

Walter Seiler, Imonda, a Papuan Language. Canberra: Department of Linguistics, The Australian National University [Pacific Linguistics B-93]. pp. v + 234. \$24.20.

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Imonda, spoken by less than 300 people just east of the Papua New Guinea (PNG) - Irian Jaya (IJ) border is one of the languages of the Waris family (including Amanab, Simog, Waris, and Daonda -- all spoken in PNG --, Manem and Senggi -- spoken in IJ only --, and Waina/Sowanda -- spoken on both sides of the international border). This is the first published grammar of any of the members of this family, and Seiler has written an excellent study which will be of burning interest to area specialists, of course, but of considerable interest to general linguists as well.

Given the putative membership of Waris languages in the "Border Stock", and the conjectured membership of the languages of this stock, in turn, within the "Trans New Guinea Phylum" (TNGP), Papuanists will be particularly interested in seeing how close or how far Imonda is to their languages of special expertise, and what evidence, if any, this description offers for the reality of the TNGP hypothesis. My own impression, as someone who has worked on languages in the Eastern Highlands and who has read the more easily accessible descriptions of Papuan languages in general, is that Imonda might as well be spoken in Africa. I mention this here not because Seiler does, but to make it clear that my qualifications for reviewing this work are those of any general linguist, no more.

Of particular interest to the comparativist are the phonological properties of Imonda. The consonantal inventory (m,n,p/b,t/d,k/g,l,f,s,h, (r)) is unexceptional; consonantal length

is phonemic, but long consonants are phonetically distinct from geminates which arise from a vowel deletion proves (13): in the latter case, there is a release. The voiced stops /b,d,g/ occur with three distinct degrees of prenasalization, depending on their phonetic environment (14); all consonants may appear morpheme- and word-finally. The vowel inventory (i,e,ĕ,ə̃,a,ɔ,ô,u,â, (ɨ/ʉ)) is somewhat richer than in most TNGP languages. A widespread but far from totally regular morphophonemic process "raises" stem vowels in the plural of verbs. This is reminiscent of a widely noted property associated with TNGP languages (16), as is the raising of /a/ to /i/ in seven verbal suffixes with plural subjects (22), but it depends on at least one less than plausible phonetic analysis, that which views the change a --> â as one of raising.

Seiler has done an exemplary job of defining parts of speech in Imonda purely on the basis of their distributional properties. Basically, he recognizes particles (which occur with no inflectional affixes), verbs (which can always occur with the tense affix -n "past"), and nouns (which occur with other affixes), (24). Among nouns, he distinguishes between true nouns (which occur with case affixes), and adverbs, which do not. True nouns which cannot bear the possessive case suffix -na are classified as "adjectives" (31). All adjectives (and many nouns) end in a bivalent (derivational?) -l suffix, the syntax of which is one of the most intriguing features of this language (32). Further subdivisions among the class of "absolutely true honest - to - God nouns" allow us to distinguish common nouns, proper nouns, kin terms, and pronouns (35-58). Imonda is typologically aberrant in having five extremely common nouns (those referring to men, women, boys, girls, and enemies) which have plural meaning in their unmarked form: id "men", but id - ianei "a single man" (38). Similar behaviour is attested by other languages of the Waris family for a small (but not identical) set of nouns with human referents (214).

Having established the basis for linguistic categories in chapter 3, Seiler now devotes a chapter to each of the categories he has identified. Later chapters on phrasal, clausal, and inter-clausal syntax, inevitably recapitulate some of the information which has been presented on nouns and verbs in chapters 4 and 5. This is most notable in the discussion of "relative clauses", initiated in chapter 4 (64-67), and recapitulated in chapter 9 (204ff.). Imonda, like Hittite, seems to be a language which has not yet (?) developed a grammaticalized relative clause construction. What in English is rendered by a relative clause is expressed in Imonda by a pair of clauses, of which the first, a topic clause, identifies a referent, while the second makes some predication about this referent, as in:

S<sub>1</sub>[He is staying in a village] S<sub>1</sub> S<sub>2</sub>[I am going to that village] S<sub>2D</sub>

Not surprisingly, S<sub>1</sub> (which corresponds to the English relative clause) is marked as a topic clause (by means of either the topic suffix -fa or the interrogative suffix -me), because topics, like relative clauses in general, constitute the given information in an utterance. There is no particular novelty in the use of the interrogative morpheme for the establishment of topics, since the speaker is asking for the listener to assent to the identification of the referent by means of a question. What is more interesting, though probably no less well motivated, is the use of another topic marker -ie, whose primary grammatical function is apparently to mark simultaneous (non-past) actions (66, 207). One may perhaps compare the use of English -ing which has a similar double function of marking both simultaneous and backgrounded activity. A possible explanation for this recurrent polysemy may be that clauses which are equally foregrounded are necessarily tense-iconic (the order of clauses corresponding to the order of events). Marking a clause as simultaneous with another is to remove it from the "time line",

thus backgrounding it relative to another clause which is not similarly marked.

Verbal morphology, the subject of chapter 5, is relatively complex, and, for many Papuanists, somewhat exotic. Seiler distinguishes between a core, and sets of prefixes and suffixes.

The core consists of either a bare verb stem or a stem followed by a verbalizing suffix, the pro-verb fe- "do".

The "pre-core" consists of three main slots: subject-marking dual e- (78), possible for human subjects only (81), an accompaniment marker (sg. -uai-, non-sg. -uõn-) which references the number of people in company with whom the subject performed the action (79), and a noun classifying prefix which references the object of a transitive verb, and the syntax of which is the subject of chapter 6.

The post-core consists of slots for the inflectional categories subject-number, negation, beneficiary, tense, aspect, mood, and topic. Verbs do not agree with their arguments for persons, only for number. Number agreement, in turn, is complicated by the fact that subject agreement with human referents can be partially indicated by the already mentioned dual prefix e-; finally, it is complicated by the fact that there are a variety of devices for indicating plurality, including the already mentioned morphophonemic process of vowel "raising" (further exemplified on p.82), suppletion, a plural prefix restricted to verbs of motion, and a number of true suffixes like -ual "dual" and -uþl "plural". Where both subject and object of a transitive verb are human, the dual suffix refers unambiguously to the number of the object (84). By a natural extension of its primary function of marking plurality, the suffix -uõl may also mark the intensity of an action, or its duration (86).

The beneficiary of an action is referenced by the suffix -na "sg." or -n "pl." as in ka - m fi - n - fin "first person-goal do-non-sg. beneficiary-perfective" or "...have done it for

us" (87). In contrast to many other Papuan languages, where the benefactive auxiliary (?) is homophonous with the verb "give", in Imonda, as in Telefol (90), the base form of the benefactive morpheme is cognate with the possessive case marker, possibly thereby with a verb meaning "have".

Mood marking is straightforward: realis - $\emptyset$ , irrealis -ta, imperative -u. Tense/aspect marking (which is not obligatory) follows mood marking (92) and distinguishes four categories: non-past -f, imperfective (habitual, progressive) -fna, perfect -fan, and past -n. Tense/aspect is followed by interrogative/negative -me (similar polysemy in languages like Latin and Cambodian, presumably motivated by derivation of polar questions from a disjunction of S not-S), and the topic suffix -ba or -fa (100).

Noun classification is the subject of chapter 6, where Seiler develops the hypothesis that the classificatory morphemes (of which there are several dozen) developed from grammaticalized serial verbs: V1 V2 became CL V2 (119). Unfortunately, as Seiler concedes, the etymological origin of most of the classifiers in Imonda today is totally opaque.

Chapter 7, on the syntax of predicates, deals with a number of issues, including case marking on object NP, and the paradoxical fact that verbs "agree" with arguments with respect to number (which is not marked on arguments), but not with respect to person (which is marked on the arguments themselves). Although Seiler does not lay any particular emphasis on this, it seems intuitively clear that "agreement" in the sense of "feature copying" is not what is at work here: rather, person and number marking are important in Imonda, as in other languages, and the division of labour in this language is rather peculiar and non-iconic. The person of arguments is indicated on the arguments, while the numbers of participants in an action are indicated on the verb.

Chapter 8, on clausal syntax, deals with the expression of negation and interrogation. Imonda is one of the few languages known to me now which grammatically distinguishes "real" from "rhetorical" questions (175). As one would expect, it is the latter which have a marked structure, whether they are polar questions or content questions.

One of the most exotic features of Imonda syntax, also dealt with in this chapter, is the "distance suffix", a mid vowel which may occur on any part of speech. This suffix is used when talking to someone at whom one is shouting (whether because the listener is distant or because the speaker is angry at him/her (181). It is also used, inexplicably, as a coordinating conjunction as in es-e sapoh-o if-e "sago-distance tobacco-distance breadfruit-distance" or "sago, tobacco, breadfruit, and so on", and, even more obscurely, in some cases of clausal coordination or combination (182).

Another exotic feature, whose inclusion in this chapter is not easy to understand, is the "nominalizer" -l with a variety of (almost certainly unrelated) functions. The most regular of these is in a kind of izafet construction of the form possessor +na possessum + l which is obligatory where the possessor is non-human thus tetoad-na ta-l "bird-'s feathers-its" (185)) or if the possessum is a kin term (thus ka-na di-l "first person-'s younger brother-its" or "my younger brother" (186)). Another function is to designate objects which are perceived as parts of something else. Seiler gives a particularly neat and convincing example of this with the minimal pair udb "net bag" (not a part of anything) and its derivative udb - l "pocket" (clearly, a part of something larger) (188). Calling the suffix a nominalizer is most clearly justified by another of its functions, that of nominalizing an entire clause so that it may serve as a purpose clause complement (190).

The final chapter of the grammar proper deals with clause combining and focusses on a number of structural peculiarities of

Imonda which serve most sharply to distinguish it from other languages of Papua New Guinea. Imonda has nothing like a medial verb construction; nor does it have clausal conjunctions (194); nor is there any trace of any kind of switch-reference marking on either final or non-final clauses in a chain. Instead "core and peripheral arguments are usually omitted if they are not absolutely essential to the understanding" (196), so omission is a tacit signal not only of identity but of familiarity or recoverability in general, for whatever reason. The bulk of this chapter is devoted to an examination of the favourite construction for subordination, the use of the topic marking suffixes on adverbial clauses of various types. As Seiler points out, subordinate clauses are marked as topics in a number of Papuan languages, but, as he also remarks, this phenomenon is scarcely restricted to languages of New Guinea.

Finally, in a brief but valuable appendix, Seiler presents some comparative notes on other languages of the Waris family on which he has done some work. The wordlists on pp.212-3 establish beyond question the extremely close relationship of the languages of the Waris family, and the reviewer is obligated to acknowledge the presence of (apparently pan-Papuan) ne- "eat".