Ulrike Mosel, **Tolai Syntax and its Historical Development,**
Canberra: The Department of Linguistics, A.N.U., 1984 |Pacific
Linguistics, B-92|. iv + 223 pp. $26.05.

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In the words of the author of the book under review, "the aim
of the present `Tolai Syntax´ is to provide a thorough description
of the noun phrase, the verbal phrase and the clause, and to
present it in such a way that information on these subjects is
readily accessible to linguists interested in language typology,
universals of language or comparative syntax" (p. 1). The
description reflects the views of language espoused by the Cologne
Research Group in Language Universals and Typology, of which Mosel
was a member. There are a number of scales or continua postulated
for Tolai, some of which, however, are less well justified than
others. (Why are active intransitive clauses lower on the hierarchy
of verbalness (?) than active transitive clauses?)

Even though the description of Tolai syntax is quite
extensive, it can hardly be said to be thorough. The discussion is
limited to the syntax of the noun phrase, the verb--or better, the
predicate--phrase and the clause. Not only is next to nothing said
about complex sentences, even the treatment of simple clauses has
some serious ommissions. For example, there is no discussion of
interrogative sentences. The title of the book is misleading. A
reader who expects to find a discussion of the development of the
syntax of present-day Tolai from an earlier stage will be
disappointed. The three chapters dealing with the syntax describe
`traditional´ Tolai, and each chapter concludes with a brief

discussion of recent innovations, most of which are due to the
influence of English or Tok Pisin.

Chapter 1, Introduction, gives background information on the
Tolai people and the sociolinguistic situation. Mosel identifies
several regional, social and functional varieties of Tolai. The
chapter ends with a list of abbreviations used in glossing the
data, but the list is far from complete.

Chapter 2 deals with the noun phrase. The discussion of the
articles if rahter unclear, and the definite/indefinite distinction
set up by Mosel does not appear supported by the ev·dence. **A/ra** is
said to be a `definite article´, but there are many examples in the
book where the article can hardly be definite. It is even used in
existential sentences:

    a   <u>kilala-na-mulmulum</u>
    ART   season C hunger
     `There was famine´.

(C is a `connective particle´.)

The chapter contains a detailed discussion of possessive
constructions. As is typical of Oceanic languages, Tolai has more
than one basic type of possessive construction. In Tolai, they are:
inalienable, and two types of alienable construction. One type of
alienable construction is used when the possessed refers to an
article of food or drink for the possessor, a weapon used against
the possessor (`its club´, i.e. the club with which it (a pig) was
hit), and emotions of the possessor (`my love´). The other type of
alienable construction is said to encode temporary possession. It
is used, for example, with `my wife´, which Mosel accounts for by
saying that a wife is the property of her husband. (The possession
is temporary because of the possibility of divorce.) This
explanation seems vitiated by the fact that the same construction
is used with `my husband´. In fact, the same lexeme is used for
both: **kau** `spouse´.

Chapter 3 deals with the "verbal" phrase. Instead of `verbal phrase´, a more appropriate term would have been `predicate phrase´, because the nucleus may be a verb, an adjective, a quantifier, a numeral or a noun.

On the basis of their structural properties, various classes of verbs can be established for Tolai: transitive vs. intransitive, dynamic vs. stative, active vs. inactive. Active verbs encode situations where the referent of the subject has control over the situation. Inactive verbs, all of which are intransitive, encode uncontrolled states and processes. The active-inactive distinction is relevant to basic word order (see below).

The chapter contains a detailed discussion of the tense, aspect and mood system of Tolai. There is also an extensive discussion of verb serialization. In Tolai, up to four verbs may appear in a serial construction. Unfortunately, even though the description of Tolai serialization is extensive, it leaves certain important questions unanswered. The way in which some examples of serial constructions are presented implies that they are compounds: the constituent verbs are joined by hyphens. In other examples, no hyphens appear between the verbs. Is this simply an error, or are there two different types of serial verb construction? What is the reason for treating (at least some) serial constructions as compounds? Mosel herself suggests that there are different types of serial constructions when she says that the verbs **mulai** `do again (intr.)´ and **mule** `do again (tr.)´ (but presumably no others) can be separated from the preceding verb by certain particles.

Chapter 4 deals with the structure of the clause. Tolai has two basic word orders: SV(O) and VS. The former is used with transitive verbs and active intransitive verbs. The latter is used with inactive intransitive verbs.

Mosel distinguishes three types of clause on the basis of the predicate: verbal clauses, where the predicate is a "verbal" phrase (with the exception of noun phrases); nominal clauses, where the

predicate is a noun phrase without a subject and a tense/aspect
marker; and semi-verbal clauses, where the predicate is a noun
phrase with a subject and a tense/aspect marker. This strikes one
as misanalysis at least partly due to the confusion between the
verbal phrase and the predicate phrase in Chapter 3. The
categories of nominal and semi-verbal clauses do not seem
warranted. Even "verbal" clauses appear without tense/aspect
markers simply because certain tenses and aspects have no overt
marking.

There are two more general critical points to be made about
the grammar. Not infrequently, a claim is made without any
substantiation. For example, adding the reciprocal prefix **var** to a
verb is said to result in "intransitivization." What makes
reciprocal verbs intransitive is not made clear.

At places, data are given that merit discussion but which are
not discussed anywhere in the grammar. For example, the transitive
suffix -e is said to be used with a number of verbs. But it
apparently also occurs with the comitative case marker: **me**, from **ma**
+ **e**.

The shortcomings aside, the grammar is a most valuable
contribution to the descriptive literature dealing wiht Oceanic
languages, and it should also prove of interest to general
theoretical linguists.