TEHIT

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Tehit is spoken by approximately 12,000 people, who live mainly in the subdistricts of Teminabuan and Sawiat, about 100 kilometers southeast of the district capital, Sorong, in the western part of the Bird’s Head peninsula of Papua (Irian Jaya). Tehit, together with Kalabra to the west and Moraid to the north, form the West Bird’s Head Stock, which when combined with Seget and Moi further to the west and north, comprise the West Bird’s Head Family, also known as the Toror language group (Voorhoeve 1975, Wurm and Hattori 1981, Silzer and Heikkinen 1984, Flassy 1991). Tehit is composed of eight major dialects: Jit, Mbol Fle, Saifi, Imian, Sfa Riere, Fkar, Sawiat, and Salmeit (Flassy and Stokhof 1979), which exhibit extensive geographic lexical chaining. (This analysis for the Tehit general language group is mainly based on the Imyan Tehit dialect.)

The inventory of Tehit phonemes includes nineteen consonants and four vowels. The stops include voiced and voiceless bilabial /p/, b/, alveolar /t/, d/, and back /q/, g/ stops, along with their prenasalized counterparts. Continuants include bilabial and alveolar fricatives /l/, s/, and the laryngeal /h/. The sonorants consist of the bilabial and alveolar nasals /m/, n/, and two liquids, the lateral /l/ and flap /ɾ/. Tehit vowel phonemes are /i, e, a, o/. Orthographically, semivowels ‘y’ and ‘w’ are derived from corresponding high vowel phonemes /i, o/ depending on syllable structure.

Tehit has a maximal syllable template of CCVVC, but the majority of syllables are CV, followed in frequency by CVC. Onsets are obligatory everywhere except word-initially (e.g. o.mos ‘vine’). Complex onsets may only consist of a voiced stop (b, d, g) followed by a liquid (l, r), e.g. ta.bra ‘forest’. If a nucleus is complex, it takes the form of a rising diphthong iV, e.g. di.len ‘ironwood’, or rarely the falling diphthong /au/, /au/ ‘mist’. Codas are restricted to liquids (l, r) word-externally, e.g. fo.l.i ‘overgrowth’. Word-finally, however, simple codas may consist of any non-laryngeal consonant (i.e. voiced stops and /h/ are excluded). Word-final complex codas take the form yC, e.g. hna.it ‘worm’. Consonant clusters not conforming to the above rules are broken up phonetically into short degenerate CV syllables with epenthized non-phonemic schwa, e.g. krmok (k.r.mok) ‘moss’. See for a more detailed phonological description, Hesse (1995).

All Tehit words have lexical stress. Stress in polysyllabic non-compound words is relegated to a single syllable, usually the penultimate, but word-ultimate stress is not uncommon. If a word contains a syllable having complex structure, whether due to a complex onset, nucleus or coda, then that syllable always carries the word stress. Degenerate syllables never carry stress and are restricted to pretonic position. Consequently, they are not found word-finally or in monosyllabic words.

Tehit is a SVO language with relatively simple morphology, almost entirely dedicated to the tracking of person-number-gender of referent nominals. This pronominal agreement is marked on a wide variety of word classes, including verbs, adjectives, possessives, quantifiers, inalienable nouns (partitives and kin terms), prepositions, relativizers, and even conjunctions. The agreement prefixes, made up of an efficient set of single-consonant phonetic signals, are invariant regardless of word class usage or referent case role:

\[(1) \quad 1SG \quad t-\]
\[1INC \quad f-\]
\[1EXC \quad m-\]
\[2 \quad n-\]
\[3SF \quad m-\]
As seen above, gender is manifest only in third person singular forms. First person plural explicitly includes or excludes the hearer. Ambiguity that results from homophonous forms, m- for both ‘1EXC’ and ‘3SF’ and under-differentiation of number in the second person, is most often resolved either by the number of a suppletive root, or by anaphoric context. Plural is usually indicated by increased height in a suppletive root’s first vowel, see (2) and (3).

(2) Om m-ase m-ak biele
3SF 3SF-sleep:SG 3SF-at:SG garden
om m-a.
3SF 3SF-POS:SG

She lives at her garden.

(3) Mam m-ese m-ik biele
We:EXC 1EXC-sleep:PL 1EXC-at:PL garden
mam m-i.
1EXC 1EXC-POS:PL

We live at our garden.

Occasionally, a noun phrase will be marked with an agreement enclitic that draws from the same set given in (1). If the last word of a noun phrase ends in a vowel, that word may include an enclitic denoting the gender and number of the third person head noun, as in (4), (5) and (6).

(4) wi hra Nago w-ase-m
place REL God 3SM-sleep-3SF

where God lives

(5) T-nok dait na trar o-u w-kedi-m.
1SG-know NEG person old DET-3SM 3SM-name-3SF

I don’t know the parent’s name.

(6) Korik bol oko-m w-natehla kat / m-aheit.
pig house DEM-3SF 3SM-leave.behind INT 3SF-stay

The domestic pig he left behind, it stayed.

Also, if a transitive verb phrase ends in a vowel and no nominal object is expressed, the verb phrase may include the enclitic, denoting the number and gender of the fronted, missing, or understood object, as in (7).

(7) Wa-wet o-u w-lok oli m-aka / w-hitung oli-m.
3SM-child DET-3SM 3SM-pick.up again 3SF-come 3SM-count again-3SF

His child again picked up another (grub) and again distributed (it).
Origin of the Se Bra River
Max Saflembolo, March 1995

(1) T-rana fe se-kmas / se-kmas hra w-athri se bra-u # 
1SG-tell about water-flood water-flood REL 3SM-cause river blue-3SM 
I will tell about the flood breakout, the flood breakout that caused Blue River.

(2) Tet t-to t-adien Srer / la mam m-kain se oko / hu # 
I 1SG-say 1SG-with Srer DU 1EXC 1EXC-own river DEM but 
I say that I (my clan) along with the Srer (clan), we both own this river, however.

(3) Tet t-kain w-ahir wa-sa ago / t-ahir Katrik / m-hok 
I 1SG-own 3SM-from 3SM-head above 1SG-from Katrik 3SF-come.out 
m-ak... kla m-kdein m-ak... kni Natok # 
3SF-at river 3SF-boundary 3SF-at log.bridge ko.tree 
I own (the area) from the headwaters, from Katrik, it comes out at...the river boundary is at... 'Natok' Log Bridge.

(4) W-ali aidi ou w-a le ou w-a se-kmas oko # 
3SM-to down.the there 3SM 3SM-POS COP 3SM 3SM-POS water-flood DEM 
ha tet t-a le-u se wa-sa ago # 
but 1SG 1SG-POS COP-3SM river 3SM-head above 
The lower part of the flood is his, but mine is the upper headwaters.

(5) Kejadian se-kmas oko / w-adien wa-wet / 
origin water-flood DEM 3SM-with 3SM-child 
w-kafe wet wa-dla-u / 
3SM-carry.on.shoulders child 3SM-male-3SM 
t-nok dait na trar o-u w-kedi-m # 
1SG-know NEG person old DET-3SM 3SM-name-3SF 
w-adien mkan / y-ein y-thok afan nak / 
3SM-with dog 3PL-go 3PL-split.out grub breadfruit 
m-ak le kni Far # 
3SF-at be log.bridge ko.tree 
The origin of this flood: he and his young child, he was carrying his son on his shoulders, I forget the father's name, along with the dog, they went to split out breadfruit tree grubs near 'Far' log bridge.

(6) W-thok w-ak aidi m-fot / wa-wet o-u w-dik # 
3SM-split.out 3SM-at down.the there 3SF-finish 3SM-child DET-3SM 3SM-put 
ou w-ak bet-alit # 
3SM 3SM-at mud-wallow

When he finished chopping out a grub, his child would set it down. He (the child) was by a boar mud wallow.
He was sitting near the mud wallow, but his father was chopping out grubs.

Splitting out a grub, he took it and tossed it aside, (and his child) set it down by the mud wallow.

He (the child) would set it down by the mud wallow; he (the father) would toss (another grub). As each grub became available he tossed it over near the boar wallow; he continued tossing (another one), tossing (another one)... and his son would pick it up and redistribute it.

He counted saying: This one, this is for mother. (His father) tossed it over, and he set it down like that.

He picked another one up from the boar wallow and said: This one is for grandpa. And he set it down like that.
W-asen oli / w-lok kat / w-to / M-an ko
3SM-stand.up again 3SM-pick.up INT 3SM-say 3SF-REL DEM
m-an korik bol # w-dik kat m-de-ke #
3SF-for pig house 3SM-put INT 3SF-like-this
He stood up, got (another grub) and said: This one is for the domestic pig. He put it down like that.

M-an ko t-lok kat m-an t-fe mkan ko-u #
3SF-REL DEM 1SG-take INT 3SF-for 1SG-POS dog DEM-3SF
This one I’m taking for my dog here.

M-an ko m-an tet #
3SF-REL DEM 3SF-for 1SG
M-an ko m-an tono #
3SF-REL DEM 3SF-for 1SG-father
This one is for me. This one is for father.

Oko m-an t-eme m-kmat #
DEM 3SF-for 1SG-mother 3SF-abdomen
This is for mother who’s pregnant.

W-leli w-an aidi w-sot fo afan hra w-ono
3SM-sit 3SM-at1 down.there 3SM-see and.then grub REL 3SM-father
w-kolb / wkoit o-m m-ba-roro / m-kaka m-ain #
3SM-split log DET-3SF 3SF-strike-turn.around 3SF-tail.end 3SF-go
He was sitting there when he saw: the grub (tree) that his father was splitting, the log swung around, and the stump end began moving. \\
c water was already swirling up, carrying the log along.

M-ahn ma-sa m-ba-roro / ma-sa m-ali ago /
3SF-from 3SF-head 3SF-strike-turn.around 3SF-head 3SF-to above and.then
ofo m-kaka o-m m-ak sa #
and.then 3SF-tail.end DET-3SF 3SF-at head
From its top end (the log) was turning around, the top end pointing upstream, and then the trunk end pointing upstream.

Bet-alit aidi m-asin / m-ska-hilis #
mud-wallow down.there 3SF-rise 3SF-thrust-encircle
m-ska-hilis / m-ska-hilis / m-ska-hilis / m-aka/
3SF-thrust-encircle 3SF-thrust-encircle 3SF-thrust-encircle 3SF-come
fo m-ba-roro m-alin #
and.then 3SF-strike-turn.around 3SF-go-ahead

1 The form –an is a prepositional verb, translatable as ‘for, to, toward, at, in, on, etc.’, it also occurs in (21), (25),
(27) and (36).
The mud wallow down there rose up, and (the flood) began to swirl around. It swirled around and around and around, and (the log) swung around and headed off.

(19) W-ono  w-asen  w-lok  kat  wet  o-u /
3SM-father  3SM-stand.up  3SM-pick.up  INT  child  DET-3SM
w-kafe  w-ak  ago #
3SM-carry.on.shoulder  3SM-at  above

His father stood up, snatched up his son, and set him up on his shoulders.

(20) W-to / Ahh  n-siga / buon  m-a  n-sese  korwain  tet #
3SM-say  ahh  2-bad  impossible  3SF-that  2-run  follow  me
He said: Hey you scuz, there's no way that you can run after me.2

(21) W-lok  wet  o-u  w-an  w-kafe-u /
3SM-lift  child  DET-3SM  3SM-so.that  3SM-carry.on.shoulder-3SM
w-fe  mkan  o-u  w-be-u #
3SM-POS  dog  DET-3SM  3SM-call-3SM

He picked up his child to carry him on his shoulders, his dog he called.

(22) Ou  w-sese /  w-sese  w-ak  sa /  w-ak  sa  w-ain #
3SM  3SM-run  3SM-run  3SM-at  head  3SM-at  head  3SM-go

He ran, ran up the path, up the path going (home).

(23) W-kro  w-ak  aidi  ha /  se...  w-to  w-kro  fo /
3SM-stand  3SM-at  down.there  but  water  3SM-say  3SM-stand  then
se  oko  w-ska-hilis  w-ak  aidi /  w-to  w-dik-si
water  DEM  3SM-thrust-encircle  3SM-at  down.there  3SM-say  3SM-put-sink
ou #
3SM

He stood still down there but, the water... whenever he stopped, the water swirled around him there, wanting to drown him.

(24) W-asen  w-ain  sros #
3SM-stand.up  3SM-go  continue

He got up and kept on going.

(25) W-si  m-an  w-sibiele /  w-sot  fo  ha /
3SM-face  3SF-to  3SM-back  3SM-see  then  but
se  oko  w-sese  korwain #
water  DEM  3SM-run  follow

He faced around to his back and looked, but the water was rushing right after him!

(26) N-siga  buon  n-sese  korwain  tet #
2-bad  impossible  2-run  follow  1SG

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2 He said this to the flood coming out.
You no-good, there's no way you can catch me.

(27) W-lok w-an w-kafe-u / ou w-ses / w-ses / 3SM-pick.up 3SM-so.that 3SM-carry.on.shoulder-3SM 3SM 3SM-run 3SM-run
    w-ses / w-ses / w-ses kawuak de... w-ak.. w-to ah #
    3SM-run 3SM-run 3SM-run CONT until 3SM-at 3SM-say Ah

He pick up (his child) to carry him and ran, ran, ran, ran on and on, until... he got (there) and he said: Ah! (he arrived home).

(28) Wa-wet w-to / La f-sot la #
    3SM-child 3SM-say DU 1INC-see please³

    t-eme le y-eše bol angko-m #
    1SG-mother COP 3PL-sleep house down.here-3SF

His child said: Please, let’s see! Mother and the others are sleeping at the house down here.

(29) La f-sese kat / f-hok f-ek fo / f-lok kat
    DU 1INC-run INT 1INC-arrive 1INC-at then 1INC-take INT

    korik bol aidi / ni aidi / se f-ein #
    pig house down.there thing down.there so.that 1INC-go

Let’s run fast, get there, grab the pig and other stuff down below, so we can go!

(30) W-sese w-ak ra fo / umhh w-sot w-ak w-eme oko-m
    3SM-run 3SM-to inside then umhh 3SM-look 3SM-to 3SM-mother DEM-3SF

    m-a m-kmat oko-m / mam m-leli m-ak bol #
    3SF-REL 3SF-pregnant DEM-3SF 3SF 3SF-sit 3SF-at house

He ran on inside and then, oh no... he (the child) saw his mother, who was pregnant, she was sitting at home.

(31) W-smit m-al aidi fo / se o-u w-sese korwain #
    3SM-look 3SF-to below then water DET-3SM 3SM-run follow

When he looked down (he saw that) the water was flooding after them.

(32) Y-ek ale fo / na y-to knwata-m / w-sma oko-m
    3PL-at down.there then person 3PL-say cave-3SF 3SM-spouse DEM-3SF

    w-natehla kat m-ak oko # korik bol oko-m /
    3SM-leave INT 3SF-at DEM pig house DEM-3SF

    w-natehla kat wa-heit #
    3SM-leave INT 3SM-remain

They were down there, people call it the cave, his wife, he left her behind there; and the domestic pig, he left that behind there.

(33) Ou w-sese sros #
    3SM 3SM-run continue

He kept on running.

³ la at the end of a command indicates respectful request.
(34) W-kafe wet w-an ago / w-de w-seše
3SM-carry.on.shoulder child 3SM-at above 3SM-until 3SM-run
kawuak de... w-teit m-drik m-ak samkam m-taiyi #
CONT until 3SM-leg 3SF-enter 3SF-in catfish 3SF-hole

He was carrying his kid on his shoulders and running on and on until... his leg entered a catfish hole (in the rock).

(35) W-teit o-m m-drik m-ak samkam m-taiyi /
3SM-leg DET-3SF 3SF-enter 3SF-at catfish 3SF-hole
de w-kro kawuak #
until 3SM-stand CONT

His leg entered a catfish hole, and so he kept on standing. (His leg was caught, and he couldn't get it out.)

(36) Tmak ou w-kafe m-an ago / wet ou
axe 3SM 3SM-carry.on.shoulder 3SF-at above child 3SM
w-kafe w-an ago / w-kro kawuak w-ak ko #
3SM-carry.on.shoulder 3SM-at above 3SM-stand CONT 3SM-at DEM

With his axe on his shoulders, his child on his shoulders, he continued to stand right there.

(37) W-owor wet w-ak w-amak ago / ou mmhh...
3SM-carry.on.neck child 3SM-stand 3SM-neck above 3SM mmhh
ou w-kein oli w-teit aidi-m mmhh m-hok dait #
3SM 3SM-pull again 3SM-leg below-3SF mmhh 3SF-come.out NEG

He was carrying his child sitting around his neck, he, oh no... he pulled his leg again, oh no... it wouldn't come out.

(38) Se oko w-aka w-ska-hillis / kawuak de
water DEM 3SM-come 3SM-thrust-encircle CONT until
té-te-te-te-te-te-te w-flie #
until... 3SM-cover

The water rushed around him, rising, rising, rising, until....it covered (them).

(39) W-kro kawuak w-ak oko ha / wi oko na
3SM-stand DEM 3SM-at DEM but place DEM people
y-wit y-to / Na-u w-kro #
3PL-name 3PL-say person-3SM 3SM-stand

He's still standing there, and the place is called, 'The Standing Man'.

(40) Hra w-agia bait le w-oko #
REL 3SM-culprit self COP 3SM-DEM
Ou w-kro kayi de hrake ko / w-abe kawuak amak #
3SM 3SM-stand CONT until present DEM 3SM-become CONT rock

He himself was the culprit. And he continues to stand to this day, turned into stone.
(41)  M-de  ni-rana  m-afe  Se  Bra-u  w-ak  le  oko  #
       3SF-so  NOM-tell  3SF-about  river  blue-3SM  3SM-at  COP  DEM
       ou  w-di  w-ali  sifie  le  w-ko  #
       3SM  3SM-fall  3SM-to  sea.shore  COP  3SM-DEM

And that's the story of Blue River; it fell into the salt water shore right there.

REFERENCES