

## Function of preverbal *pë-* in the language variety of Tepërav (Espiegle Bay)

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The language variety of Tepërav (Espiegle Bay, Malekula Island) has a preverbal morpheme *pë-* (also *pe-* and *po-*), which is positioned between the subject index and the verb root. This morpheme was originally classified as ‘intensive’ by Holmes (2014: 80-81) based on a very small text corpus. In a larger corpus for the language (Barbour & Tarosa 2011-2023), *pë-* is attested with a range of functions that have been associated with irrealis mood in other Malekula languages, such as Neverver (Barbour 2012). The question thus arises: is *pë-* an irrealis marker? And if not, what range of functions does it cover?

Examples below show (1) *pë-* coding a desiderative complement, (2) *pë-* coding a relative clause under the scope of negation, and (3) *pë-* in both the condition and the consequence of a conditional structure. Other functions are also attested in the data.

(1) *Nëmlakel polpol rë-rongo rë-pë-ven lames.*  
young.man all/every 3PL-want 3PL-XX-go LOC.bush  
‘All the young men want to go to the bush.’ [eb18.wav 452.383 458.854 Ref.064]

(2) *Xaen pete duwat te Ø-pë-rech nawon*  
3sg be.not female SUB 3SG-XX-talk very  
She was not a woman who talked a lot. [eb12.wav 62.087 65.27 Ref.016]

(3) *Ø-po-wo Ø-pe-ve xunu, Ø-pe-ruv po not rëngen.*  
3SG-XX-say 3SG-XX-COP 1SG 3SG-XX-plant LIM garden LOC  
‘If it were me, I’d just plant a garden in it.’ [eb41.wav 42.68 46.483 Ref.012]

In this paper, I explore the functions of *pë-* in a corpus of recorded language data (Barbour & Tarosa 2011-2023), considering the interaction of *pë-* with other morphology, and in complex clausal structures.

## References

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