

Ozanne-Rivierre, Françoise. *Le nyelâyu de Balade (Nouvelle-Calédonie)*. Peeters: Paris. (SELAF no. 367; Langues et Cultures du Pacifique 12.) 276 pp. No price given. *Reviewed by John Lynch*, University of the South Pacific, Port Vila, Vanuatu.

Nyelâyu (/ñelâyu/) is the northernmost language in New Caledonia. It is spoken in two dialects: one in the Bélep Islands immediately to the north of the New Caledonian mainland, and the other on the north-east tip of the mainland in the Balade area, which forms the basis for Ozanne-Rivierre's (O-R) study. It is bordered to the west by Nêlêmwâ and Kumak, to the south by Yuanga, and to the south-east by Caaâc. O-R does not give the number of speakers; the figure given in Wurm and Hattori's (1981) atlas was 1250.

Balade was the first area in New Caledonia contacted by Europeans—in 1774, by Captain James Cook in the *Resolution*—and 40 words were recorded by the naturalist J.R. Forster. O-R discusses early documentation of Nyelâyu in her first chapter (13-17), and also gives Forster's full list, with commentary, in an Appendix (265-268).

Chapter 2 (19-31) outlines the phonological structure of Nyelâyu. Nyelâyu has a typically complex phonology: contrast between voiceless aspirated, voiceless unaspirated and prenasalised stops in labiovelar, bilabial, apical, palatal and velar positions; contrast between voiced and voiceless nasals, lateral and semivowels; seven oral and five nasal vowels; and a phonemic vowel

length distinction. Syllables may be open or closed, though consonant clusters are not permitted. The orthography uses digraphs and trigraphs for complex consonants (e.g. *bw* for /^mb^w/, *ny* for /ñ/, *phw* for /p^hw/ and *mhw* for /m^w/); the circumflex accent distinguishes nasal from oral vowels, while vowel length is written by doubling the letter – thus *ââ* = /ã:/.

Chapter 3 (33-63) is a brief sketch of the grammar. Nyelâyu is an ergative language; intransitive clauses have the structure VS, while transitive clauses are VAO, with the agent marked by a preposed particle (*an* in some contexts, *ru* in others). Within the verb phrase, person and number of the subject, as well as markers of tense-aspect, are pre-verbal, while pronominal objects and directionals are post-verbal. As in most New Caledonian languages, there is a rich system of deictics/demonstratives. Five short texts can be found near the end of the book (201-226).

The bulk of the book is a dictionary of Nyelâyu: a general Nyelâyu-French listing (67-181), a separate list of names of flora and fauna (185-197) and, following the texts, a French-Nyelâyu finder list (229-262). The dictionary is clearly laid out, with headwords easily identifiable. Definitions are relatively brief, but compounds and idiomatic expressions are

given, as are example sentences (though there could be more of these). The zoological/botanical section is thorough, as we have come to expect from French Pacific linguists who trained under or worked with Haudricourt.

This is a useful addition to the literature on New Caledonian languages, and will be of assistance to linguists working in the comparative Oceanic area.