

T.R. Groves, G.W. Groves and R. Jacobs, Kiribatese: an outline description. Canberra: Department of Linguistics, Australian National University, 1985 [Pacific Linguistics D-64]. pp. 155. \$21.75.

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The present grammar of Kiribatese is based on work on the language that one of the authors (a native speaker) had taken part in at the University of Hawaii. Such active involvement of native speakers in describing and analysing the indigenous languages of the South Pacific is not only welcomed but also to be encouraged.

The volume consists of five chapters and three appendices. The introductory chapter provides background information on the language. Kiribatese has two major dialects, and the grammar deals with the southern one. The differences between the dialects appear to be minor. The family tree of Austronesian given in the grammar lists Nuclear Micronesian, of which Kiribatese is a member, as one branch of a North Hebridean subgroup within Oceanic. This will come as a surprise to most specialists in Oceanic linguistics, and one would like to know the basis for this classification. More orthodox subgroupings of Austronesian have Nuclear Micronesian either as a primary subgroup of Oceanic or as a branch of a Remote Oceanic subgroup of Oceanic (see e.g. Pawley 1982).

The descriptive part of the book is structured in the classical 'bottom-to-top' way: from Phonology and Orthography (Ch. 2), through Morphemes (Ch. 3) and Function classes (Parts of speech) (Ch. 4), to Syntax of simple sentences (Ch. 5). The chapter on the phonology contains, beside a description of the phonemic system, statements about the phonotactics and morphophonemics.

Collectors of linguistic curios may note with interest that in Kiribatese whole sentences may consist exclusively of vowels, indeed with only one vocalic contrast: iai aia aia aiaia iaايا 'their enemies had their firewood under them.' Stress is said to be "very important semantically" (p. 18), but whether this means that it is phonemic is not made clear.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed discussion of the derivational morphology of Kiribatese, and, strangely, also a section on the phonology adaptations of recent loan words, mostly from English.

Chapter 4, on the function classes, is by far the largest. In it are discussed the articles, noun classifiers and numerals, nouns, pronouns, prepositions, adjectives, verbs, adverbs and conjunctions. Two sections seem out of place here: one on 'agent prefixes' (written separately from the following verb), and one on reduplication.

Kiribatese has an elaborate system of noun classifiers. Some of them are used according to the nature of the objects counted: persons/animals, plants, flat objects, long objects, means of transportation, pandanus fruit, etc. Others are used to express measures: cupfuls, handfuls, rows of thatch, etc. At least some of the classifiers are related to/derived from nouns. For example, the classifier for means of transportation is waa, which is also the word for 'canoe'.

As is usual in Oceanic languages, Kiribatese makes a distinction between alienable and inalienable possession. Different possessive constructions are also used depending on the animacy of the possessor.

Eleven classes of transitive verbs are distinguished for Kiribatese on the basis of the allomorphs of the object-marking and the passive suffixes they select. A list of the classes with examples is given in the first appendix. There are only minor phonological differences among the variants of each of the

suffixes, and as the authors say, a more detailed study might reduce the number of the classes required.

The chapter on the syntax is brief, and the discussion is limited to a few basic sentence types, such as equational sentences, and transitive and intransitive structures. Kiribatese is a VOS language with preverbal subject markers. It has passivization, signalled by a suffix on the verb but no special word order.

The last two appendices contain short lexicons, Kiribatese-English and English-Kiribatese.

The grammar is primarily the work of two people who are not linguistic specialists (RJ is credited with providing "the organisational framework for presentation" (p. 1), and it does not have the degree of thoroughness and analytic rigour one would otherwise expect. For example, there is practically no explicit treatment of the phrase level. (An exception is the discussion of the possessive constructions included in the section on nouns.) There are some problems that a little editorial care could have avoided: awkward statements such as "Just as in other languages, Kiribatese has utterances which express a more-or-less complete thought, and these are begun with a capital letter and ended with a period in written text." (as an introduction to the chapter on the syntax; p. 104); the use of // for both phonemic and phonetic representations, inconsistencies and wrong alphabetisation in the lexicons; and some others. One also wishes that the examples had been provided with morphemic, or at least lexemic glosses, rather than just free translations. It takes many trips to the Kiribatese-English lexicon to get some idea about the structure of a sentence like Ngkana e b'aka te karau ao a na maiu raoui arokara 'If it rains our plants will do well'.

Such problems apart, the grammar is a valuable source of information on Kiribatese and a welcome addition to the descriptive literature dealing with the Austronesian languages.

**REFERENCES**

- Pawley, Andrew. 1982. "Rubbish-man commoner, big man or chief? Linguistic evidence for hereditary chieftainship in Proto-Oceanic Society". In: Siikala (ed.) 1982:33-52.
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