

Reviews

Echo of a culture: A grammar of Rennell and Bellona. By Samuel H. Elbert. Oceanic Linguistics Special Publication No. 22. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988. xix + 305 pp. US\$18.00.

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Rennell and Bellona is one of the Polynesian Outlier languages spoken in the Solomon Islands by approximately 3,000 speakers, many of whom live away from their home islands Rennell and Bellona, mostly in Honiara, the capital. It has two mutually intelligible dialects spoken on the two islands, situated about 200 kilometres south of Guadalcanal.

As Elbert himself says in his introduction, this grammar is different from most Pacific grammars in that it contains a good deal of personal comment and discussion, as well as much valuable ethnographic material. The grammar is deliberately written with an absolute minimum of technical terms in order to render it as accessible as possible to a wide readership including the Rennellese and Bellonese themselves.

Elbert worked on Rennell and Bellona in the Solomons on four different occasions between 1957 and 1972 for a total of twenty months and in Denmark and Hawaii for

lengthy periods also. His deep knowledge of Rennell and Bellona language and culture is evidenced throughout the work. Elbert says that he has relied heavily on text material from Elbert and Monberg (1965). He also provides interesting details of discussions with his Rennellese and Bellonese friends and linguistic consultants on many grammatical points.

The grammar itself consists of twelve chapters, the titles and ordering of which reveal much about Elbert's descriptive strategy. After a short introduction, Elbert first discusses phonology, obviously the dialect differences between Rennell and Bellona and the phoneme inventory of the language. But he also discusses such topics as Bellonese fast speech, the strange definitive accent which among other things involves higher pitch levels before pauses, well-known in other Polynesian languages but very rarely treated, and even more rarely mastered by non-native speakers. After the phonology, Elbert moves into a lengthy discussion of verb and noun phrases, the core of the grammar. Then follow "substitutes" (pronouns, demonstratives, interrogatives and possessives). This in turn is followed by a stimulating chapter on counting (numerals), and another bringing together all of the derivational morphology of the language. Finally Elbert discusses Rennell and Bellona syntax and then the lexicon and the question of a *Hiti* substratum, loanwords and their provenance, with a final note on dialects and sub-dialects.

Elbert gives a very full account of Rennell and Bellona morphology and syntax. But he does much more than this. He approaches the whole question of grammatical description from the perspective of a master Polynesianist, one who has an intimate knowledge of a wide range of Polynesian languages and who has pondered and evaluated, with respect to specific points, the whole gamut of Polynesian language descriptions. For at all points he discusses the idiosyncracies of Rennell and Bellona mor-

pho-syntax vis-a-vis Proto-Polynesian forms and the numerous present-day Polynesian languages known to him. However, he goes well beyond this and involves the reader in his struggles to make sense of irregularities such as the seeming irrationality of the *o* and *a* form possessives. The reader is taken inside Elbert's world as a privileged spectator as he provides anecdotal evidence of lengthy discussions with his most trusted friends and language consultants. And when we reach the chapter dealing with counting we are made to realise that without the cultural detail provided by Elbert the traditional counting systems would be incomprehensible. Without appearing at all didactic, Elbert demonstrates what he claims in his introduction, namely that there is a symbiotic relationship between culture, folktales and grammar not only in Rennell and Bellona, but universally.

Echo of a Culture is a landmark achievement in Polynesian linguistics. For it goes far beyond a normal description of an Oceanic language in its detail and the comprehensive cultural envelope in which it is presented. It will be appreciated not only by descriptive linguists everywhere but also by Elbert's friends, the people of Rennell and Bellona themselves.

References

Elbert and Monberg. 1965. *From the two canoes: Oral traditions from Rennell and Bellona Islands*. Copenhagen: Danish National Museum.

The Markham languages of Papua New Guinea. By Suzanne Holzknrecht. Pacific Linguistics C-115. Canberra: Australian National University, 1989. vii + 228pp. (incl. 11 maps). AUS\$32.40.

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This work is the published version of Holzknrecht's doctoral thesis submitted to the Australian National University. The book is divided into seven chapters. It also contains an excellent series of maps and an extensive bibliography.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to this work, and presents the conventions used in the presentation of the data. It describes the aims of the study as being to test the genetic relationships of the Markham Valley languages, and their relationships with previously established lower order subgroupings of Oceanic, and to endeavour to reconstruct the history of Markham languages. H attempts to reconstruct the history of the Markham languages by using the standard comparative method. She also proposes to use further linguistic, social and geographical information as evidence for reconstructing forms. Chapter 1.3 gives a good summary of the special characters used.

Chapter 2 deals with earlier descriptions of the Markham languages, and with the methodology used in this work. H criticises the comment of Schmitz (1960:413) that the dialects of the Markham Valley have "always been suspected as belonging to an older stratum of the Austronesian family." H also judges the research of Milke (1965) to be incorrect, in that the "evidence" that Adzera belongs to the Gedaged group because of the phonological rule *z > ø is insufficient proof. Hooley is criticised for his use of wordlists which are too short to give good statistical evidence, though H does acknowledge that the work of Hooley and McElhanon (1970) and later publications by Hooley were helpful despite the shortcomings. The work of Ross (1988) is acknowledged as valuable, because of its use of some morphosyntactic data as well as lexicostatistical data. In the estimation of H, while most of these previous studies have been helpful, virtually all have some shortcomings, especially with