

Reviews

Lawton, Ralph. *Topics in the Description of Kiriwina*. Ed by Malcolm Ross and Janet Ezard. Pacific Linguistics Series D-84. Research of Pacific Studies, Australian National University: Canberra. 1993. xii + 348 pp. \$38.60 (paper)

Reviewed by Gunter Senft, Max Planck, Institute of Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Seven years after the publication of my Kilivila grammar and dictionary (Senft of 1996) a compilation of some of Ralph Lawton's linguistic descriptions of this language was finally edited by Malcolm Ross and Janet Ezard and published in the D Series of *Pacific Linguistics*. This series comprises archival studies, and Ralph Lawton lived as a Methodist missionary in Oyabia village on Kiriwina, the biggest of the Trobriand Islands, between 1961 and 1973, when the data for this book were collected (see p.6 fn.3). As already hinted by the name of the Austronesian language of the Trobrianders in the title, much of the information is archaic now, even the speakers of Kilivila, and I will return to this important theme in my review.

After the 'Table of Contents' the book starts with a 'Preface' by the editors. The editors incorrectly refer (p.v) to this book as "an edited version of Lawton's dissertation"; only chapter 5 and appendix 3 present a slightly modified version of Lawton's 1980 Maters' thesis. The editors also claim (p.v) that "Lawton's study provides a more detailed description

of certain parts of Kiriwina grammar than Senft's does" (p.v). Moreover, they also explicitly refute a classification of Kilivila which was never done: Ross and Ezard (p.v) claim that Senft (1986) classified Kilivila as a Verb-Subject (VSO) language - Kilivila is a VOS language¹ - and they hope that Lawton's work will clarify a controversy that goes back to Lithgow's (1988) review of Senft (1986).

After acknowledgements, a list of abbreviations and conventions, and an excellent map of Milne Bay Province, the first chapter (pp 3-12) presents an introduction to the society and the language of the Trobriand Islanders with brief introductory remarks on dialects, morphology and syntax. Many of the remarks here are out of date by now (see Senft 1992), the population figure of 1,600, for example is probably now ~~2,500~~ 25,000. Unfortunately, the names of the "11 Kiriwian dialects" listed are those used by the Trobriand Islanders to refer to "districts" or "political divisions"; they do not include the traditional dialect names (see Senft 1986:6-10). The remarks on morphology emphasize the fact that it

¹ In his review of my grammar and dictionary Ross (1987:88) made a similar mistake, analyzing and glossing the plural suffix "-sɛ" (and its variant "-sa") as a suffixed personal pronoun that can be infixed into the verbal expression and then serves as an object (Senft 1986:33-35). Unfortunately there seems to be some truth in the old saying: "It is bad to have critics who cannot write, but it is worse to have critics who cannot read".

is synthetic and has agglutinative features, and the section on syntax is basically a

discussion of the general word order pattern. Here first evidence is provided for the classification that is presented in chapter 4, and it is there that I will discuss this analysis.

The second chapter (pp 15-49) deals with Kilivila phonology. It first lists and describes phonemes, illustrates their phonemic status in lists of minimal pairs and discusses some specific features of the inventory like fluctuation of /l/, /n/, and /r/ and syllabic and non-syllabic /m/. However, the glottal stop (Senft 1986:11f., 19) and the fact that phoneme fluctuation is also used to mark local varieties (or dialects) in Kilivila is not mentioned. The chapter discusses (verbosely and sometimes speculatively) the status of consonantal and syllabic /m/ in the Kilivila phoneme inventory. It also presents a long (and by now completely out of date) discussion of Kilivila diphthongs, then gives a distinctive features analysis of the phonemes (with the wrong notation of syllabic /m/ as "+/-syllabic"), and ends with an analysis of syllable patterns- including (incomplete and incorrectly illustrated²) phonotactics,

² I just want to mention that /u/ can follow /m/ as in "Munuwata" - the name of a village on Kiriwina Island, and that /e/ can follow /ai/ as in the emphatic vocative form "Tokwaieee" - where the lengthened /e/ marks the emphatic vocative in calling the "dwarfs" that are called "tokwai". In the case of the prepositional phrase "o u'ulela" (see p. 40 "o-u.u'le-la" Lawton's notation) there is a morpheme boundary between the preposition (or better: locative) "o" and the (possessed) noun "u'ule-la" (root-its). Note also the parsing error on page 47: Lawton writes "agu pokala" (my deception) as one

a few remarks on, but no explicit description of the orthography used, a discussion of the Kilivila word, and a description of the stress rules. In general - with the exception of a few marginal and notational differences - the analyses presented here basically confirm the analyses presented in Senft (1986: 11-27).

Chapter 3 (pp 53-112) presents a study on the Kilivila verb. Based on a 1969(!) study by Williamson, phrase structure rules within the framework of a context-free phrase structure grammar are used for illustrating the author's points. The chapter first describes the sentence structure as a whole and then discusses the predicate and the verb phrase. Within the section on the verb phrase the author analyses among other things negative and temporal modes, modal categories, time reference modes and adverbial constituents that modify a verb. After this discussion the chapter zooms in on what is called "the verb word". This section presents the inflectional morphological analysis of the Kilivila verbal expression and discusses completiveness in the verb, time reference, subject prefixes, the plural marker, and an emphatic suffix. From "the verb word" the author then focusses on the verb stem and then on the verb root. Together with the chapter on classifiers this third chapter is central for

word. The noun phrase consists of the possessive pronoun "agu", a full form of its own, and the noun "pokala". It is at least with notations like these that the reader misses a complete discussion of Kilivila inflectional morphology (see Senft 1986: 28-102).

this book. Thus, I will discuss some parts of it in more detail.

Discussing the category of mode, the chapter introduces a differentiation between two "true modal verbs" and adverbial element(s) which may function...in place of the modal verb" on the one hand and a "head verb" (p.61) on the other. However, it remains completely unclear on what grammatical grounds this differentiation can be justified - the attentive reader gets the impression that these categories are imported from the English grammar into the description of Kilivila - via the English glosses.

The expression "emphatics" is introduced to refer to two of four particles that are typical for speakers of certain Kilivila dialects (Senft 1986:6-8). These particles mark these varieties and are thus used by the Trobriand Islanders for labelling the four main dialects on the Trobriands (excluding Kitava Island).

In connection with the discussion of the "negative mode" and the "verb word", "a class I noun" and "a noun..of class II" (p. 66) is mentioned. It remains completely unclear to what kind of noun classification the author refers here. There are no noun classes in Kilivila. It may well be that the author wants to distinguish nouns with respect to what kind of possessive pronoun can go with them. Kilivila has a fourfold series of possessive pronouns. One series is only produced referring to food, and the other three series are used to distinguish different degrees of possession (Senft 1986: 47-54). However, the reader looks in vain for such information.

Discussing the marking of tense/mood/aspect on the Kilivila verb the author is rather straightforward'. It is stated that Kilivila has a "completive prefix...indicating that the verb action has been completed (l-), has not been completed (b-), or is habitual (m-)" (p. 66f.). However, it is not mentioned that the "b-" prefixed to the subject-prefix proper also refers to actions in the future and covers the concept of expressing a statement as irrealis, and it is not mentioned, either, that the "m-" prefixed to the subject-prefix proper also indicates optative or irrealis and may indicate humorous or poetic style. How tense/aspect/mood are actually expressed with the Kilivila verb is extremely difficult to analyse (see Senft 1993:88-95). The author also refers to serial verb constructions (p. 70) and to the effects of constructions that Baldwin (n.d.) in his unpublished grammar of Kilivila first described as the "tandem pattern" of verbal expressions (see Senft 1986:39 42)³.

Discussing the possibility of infixing an object-indicating suffix into the verbal expression it is stated "that whenever the second person plural object pronoun *mi* appears, the plural marker *-si* is lost. This is no longer true in Kilivila as it is spoken these days"⁴.

³ The author does not refer to Baldwin.

⁴ To give just one example (see Senft 1986:35):

tayamatamisi

ta-yamata-mi-si

1.incl.-look.after-you(Pl.)-Pl.

We look after you (all).

The book presents an attempt to differentiate ten verb root formative processes (pp 82-85), but no evidence is given for these analyses. Thus, on page 83 it is claimed, for example, that the verbal expression “-*kainagi*-” (which is glossed in the wordlist as “to speak carefully”) consists of the verbal expression “-*kaibiga*” (to speak) and the verbal expression “-*naga*-” (to choose). Here it seems that “plausibility” is taken as “fact” - but this kind of speculation comes close to folk etymology. Moreover, the remarks on derivational morphology given in the book are in general highly speculative.

The pages 86-97 discuss 20 verbal referents or prefixes with what the author calls class II and class III verbs. These prefixes are said to mark degree of causation or involvement between actor and action, to indicate the means by which an action is done, to refer to certain parts of the body as instruments of action, and to refer to the whole body of the actor being used to effect something. With the very first prefix the author himself lists already 8 counterexamples to 12 examples that are presented in support of the proposed analysis. A brief comparison of this prefix analyses with verbal expressions listed in Senft (1986) which begin with these prefixes shows how easy it is to find counterexamples for almost all of the interpretations of these ‘verbal referents’ proposed here. Moreover, we find the prefix “-*va*-” as marking two different actions (“do by fire” (p. 91) and “do with foot action; do while walking” (p.94)). Analyses like “The meaning most frequently found is that the actor is the indirect cause of the action, though

sometimes there is the implication of direct and intentional action” (p. 89) and hedges like “In a large body of data there are bound to be inconsistencies” (p. 90) reveal that the author seems to not trust his own analyses too much. Usually it is the analyses and not the data that are inconsistent!

The analyses of the Kilivila verbal expression proposed by Senft (1986) have always avoided the technical terms “transitive” and “intransitive”, because - like Mosel and Hovdhaugen (1992:720ff) in their description of Samoan - the author of this review takes them basically as inadequate for describing the verbal expression and the argument structure in Kilivila. Lawton, however, differentiates between transitive and intransitive verbs and even lists a class of ‘true intransitive verbs’ (p. 86). The first verbal expression of this list is “-*la*-” (to go). However, the sentence “*bala keda*” (I will walk (the) road) is a perfectly well formed, acceptable and grammatical sentence in this language. Lawton takes up this differentiation again in discussing verbs that are marked for what is called “verb or object focus”. However, with this differentiation the reader soon gets lost. In trying to find grammatical evidence for the differentiation the author has to state that “verb focus forms of this verb class need not have an explicit object but sometimes do, whereas object focus forms always clearly imply an object and so often do not state it” (p.97). With this description the differentiation between verb and object focus gets void. Nevertheless, the rules the author can formulate with respect to changes in the vowels of the verb roots seem to indicate that some such

differentiation must have had existed, indeed, probably in an (even more) archaic version of Kilivila. When I confronted my consultants on the Trobriands with variants of verbal expressions that show such changes in the vowels of the verb root they either claimed that one of the two variants no longer exists in their language or that there is no difference in meaning whatsoever between the two variants. The usual linguistic tests to find such differences did not show any results, either. Thus I have to conclude that if variant forms of verbal expressions exist in Kilivila as it is spoken now, they exist side by side in free variation⁵. Such a conclusion is certainly not very satisfying, however, it sticks to the observable facts and is free of any kind of speculation.

Chapter 4 presents a study of foregrounding techniques in Kilivila. This chapter presents evidence for classifying Kilivila as a language with Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order. The evidence consists of frequency counts of word order patterns found in Kilivila texts and on acceptability judgements on possible reorderings of sentence constituents given by one informant (see p. 125). I agree with the statement that the word order patterns in Kilivila "are rather flexible and that their variations convey foregrounding and thus emphasis" (Senft 1986:112). However, I disagree with the claim that "SVO is the basic unemphatic order of

sentence constituents" (p. 120). The textual evidence presented is not convincing because linguists have to differentiate between frequency and markedness. In 1989 I did a study with 48 informants of different age groups to find out what word order pattern is the unmarked one (see Senft 1993:97-100). This study unanimously confirmed the former classification of Kilivila as a language with VOS as the prime and unmarked word order pattern (see Senft 1986:107-112).

Chapter 5 (pp. 135-236) together with appendix 3 presents the author's MA-thesis on classifiers. This is a comprehensive description of the Kilivila system of classifiers or "Classificatory Particles" (CPs), as Malinowski (1920) referred to these formatives. After a description of the morphological role the CPs fulfill, and a discussion of the special relation between CPs on the one hand and nouns on the other hand, a semantic description of 147 CPs is presented. These CPs are divided into two groups. Group 1 encompasses 34 CPs; they "specify whole items in terms of their features or properties" (p. 177). Group 2 encompasses 113 CPs "which classify items in terms of some modification they have undergone. Modification of items is conveniently divisible into three categories labelled activity, partition and arrangement" (p. 177). The CPs of group 1 are further subdivided into the following three classes: 1.) 'Basic Property Specifiers' which are subclassified according to the features '+/- Animate', '+/- Human', 'Dimension', and 'Residue'; 2.) subclassifying CPs within the semantic domains constituted by the

⁵ This chapter also refers to a "dative suffix": However, it is not defined what is meant by "dative"- I just cannot find any "dative" in the examples presented on p.107. However, I do not want to go into more detail here.

misleading glosses. Thus, “*matauna*” and “*latula*” (p. 55, (9)) are glossed as “that” and “his son”. The demonstrative pronoun “*matauna*” consists of the morphological frame “*ma-*” and “*-na*” with the (archaic) classifier “*tau*” for “males” infixed in this frame. It is best glossed as “this (male)”; the Kilivila demonstrative that can be glossed as “that man” needs an additional infixed morpheme “*we-*” as in “*matauwena*” (or, to give the form used these days: “*mtowena*”). The noun “*latula*” consists of the noun “*latu-*” and the suffixed form of the 3rd person of the possessive pronoun indicating inalienable possession “*-la*”; the word has to be glossed as “child-his”⁶. Moreover, there are also some inconsistencies in the glosses presented (see for example pp. 73 & 79 where two different glosses of “*bogwa*” and two different free translations of exactly the same example sentence (Nos. 88 and 95) are given). A bibliography (that does not list Lawton 1971 (see p. 78 fn. 35)) and an index finishes this volume.

There are only a few typos (the voiced alveolar flap is represented by the API sign for the rolled dental alveolar vibrant on p. 17; and on page 126 read “they.tired” for “they.tire” in example 138); however, given the shortcomings mentioned above it has to be concluded that the book is not well edited. Many of the shortcomings criticized here could

have been avoided by a more careful editing process by experienced descriptive linguists.

In summary and despite all my criticism the volume presents a number of interesting observations on (archaic material of) the Kilivila language - and the good, though traditional, study of Kilivila classifiers in chapter 5 is together with appendix 3 an important contribution to the description of the language of the Trobriand Islanders.

Notes:

This review is based on my field research on the Trobriand Islands (1982/4 months; 1983/11 months, 1989/4 months; 1992/2 months; 1993/1 1/2 months; 1994/1 1/2 months; 1995/ 1 1/2 months, 1996 1 1/2 months). I would like to thank the National and Provincial Governments of Papua New Guinea and Milne Bay Province, the Institute for PNG Studies, and the Council of Chiefs of the Trobriand Islands for their assistance with, and permission for, my research projects. I thank the people of the Trobriand Islands especially the inhabitants of Tauwema and my consultants for their hospitality, friendliness, friendship and patient cooperation over the years.

⁶ See also the free (and quite misleading) translation of the expression “*tuta bima*” as “the future generally”. This phrase consists of the noun “*tuta*” (time) and the verbal expression “*bima*” (3.Fut-come = it will come).

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