Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2008. *The Manambu language of East Sepik, Papua New Guinea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. xxvi-702 pp. (ISBN 978-0-19-953981-9)

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Manambu is a Papuan language spoken by about 2,500 people in five villages along the Sepik river in the north of Papua New Guinea. The term Papuan does not imply a genealogical unit, but encompasses the large Trans New Guinea family with 350 to perhaps 450 member languages as well as 23 smaller non-TNG families and a number of isolates (Ross 2005; Pawley 2007), totalling more than 800 languages. Manambu is a member of the Ndu family, itself classified as a member of the Sepik family (Foley 2005: 127), which includes also its direct geographic neighbor Iatmul.

The ethnolinguistic groups along the Sepik have had considerable attention from anthropologists; see for example Bateson (1958) on Iatmul and Harrison (1990) on Manambu. In the linguistic literature, Staalsen's work on Iatmul (e.g. Staalsen 1966, 1972) is referred to, but full grammars of languages from this family are scarce, an exception being Ambulas (Wilson 1980).

Professor Aikhenvald has earned her reputation with work on Berber and Amazonian languages, in particular Tariana, typological studies on classifiers and serial verbs, and has now added this massive grammar of a Ndu language to her impressive list of publications.

Both the inside cover and the characterization on the website of Oxford University Press state:

After an introductory account of the language and its speakers, Professor Aikhenvald devotes chapters to phonology, grammatical relations, word classes, gender, semantics, number, case, possession, derivation and compounding, pronouns, morphology, verbs, mood and modality, negation, clauses, pragmatics, discourse, semantics, the lexicon, current directions of change, and genetic relationship to other languages. The description is presented in a clear style in a framework that will be comprehensible to all linguists and linguistic anthropologists.

This gives a total of 22 chapters, which are followed by three texts, a vocabulary listing words occurring in the grammar, an alphabetical list of affixes with sections in which they are introduced, nine pages of references, and a useful index of authors, languages and subjects.

In other words, the book is set out along the familiar outline of a reference grammar, with a few extras, such as a separate chapter on issues in semantics and features of lexicon. All 22 chapters contain many examples, comments on relationships to other languages of the Ndyu family or typological comparisons, either to Papuan languages or to linguistic lineages far beyond the New Guinea area, and many cross-references to other chapters. Aikhenvald's command of all these materials, whether Manambu, the Ndu family as far as can be known, or general typological issues is truly impressive, even daunting.

The introduction gives a useful typological overview, followed by some observations on the culture and environment of Manambu speakers, and the past and present relationships with other language groups. It ends with a wordlist of various Sepik languages compiled more than a century ago.

In the introduction Aikhenvald reports the complaints of the Manambu speakers about the orthography developed during the 70's by Robin and Marva Farnsworth of SIL. She employs an alternative orthography based on her phonological analysis in Chapter 2. The main differences concern four vowels distinguished earlier against nine recognized in the present analysis and the phonemic difference between lateral /l/ and rhotic /r/, although it is admitted (p. 40) that the Yuanab variety of Manambu has only one liquid. As for the vowel system, the four vowels /i, æ, a, u/ have a phonemic difference in length (p. 42), but the long vowels /a:/ and /æ:/ are pronounced as a sequence separated by a glottal stop by older Manambu speakers.

The fifth vowel /schwa/ has no long variant, but it does have a frequent allophonic variation with the other central vowel /a/. On the one hand, there seems to be a phonemic contrast between /schwa/ and the lower central vowel /a/, indicating past versus non-past in subject cross-references on verbs (Table 11.2; p. 248). But throughout the grammar there are many instances of apparent fluctuation between the two vowels, as for example in the manner demonstrative 'like this': *a-kə-tawa* or *akatawa* (p. 217). Comments on this contrast or variation are spread over a number of sections so it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the variation is free, conditioned or related to stress. On p. 42 it is stated that "schwa is a fully-fledged phoneme (rather than an epenthetic element) is clear from the fact that it can take stress, just like any other vowel." But in about 30 per cent of nouns, the unstressed root vowel *a* or *a:* is shortened to *ə* (p. 71), while the (epenthetic) linker between a noun and a prehead modifier or postnominal case marker is *a* with about 40 per cent of nouns and *ə* with about 60 per cent (p. 72,73).

Chapter 3 gives a summary of the means by which grammatical relations are expressed. The most striking is Aikhenvald's claim that virtually all word classes can head an intransitive predicate, but only verbs can be head of a transitive predicate. All verbs in the indicative mood require a suffix cross-referencing the subject

(A/S). Independently of a verb's transitivity, a non-subject argument can also be cross-referenced if it is more topical than the subject (p. 61). Unfortunately, the grammar does not contain a section in which this claim is systematically treated with minimally contrastive examples.

Manambu shares with Ambulas (Abelam) suppletive stems for person of the recipient of the verb 'give': *kui* 'give to third person', *kwatiya* 'give to first or second person' (pp. 86–89). These are the only Ndu languages having this feature, which occurs in a few other Papuan languages of different lineages. The inconsistent use of *kui* for non-third person recipients, and the cognate forms in these two Ndu languages in contrast to other members of the family point to a recent innovation of the non-third recipient stem.

Chapter 4 presents the word classes distinguished for Manambu, which includes subclasses of open classes nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The criteria followed for assigning words to these classes are generally self-evident, however, in the light of the discussion on cross-referencing of arguments and obliques, with example (1) given in Chapter 3, it does not become clear which criteria are employed to define "strictly intransitive verbs" that include motion verbs such as *yi*- 'go' (p. 79).

- (1) (wun) a-də yaba:r yi-tua-d
 I DEM.DIST-MASC.SG road+LK+ALL go-1SGSUBJ.VT-3MASC.SGBAS.VT
 'I went towards that road' (that we are talking about) (example 3.5, p. 62)

The subclass of ten polyfunctional verbs includes three positional verbs ('sit', 'stand', and 'stay') and the verbs *kur*- 'do, take, get' and *yi*- 'say; go' that can also occur as independent verbs. Polyfunctional verbs are defined as those verbs that can be used as copula, support verb, or auxiliary. As noted (p. 81), "the regularity of their multiple functions points towards the appropriateness of a polysemy, rather than a homonymy, analysis."

Gender and number marking are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Manambu has the gender and number agreement forms *-l*, *-ø* 'singular feminine', *-d* 'singular masculine', *bər* 'dual', and *-di* 'plural'. The gender forms show up in third person free pronouns, *lə* '3sg.fem' and *də* '3sg.masc'. Cognates of these forms are found throughout the Ndu family, as is the gender distinction for second person singular with the forms *mən* '2sg.masc' and *nən* '2sg.fem'. Comparative data for the gender and number forms in the Ndu family are provided in Chapter 22.

Chapter 7 discusses case marking. Aikhenvald distinguishes nine case forms, including zero, for eighteen different cases, if going strictly by their function. She explicitly compares a 'lumper' and 'splitter' approach, and chooses thirteen cases as her most reasonable and economic solution to account for the attested forms and functions as she understands them. The chapter closes with a brief comment

on case morphology on verbs, which is compared to its widespread occurrence in Australian languages, but curiously enough not to the typical usage of nominal morphology on clauses in Papuan languages.

The short Chapter 8 on Possession is rather heterogeneous; it includes N+N compounds, as the discussion on 'genitive' compounds in Chapter 9 (p.193) shows, as well as predicative possessive constructions with the verb 'have', which turns out to be the positional verb *tə* 'stand', identified as one of the polyfunctional verbs mentioned above. Various constructions are given with or without linkers (*a*, *ə*, or *kə*) with alternating glosses (LK 'linker', POSS 'possessive' or OBL 'oblique'), which makes this chapter rather difficult to process.

Chapter 9 consists of a few derivational mechanisms and compounding. Under this heading four suffixes "appear to form one morphological system. They can combine with any word class [...], displaying somewhat different properties depending on the word class they occur with" (p.187). All these suffixes require a [phonologically motivated] linker. These 'suffixes' are:

- dəka* glossed as 'only, just, exactly' (Note: In Chapter 2 (p.41) an independent word *adəka* 'only' is given to exemplify the short vowel /a/);
- rəb* 'fully, totally';
- aba:b* and -*a:b* are both 'also'; no mentioning of reduplication, but "it is probably etymologically related to the quantifier *aba:b* 'all'" (p.190)
- pək* is said to have different meanings depending on the class of word it attaches to: "It means 'like' when used with verbs, 'more or less; like' when used with nouns and other nominals, and is a comparative marker when used with adjectives" (p.190).

However, rather than analyzing these forms as suffixes, in my view they would more naturally belong to the class of adverbs, discussed on p.100, because the meanings as suggested by the glosses, and their syntactic behavior are more adverb-like as they occur in other Papuan languages, and secondly, it is strange to have the same 'suffix' on all possible word classes.

Chapter 10 presents the closed classes that were not covered in Chapter 4.5: personal pronouns, demonstratives, interrogatives, quantifiers, and numerals. The section on demonstratives shows how the three basic forms *kə* 'proximal', *wa-* 'proximal to addressee', and *a* 'distal' combine with various elements specifying distance, direction, elevation, or textual/pragmatic information. An important, because frequent, product are the 'reactivated topic' demonstratives, which had already been introduced in Chapter 3 as being relevant to cross-referencing of arguments on the verb. There are a number of different forms but their morphological composition is not given in a list or table. They typically refer to S/O argument (p.219), for example, when an Object constituent is a reactivated topic, it is

obligatorily cross-referenced on the verb. The illustrating examples seem to show that 'reactivated topic' demonstratives are not found in a prehead position, as is stipulated for demonstratives in general (Table 10.11), p. 243.

Chapters 11–13 (pp. 244–297) deal with verbal categories: structures of verbal and non-verbal predicate heads, tenses, aspects, and moods. These are followed by a chapter exclusively devoted to negation (Chapter 14).

Chapters 15–17 deal with different ways in which Manambu verbs combine with each other or other (unspecified) elements: verb compounding, directionals and valency-changing devices, and complex predicates. Verb compounding is explicitly preferred over verb serialization (p. 339). Again, these chapters are densely populated with examples and very detailed comments, sometimes specifying the actual extra-linguistic context in which the utterances were obtained.

Chapters 18–20 discuss various issues related to clause combining, such as dependent clauses, sequencing of clauses with same or different subject, relative clauses, speech reports, with special attention to semi-indirect speech. Each chapter or section contains a summarizing chart listing the criteria for the distinguished categories.

An interesting feature of this grammar is the attention devoted to the lexicon. Features that are common in languages of all Papuan lineages, which often go unnoticed in other descriptive grammars, are explicitly reviewed: no special verb for 'want', or speech act verbs like 'refuse'; a number of specific lexical items for different ways of 'carrying', 'putting', 'breaking'. On the other hand, like many other Papuan languages Manambu has only one verb covering 'eat, drink, smoke'. These items are then discussed as instances of 'polysemy', and detailed observations are offered on how such polysemy or ambiguity is disambiguated by special grammatical treatment or contextual information. The chapter is rich in detail, with many asides to related expressions.

The final chapter discusses the position of Manambu in a genetic and areal perspective, including its viability in the light of Tok Pisin as *lingua franca* and the English education system.

Recurrent throughout the grammar are analytical decisions based on the pragmatic function of a construction in a particular situation, confusing meaning and implicature. In the introductory comments to Chapter 15 on Verb Compounding, Aikhenvald herself states: "We are faced with the problem of differentiating polysemous stems from homonyms — a pervasive puzzle throughout Manambu." The pervasive puzzle could have been solved (and the grammar reduced to about half the size), if the analysis had been more faithful to the Manambu system of form-meaning relations instead of equating 'meaning' with 'translation equivalent'. Such confusion is apparent in the analysis of Irrealis and Negation.

On p. 258 — and later p. 284 — it is said that the future in non-negative main clauses is homophonous with a form termed irrealis. “Whether a form marked with *-kə* has an irrealis or a future meaning is often determined by the context (they are differentiated under negation).”

This seems to me a spurious distinction, more suggested by some translation equivalent than by the emic system of Manambu. Aikhenvald claims that it is the irrealis that is used in warnings, but there is, of course, nothing unusual about a future form in warnings, not only in Papuan languages: *Watch out, you’re gonna fall*.

This topic gives rise to other cases of putative homonymy. “The negative future consists of a verb root followed by the negator *ma:*, the negative irrealis is formed with the negator *akəs* (same as the habitual negator) followed by a fully inflected verb” (p. 309–310), and on p. 312 it is questioned whether the two *akəs* are the same morpheme or two different ones. Aikhenvald’s answer is that synchronically they are distinct, and diachronically the question remains open. Such an analysis unnecessarily complicates the morphosyntactic mechanism of negation in Manambu.

I would claim that the post-verbal position of the regular pre-verbal negator *ma:* is due to its position in non-verbal predicates, as shown in Section 14.1.2, because the examples of so-called negative future involve a non-verbal predicate, a plain verb root. The negator *akəs* conveys a different negation than the regular negator *ma:*, used for both fully inflected habitual and future verb forms.

The chapter on negation contains an even more questionable case of homonymy. Manambu, it is claimed on p. 312–314, has *ata* as a special negator of same-subject purposive and desiderative, as illustrated in

- (2) *ñən ata vəkər-ək*
 you.FEM NEG.DES fall-PURP.SS

‘You are not going to fall down’ (example 14.63, p. 312)

The form *ata* occurs frequently and is in most cases glossed as ‘thus, then’. It is a member of the demonstrative system, as described on p. 215. The form *-ta* has an unknown history, but it can be attached to the basic demonstrative stems *kə* ‘close to speaker’ and *a* ‘distal’ to form adverbial demonstratives. And, as in many other (Papuan) languages, such demonstrative forms can be found in more complex forms functioning as adverbs or conjunctions. With regard to the form *ata* in its two allegedly different functions, the question is raised whether “we are faced with polysemy or homonymy” with the answer that this is an open question.

But surely, once the negative import of (2) is understood as an implicature rather than a meaning, much like the English warning given earlier, there are not two different functions of *ata*. The question can be readily answered: there is but

one form *ata* with one meaning in the morphosyntax of Manambu. And also the number of negators is reduced.

The purpose of a reference grammar of a hitherto undescribed language is to provide a guide to linguists to understand a unique instrument of communication by which a group of people make sense of the world, while at the same time teaching what this language has in common with other unique communication systems. This grammar is a much needed source of information on Manambu as a member of the Ndu family of Papuan languages. However, the recommendation that the description is “in a clear style that will be comprehensible to all linguists” is rather an overstatement. For readers who are ‘splitters’ this grammar may be a delight to read, for readers who try to follow the rule-of-thumb ‘one form, one meaning’ it could be a frustrating experience. Although Professor Aikhenvald has not made it easy for other linguists to understand both the unique and common properties of this fascinating language, the book is full of interesting and thought provoking observations.

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