

REVIEWS

Wurm, S.A., (ed.). 1975. *New Guinea Area Languages and Language Study. Vol.1: Papuan Languages and the New Guinea Linguistic Scene.* Pacific Linguistics, C38. Canberra, The Australian National University. xlii + 1038.

This volume is the first of three on the language situation in the New Guinea area. It offers us a full 1038 pages of information on, mainly, the classification of the Papuan languages. There are two dedications by Mr. Somare, the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, one presumably for the three volumes as a whole, the other specially for volume 1. There is a preface, a summary table of contents, an introduction, a 22-page detailed table of contents of divisions 1-3, (divisions 1-3 making up the main body of the book (pp. 1-960)), a section with biographical notes on the ten contributors and three indices, one on language names, the second on other names, and the third on authors' and personal names. The volume is devoid of theory (although not of technical jargon) and rich in speculations regarding the possible linguistic prehistory of the New Guinea region.

Division 1 presents an overview of the linguistic situation as it is presently known in regard to the Papuan languages, i.e., those languages also known as non-Austronesian, and spanning an area from Timor in the west to Santa Cruz in the east.

Division 2 deals firstly with the history of research in Papuan languages, classification problems, typological characteristics of Papuan languages, and the application of the comparative method to these languages. It then covers a characterisation of the various phyla and isolates known and finally deals with the question of possible wider connections of the Papuan languages.

Division 3 may be regarded as the crowning chapter and is a grand synthesis of everything that has come before it, welding it into an imaginative but nevertheless speculative linguistic prehistory of the New Guinea region.

The volume unmistakably carries the stamp of Professor Wurm of the Australian National University and the contributions are a reflection of his interests and pre-occupations. It is intended as

a detailed reference work and compendium giving concise information on as large as possible range of matters and problems concerning the languages, and their study, of the New Guinea area (ix).

It is addressed to both researchers from a wide variety of fields and to "persons whose interests lie in the practical application of the results of scientific study" (ix), but it is doubtful whether the volume will be of more than token value to anybody but professional linguists. The actual contents cater mostly to professional linguists and no attempt has been made to make the volume pedagogically useful. To the outsider the amount of detail is likely to be overpowering and/or of only marginal interest.

The question then is what does the volume have to offer to the professional linguist? For the novice considering the study of a Papuan language there is enough of an overview and enough detail at the same time to allow him to select a meaningful problem for investigation or, if not that, for him to have himself directed to a source which will

provide such information for him. To a linguist of the transformational-generative persuasion the volume is likely to be a source of frustration, as he will look in vain for such things as relativization, coordination, distinctive features, or rules such as Equi-NP-Deletion, and Raising rules. Of such there is very little to be found in the literature as a whole and in this volume in particular.

For the linguist interested in typology there are enough pointers to phenomena of interest, but there is not enough detail to investigate any one problem to a point where it would be useful to those working outside of Papuan linguistics. Notable is the lack of any attempt by the authors to relate their findings to recent work done on language universals.

The comparativist probably will find the volume most useful for a number of reasons. A number of authors have supplied the reader with comparative word lists so that their findings can either be checked or elaborated on. The number of reconstructed proto-systems is minimal and the field, therefore, is wide open. The classifications proposed are almost all of a preliminary nature, being derived for the most part from lexicostatistical calculations, and there is a crying need to do the hard work of looking for proven cognates based on solid reconstructions of proto-systems. Only three papers totalling together a mere sixty pages are devoted to this endeavor, and Professor Wurm, in the first of these, attempts the near-impossible by setting up a Proto-Trans-New Guinea Phylum sound system from lexical data of the individual daughter languages without the reconstruction of intermediate proto-systems. If we remember that there are 491 languages in the Trans-New Guinea Phylum the absolutely daring nature of the enterprise becomes apparent at once.

Much of the volume is a celebration, as it were, of the notion of substratum and the reasoning behind this can perhaps best be discerned from Wurm, Voorhoeve, and McElhanon's discussion of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum in general. They point out that the

main characteristics of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum show a fair amount of homogeneity in their appearance in the languages belonging to it except that the influence of various substrata is in evidence in most parts of the phylum with their influence particularly strong in some, mostly marginal, areas where the languages contain a considerable number of non-Trans-New Guinea Phylum features and are quite aberrant in several ways.

.... it appears that much of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum area may have been originally occupied by a number of probably unrelated earlier languages, and that the inter-relationship of many of the present-day Trans-New Guinea Phylum languages is in a way, secondary, or partial and fractional, in nature and brought about by the very strong and pervading influence of an originally little differentiated element manifested on both the lexical and structural- typological levels, and attributable to the spreading of daughter languages of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum proto-language first from west to east through much of the New Guinea mainland well over five thousand years ago, and perhaps much more vigorously, from east to west during the last five thousand years or so The presence of the older, different languages upon which the Trans-New Guinea Phylum languages appear to have been superimposed in the course of these migrations, is noticeable in the form of substrata of varying strength throughout the greater part of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum (300).

There are, in other words, a certain number of languages of a certain type which according to lexicostatistical comparisons are related to each other. There are also a number of languages of different and varying types which can also be shown by lexicostatistical comparisons to be related to the languages of the first type. The question then becomes one of how to account for the variations. Wurm and the majority of the contributors to the volume rely on the notion of substratum as the sole explanatory device. Any deviation from the ideal type, be it in phonology, grammar, or lexicon is due to one language or language group having impinged on another. There are two exceptions to this in that presumed Austronesian loans in the Trans-New Guinea Phylum languages

are referred to as loans and not sub-stratum influence and language groups and isolates unrelated to other languages are granted the uniqueness of their features. Wurm, Laycock, and Voorhoeve in their discussion of general Papuan characteristics note that there are two kinds of substratum influences; one is due to the

characteristics of a particular language group which appear in other, unrelated, languages and language groups and which are attributable to the interaction, and influence upon each other, of the two language groups involved (175).

The other substratum influence

observable in several, often unrelated or only distantly related languages and language groups cannot be directly associated with known characteristics of other languages, or with characteristics believed to be attributable to postulated language migrations, but seem [s] to be attributable to the earlier presence, in certain areas, of languages and language types upon which later language migrations ultimately resulting in the present-day linguistic picture in the New Guinea area have been superimposed (176).

Assertions of substratum influence are tempered throughout the volume by such phrases as "... is obviously ascribable to the influence of a substratum ...", "... is also likely to reflect substratum influence", "... is undoubtedly attributable to the presence of a strong substratum" (176f.). These do not detract, however, from the over-all importance the authors attach to the concept. It is only fair, then, to warn the reader that such wholesale adoption of the concept as an explanatory device is open to a number of objections. Professor Wurm is probably his own best critic in this matter. In Wurm (1954), he attempted to set out the conditions under which languages are known to have influenced each other due to invasion of one group by another. He pointed out that aside from the comparatively rare possibility of peaceful coexistence,

either of two things could happen: (a) the invaders assimilate to the invaded group and the only trace of the invaders left in the language later on are loanwords, their grammar and phonology having been lost; (b) the invaders due to cultural superiority and/or numerical equivalence or near equivalence retain their language which is also adopted by the invaded group. In the case of (b), however, the language of the invaders undergoes not only lexical but also phonological and morphological/syntactical modifications along the lines of a pidginization of the invaders' language. It is in the case of (b) that people generally talk about a substratum. Professor Wurm in his 1954 publication cites a number of examples to illustrate both (a) and (b) and all but one of these are historically well documented cases, not only linguistically, but also culturally. This is in complete contrast to the situation in the New Guinea area, where we have no written records, and where the knowledge derived from archeology is still very scanty. What evidence we have of population movements in Papua New Guinea is of a kind that does not allow for substrata. Populations have been displaced in recent history in Papua New Guinea through either of two events (or a combination of the two): (a) natural disasters such as volcanic eruption, an earthquake, or drought and/or frost have driven populations from their home ground; (b) warfare has had the same effect. When they have left their home ground, they have either moved into virgin bush to carve out an entirely new existence for themselves, in which case their language remained unaffected by that of other peoples, or they have taken refuges with allies, in which case they have been absorbed into the host group, thus giving up their language and adopting that of their hosts. Large-scale occupation by an invading force and the resultant subjugation of the original inhabitants by that force is unlikely to have happened in Papua New Guinea (until, of course, the arrival of the European powers), as until very recent times the population densities were simply not conducive to this having happened. The variety of substratum influences postulated by Professor Wurm and his colleagues is enormous and it

would take a very long time indeed to investigate each one in order to substantiate or disprove it. For this our knowledge is far too scanty, and is likely to remain so. One is reminded in this connection of Jespersen's remarks in regard to postulated substratum influences elsewhere that

it is impossible to ascribe to an ethnic substratum all the changes and dialectal differentiations which some linguists explain as due to this sole cause. Many other influences must have been at work, among which an interruption of intercourse created by natural obstacles or social conditions of various kinds would be of prime importance (1959:206).

It would seem that the natural fragmentation of the country and the social conditions (partly brought about by geographical factors) would be much stronger determinants of linguistic diversity than substratum influences. But how the social conditions bring about linguistic changes, of this we know precious little in the New Guinea area. The sophisticated sociolinguistic work just has not been carried out. The authors of the volume might also have wanted to consider system-internal pressures towards the evolution of particular typological features, but this too can only be done by reference to recent work in language universals and typology. In this respect all work done in Papuan languages stands curiously isolated from what is happening elsewhere.

The volume is bibliographically complete and up-to-date. Professor Wurm in his introductory remarks on the nature of Papuan languages might have wanted to mention Capell's (1969) Survey of New Guinea Languages; and to Laycock's discussion of the literature on the semantics of Papuan languages should be added the very fine study of Ndumba (Southern Tairora) ethnobotany by Hays (1974). Z'Graggen and Laycock being collaborators on a chapter should have noticed a discrepancy in their maps on pp.578 and 732, Z'Graggen's U2 (Aramaue) and U1 (Wuiabuk) being equivalent to Laycock and Z'Graggen's M2 (Aramaue) and M3 (Wiyaw).

There appears to be general confusion regarding the languages related to Enga on the northern fringes of the Enga-speaking area. The reader is referred to Dornstreich (1973) and Haberland and Seyfarth (1974) for a detailed discussion of the cultural and linguistic situation in that area. Suffice it to say that what Dornstreich refers to as the outer Enga comprises the following groups: Gadio, Bisorio (Nese), Sidi and Towi. These all speak the same language. Mutually intelligible with this language (ca.80% shared vocabulary) is the language/dialect of what Dornstreich refers to as an intermediate Enga group, the Sogowame (referred to by the Western Enga groups as Nete). All these groups are in close cultural contact with the southern Yimar people who speak a Sepik Hill language. The two Yimar groups most closely in contact with Outer Enga groups and largely bilingual in the language of the Outer Enga and their own are the Inyai (Inyai, In'ai) and Sogobah (Tsogoba). (Haberland and Seyfarth classify Inyai as an Outer Enga group, but this is based on incomplete information). The language of these Outer Enga groups (as well as that of the Nete) is related to Enga, but mutually unintelligible with it. Lembena is to the east of the Outer Enga groups and also mutually unintelligible with them and with Enga.

Enga readers will likely be disturbed at the way examples from Enga are rendered. There has been a published dictionary of Enga since 1973 in the standard orthography (Lang 1973) and it is beyond my comprehension why scholars should insist on quoting from older (mostly) unpublished sources or from their own notes collected from the odd informant here and there, or why they should insist on changing the orthographic conventions when this can serve no useful purpose; nor can I understand why comparativists refuse to exploit the dictionary. I have prepared an extensive list of corrections which is available to interested individuals on request.

While the price of the volume (\$A32) will detract most people from buying it, the above criticisms should in no way prevent people from making the utmost use of the information to be found within its pages. The volume is an important one.

Ranier Lang

Institute of Applied Social &
Economic Research.

REFERENCES

- Capell, A. 1969. A Survey of New Guinea Languages. Sydney: Sydney University Press.
- Dornstreich, Mark David. 1973. An Ecological Study of Gadio Enga (New Guinea) Subsistence. Columbia University Ph.D. Thesis. Ann Arbor, University Microfilms.
- Haberland, Eike und Siegfried Seyfarth. 1974. 'Die Yimar am oberen Korowori (Neuguinea)', Studien zur Kulturkunde 36. Band.
- Hays, Terence Eugene. 1974. Mauna: Explorations in Ndumba Ethnobotany. University of Washington Ph.D. Thesis. Ann Arbor, University Microfilms.
- Lang, Adriane. 1973. Enga Dictionary with English Index. Pacific Linguistics C20.
- Jespersen, Otto. 1959 [1922]. Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin. London: Allen & Unwin
- Wurm, S.A. 1954. 'The Indonesian element in Melanesia: A reply'. Journal of the Polynesian Society 63:266-73.