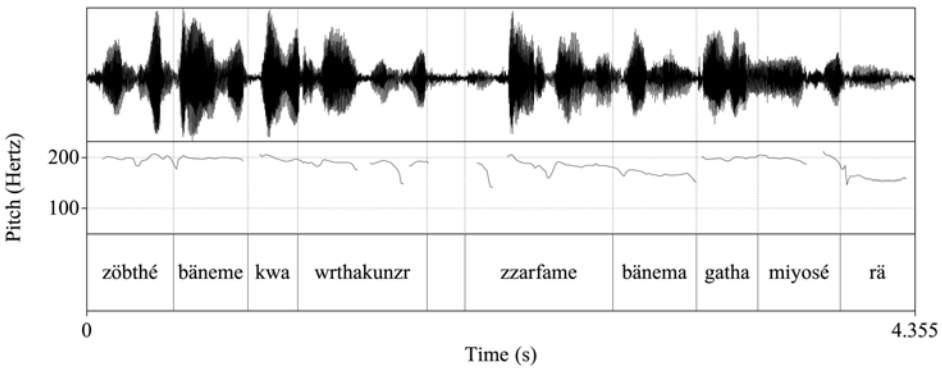

Figure 18: Audio analysis of [tci20130903-04 RNA 63–64]

Not all tokens of *bäne* in three inflections (CHAR, PURP, INS) are connectors, as we just saw with *bäneme* in (25) or with *bänema* in (21) and (23). Next to the meaning, it depends on syntactic and prosodic cues whether a specific example is best analysed as a placeholder or as a connector. Thus, it would be wrong to say that these inflections have grammaticalized to become connectors, but rather that they have widened their functional scope or their syntactic possibilities.

A reviewer of this chapter suggested that the development of the adverbial connector need not involve the additional step via a placeholder, but come directly from the medial demonstrative. Based on synchronic data, I cannot rule out this possibility. Moreover, Himmelmann (2014: 230) noted already that demonstratives in the "recognitional use" are often found as connectors of relative clauses,

and there is an obvious link between recognitional deixis and placeholders (cf. Enfield 2003).

Nevertheless, I want to sketch out a scenario via the placeholder that seems to me more parsimonous. For this, let us think about the problem as bridging two ends of a spectrum: On the one hand, we have a clear placeholder use, which involves disfluency and some kind of mirroring of the delayed constituent. Most of the examples in this chapter fit this description. On the other end of the spectrum, we have examples like (24) and (25), where two clauses are connected, and where there is no disfluency.

One kind of bridging construction are cases in which the placeholder has the entire following clause as its delayed constituent, as in (23). A clearer example of this pattern is shown in example (26), in which the speaker introduces the protagonist of a story. He uses a placeholder in the first clause, and after a pause of 1100ms he informs us about the protagonist (cf. Figure 19).[18] The function of the placeholder in (23) and (26) is to create a certain anticipation that the speaker has more to say.

(26) *trikasi* ***bäne=ma*** *kwa na\trik/wé* ... *kabe tnz yf*
story PH=CHAR FUT 1SG>2SG:NPST:IPFV\tell (1100ms) man short name
sf\rä/rm *kukufia.*
3SG.M:PST:DUR\be PN
'I will tell you a story about **that one**: The short man's name was Kukufia.' [tci20100905 ABB 6–7]

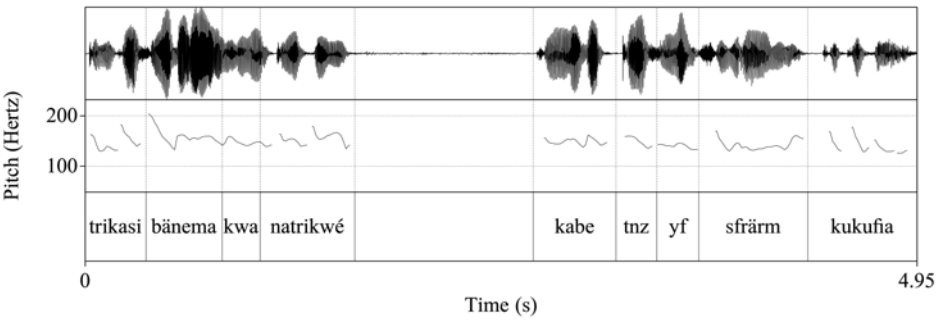

Figure 19: Audio analysis of [tci20100905 ABB 6–7]

[18] Note that the characteristic case (*=ma*) covers both meanings of reason and aboutness (Döhler 2018: 157).

All it takes for the second pillar of the bridge, is for the placeholder to occur after the verb, i.e. in final position. This happens frequently in a kind of afterthought expression which is introduced by *bäne*. In (27), the speaker explains the layout of yam tubers in his storage house. The placeholder (*bäne=mr*), flagged with the purposive case, can be translated as 'in order to' or 'so that', and its delayed constituent is the following clause, the afterthought. The pauses preceding (850ms) and following (300ms) the placeholder signal a disfluency (cf. Figure 20). Thus, the example has features from both ends of the spectrum: disfluency and clausal connector use.

(27) *keke ŋa\fsi/nzre* *komnzo e\nak/wre* ...
NEG 1PL:NPST:IPFV\count just 1PL>3PL:NPST:IPFV\put_down (850ms)
bäne=mr ... *gb* *thra\rfik/wr* *zba.*
PH=PURP (300ms) shoot 3PL:IRR:IPFV\grow PROX.ABL
'We don't count (them). We just put them down ... **so that** ... the shoots grow from here.' [tci20120805-01 ABB 33–35]

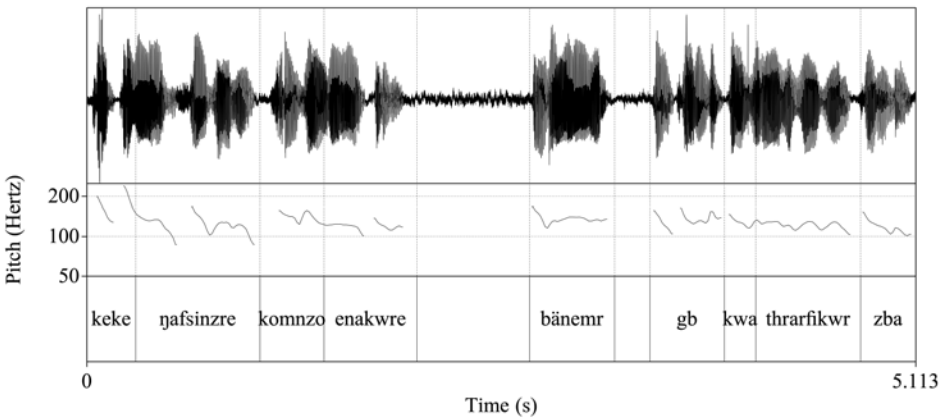

Figure 20: Audio analysis of [tci20120805-01 ABB 33–35]

I suggest here that afterthoughts like (27) provide a bridging context from which the function of *bäne* can be extended to include non-placeholder uses, i.e. to be used as different kinds of adverbial connectors. What drives this functional extension is the "hiatus moment" that is so typical of placeholders, i.e. the anticipation for further elaboration.

3.5 Multimodality

Multimodal aspects of placeholders have been largely neglected in the literature, but see the chapter on Northern Pastaza Kichwa (Rice 2025 [this volume]). An exception is Navarretta's (2016) study on Danish hesitative fillers and simultaneously occurring gestures. In the examples from Komnzo, the placeholder *bäne/baf* is often accompanied by a hand gesture, often a pointing gesture. This does not come as a surprise, as the placeholder has developed from a demonstrative.

Note that there has not been a detailed analysis or description of gestures in Komnzo, nor is the corpus currently annotated for gestures. For these reasons, I can only give a rough estimate of the frequency of gesture co-occurrence. One can find gestures in about two thirds of the placeholder tokens. I include here three examples from the Komnzo data.

The first example comes from a conversation in the garden. Speaker STK refers to a road junction in the forest, but has problems finding the correct place name in his description. He uses a placeholder inflected with the allative case in (28). The accompanying gesture is a pointing gesture consisting of a short jerk of the left hand in the corresponding direction. This is highlighted in the still image with the red circle (cf. Figure 22). The audio analysis in Figure (21) shows the time and length of the gesture with the grey overlay on the Praat picture. The gestural component is almost perfectly aligned with the placeholder, but not with the target word *Fothr Zfthfo*, which is produced after a short pause. Hence, the gesture functions like a support during the retrieval of the correct place name. In fact, the gesture alone establishes the correct spatial relationships by pointing in the corresponding direction.

(28) *fä mane \rä/ **bäne=fo** ... fothr_zfth=fo.*
DIST which 3SG.F:NPST:IPFV\be PH=ALL (400ms) PLN=ALL
'where (the road) turns **to whatchamacallit** ... to Fothr Zfth.'
[tci20130823–06 STK 143–144]

The second example comes from a conversational narrative in which speaker MAB talks about an event that happened a long time ago. His interlocutor CAM asks whether he was married at the time, to which MAB replies "No, I was just a boy". To further emphasise his age, he adds that his beard had only just started to grow at the time. In (29), he uses a placeholder for the target word *fäk thäbu* 'beard'. The accompanying gesture is that he strokes his left cheek with the fingers of his right hand (cf. Figure 24). The gestural component overlaps with more than just the placeholder. The audio analysis in Figure 23 shows that the gesture starts with the proximal demonstrative *zane*, lasts through the false start and

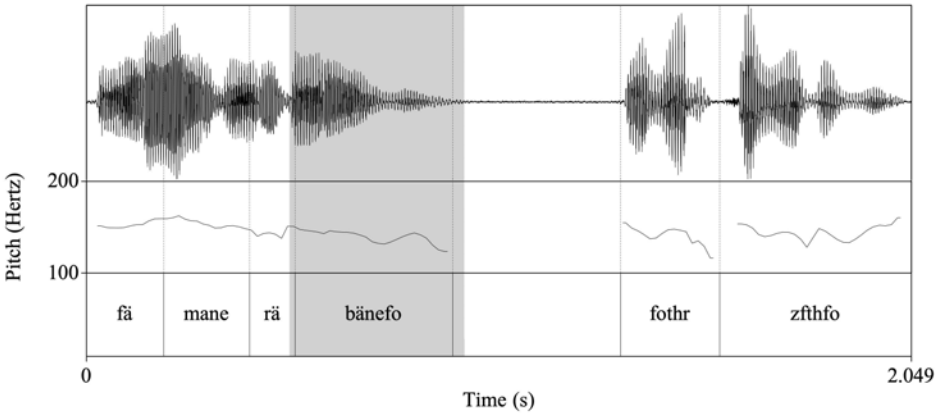

Figure 21: Audio analysis of [tci20130823–06 STK 143–144]

Figure 22: Still image of [tci20130823–06 STK 143–144]

the placeholder, and stops in the pause. The speaker does not produce the target word (*fäk thäbu* 'beard'), because the gesture alone is sufficient to identify the referent.

(29) *komnzo kwa zane -/nzä/-* ***bäne*** *...* *thf\rfik/wrm.*
just FUT PROX FS PH (480ms) 3PL:PST:DUR\grow
'**These watchamacallit** were just about to start growing.'
[tci20130927-06 MAB 187]

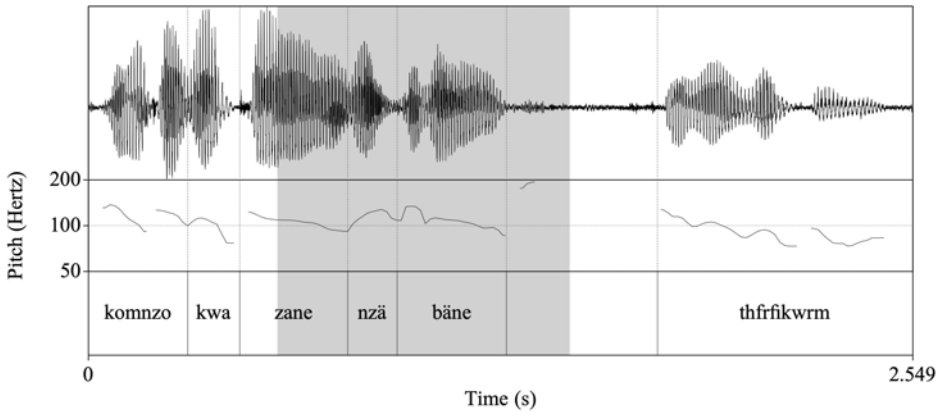

Figure 23: Audio analysis of [tci20130927-06 MAB 187]

Figure 24: Still image of [tci20130927-06 MAB 187]

In the third example, the gesture is more figurative. The example comes from the picture task, and it belongs to example (19) above: Speaker RMA explains to his interlocutor, who is off the videoframe to the right, that the picture cards came in random order, i.e. they were mixed up. He has problems in lexical retrieval for this concept. First, he uses the placeholder, then an insertion from English (*mix*), and — after a prompt from the second participant TSA — a Komnzo word

(*thafraksikarä*). The gesture consist of both hands spinning around each other on a horizontal left-to-right axis (cf. Figure 25), and he produces it two times. First, it occurs with the placeholder. Then he repeats the gesture with the English insertion, but not with the final expression in Komnzo. Here too, the gesture functions as a support channel during lexical retrieval.

Figure 25: Still image of [tci20111004 RMA 305–307]

The three examples presented here are anecdotal, but we can still derive some generalisations from them. First, gestures provide a parallel support channel during disfluencies. This is shown by the fact that the gesture only accompanies the placeholder and not the target word. Secondly, there is a broad range of gestures for such situations. The three examples presented here involve different manual gestures, but non-manual gestures such as lip- and head-pointing are also common. Thirdly, gestures vary in their function: They can be used to point to a target that is not present, as in the first example. They can be used to identify the target directly, as in the second example. Finally, they can be used to re-enact the target, as in the third example.

3.6 Frequency of *bäne*/*baf*

There has not been much mention in the literature on the frequency of placeholders. Podlesskaya (2010) reports 5 placeholders per 1000 words in a corpus of informal elicited narratives in Russian, and Zhao & Jurafsky (2005) report

6.68 placeholders per 1000 words in a conversational corpus of Mandarin. However preliminary these figures are, on first inspection the placeholder *bäne/baf* is much more frequent in the Komnzo data. There are 723 tokens in a corpus of 53,678 words, which amounts to 13.47 placeholders per 1000 words. This high figure has to be treated cautiously.

The figure of 13.47 per 1000 words is certainly too high, because some the 723 tokens are not placeholders, but connectors (cf. Section 3.4). For example, inflections such as *bäne=ma* [PH=CHAR] can be used as a placeholder, as in example (21), and as a connector, as in (25). The corpus has not been annotated in such a way that these can be searched for separately. To get an idea of the error rate, I have therefore excluded all of the inflections of *bäne* that can be used as connectors.[19] This recount still results in a rather high figure of 9.71 placeholders per 1000 words. It follows that the true figure must lie somewhere between 9.71 and 13.47 per 1000 words.

A reviewer of this chapter suggested that the high frequency may be an artefact introduced by the recording situation. The presence of an outsider linguist may exert pressure on the speakers to find the correct word and to avoid English insertions, which are permissible in natural conversation. I acknowledge that these pressures are real for Komnzo speakers as for anyone else. However, a brief examination of the data shows that this aspect has little influence in my data. To investigate this claim, I selected four more natural recordings. These are either purely observational recordings (even without my presence), or recordings in which I was only a spectator of an ongoing conversation. If we compare the frequency of *bäne/baf* in this subset with the overall frequency in the text corpus, we see that the frequency is only slightly lower: 13.27 placeholders per 1000 words.[20]

A third explanation for the high frequency might be that *bäne/baf* is used in disfluency situations in which other languages employ hesitative fillers. While this is confirmed by my general impression of Komnzo speech, there is no way to measure relative frequency, as hesitative fillers are not consistently coded in the corpus.

[19] These are: *bäne=ma* [PH=CHAR] 'because', *bäne=mr* [PH=PURP] 'in order to', *bäne=me* [PH=INS] 'thereby'). They add up to 202 tokens.

[20] The four recordings were: tci20130823-06 (a conversation in the garden between two speakers), tci20130927v-06 (a conversational narrative between two speakers), tci20130901-04 (a conversational narrative between three speakers), and tci20131004-05 (a conversation between six speakers). The combined figures for these four recordings were 70 placeholders out of 5274 words.

4 Conclusion

I hope that the chapter helps to push forward the emerging typology of fillers. I close the chapter by summarizing a few interesting observations in Komnzo.

As I pointed out in Section 3.6, the figure of 13.47 placeholders per 1000 words is somewhat inflated. With a better coding of the data, this figure will come down, but not by much. The question of why Komnzo has a higher frequency than other languages will remain. Note that this observation extends to other languages in the Southern New Guinea region. For Bine, an unrelated Oriomo language spoken 200km to the East of Komnzo, I can report the staggering figure of 18.71 placeholders per 1000 words.[21] For Evenki, an endangered Tungusic language spoken in Russia, China and Mongolia, Klyachko (2022) reports a token frequency of 12.6 placeholders per 1000 words[22], and she explains this with a "lack of proficiency in some speakers" (2022: 213). This is not the case for Komnzo and Bine speakers. Although they are small languages – Komnzo is spoken by about 250 people, and Bine is estimated to have 2000 speakers — neither language is endangered, and the recorded speakers are fully competent. My general answer to the puzzle of the high frequency is that placeholders rather than hesitative fillers are the preferred strategy in disfluency situations.

The second point I want to raise here is the multi-functionality of *bäne*/*baf* in Komnzo. We have seen that its use goes well beyond that of a filler. It includes intentional uses with communicative goals such as signalling a taboo context. Moreover, it is used for interaction management in conversations. Lastly, in clause final position it has grammaticalized via an afterthought construction into a connector for adverbial clauses.

A third topic are co-occuring gestures, which open up a fascinating field of research for the study of fillers. As we have seen from the three examples in Section 3.5, Komnzo speakers use gestures as a visual support channel when they have problems retrieving the correct word from their mental lexicon.

[21] 629 tokens of the placeholder *nake* in a corpus of ca. 33,000 words. The coding problems are not an issue for Bine because (i) the placeholder *nake* is unrelated to demonstratives, and (ii) it is not used as clausal connector. That being said, the description of Bine is still in its infancy (cf. Döhler forthcoming).

[22] There are 350 tokens of the placeholder *aŋi* in a corpus of about 27,700 words (Klyachko 2022: 213).

Abbreviations

Abbreviations in the gloss line follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules. Additional conventions are given below:

...	pause	IPST	immediate past
(###ms)	measured pause in milliseconds	(MA)	loanword from Malay
		MED	medial
ANDAT	andative ('away')	NPST	non-past
ANIM	animate	NSG	non-singular
CHAR	characteristic	ONLY	exclusive ('only X')
(E)	loanword from English	PH	placeholder
EMPH	emphatic	PLN	place name
EPS	epistemic primacy	PN	proper noun
FS	false start	PROP	proprietive ('having')
HES	hesitator	PRIV	privative ('lacking')
IC	inclusory case	RPST	recent past
INANIM	inanimate	VENIT	venitive ('hither')

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