

Wiebe, Brent & René van den Berg. 2019. *Bola grammar sketch* (Data Papers on Papua New Guinea Languages 63). Ukarumpa: SIL-PNG Academic Publications. ISBN 9980 0 4482 9 ([https://www.sil.org/system/files/reapdata/69/02/40/69024055998614577724075211921224072564/Bola\\_grammar\\_20\\_03\\_2019\\_final.pdf](https://www.sil.org/system/files/reapdata/69/02/40/69024055998614577724075211921224072564/Bola_grammar_20_03_2019_final.pdf))

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Bola, also known as Bakovi, is an Austronesian language of the Willaumez linkage spoken in the Papua New Guinea province of West New Britain. With an estimated 14,000 speakers and a language area including the province's capital city of Kimbe, Bola remains an important language of the region. Despite this, prior descriptive work regarding Bola is scarce, limited primarily to language surveys and analyses of certain aspects of the language. The *Bola Grammar Sketch* under review aimed to tackle this issue by providing a more thorough description than the two previous unpublished sketches by Bosco (1979) and Wiebe & Wiebe (1998). To say it has fulfilled this task would be an understatement, and the title is far too humble for its thorough, nearly 300-page text. This is not to say that the volume is wholly without its shortcomings, but the description detailed therein provides both much needed and enlightening scholarship on the Bola language.

The text is the result of a collaboration between Brent Wiebe, who has had extensive interaction with the Bola people for just shy of two decades, and one of SIL's senior linguistics consultants René van den Berg, whose previous experience in descriptive grammars of Austronesian languages (see van den Berg 1989; van den Berg & Bachet 2006; van den Berg & Busenitz 2012; Pearson & van den Berg 2008) is apparent in this volume's detail. The book is divided into ten chapters, each of which I describe briefly below and highlight a few interesting points.

The first chapter, *Introduction*, provides a brief overview of the Bola language and people, their distribution across West New Britain, remarks on a few cultural aspects, prior research with the language, Bola dialects, and Bola's stability with particular reference to its interaction with Tok Pisin.

The second chapter, *Phonology*, discusses the sound system of the language with particular detail on syllable structure and vowels (diphthongs, elision, dissimilation). Of interest are the seeming free variation between voiced stops with their prenasalized counterparts and the phonology of loan words from Tok Pisin.

The third chapter, *Basic typology and word classes*, introduces the eleven basic word classes of Bola and remarks on certain properties of them to be discussed in later chapters. The tests by which a noun, verb, or adjective is determined to belong to its respective class are thoroughly described, and provided examples make it clear how to identify them and their overlaps.

The fourth chapter, *Nouns and noun phrases*, is by far the largest of all ten chapters, comprising a total of 65 pages, more than a fifth of the main content, and with good reason. The detail with which the individual components of the noun phrase are described leaves few, if any, surface matters left unanswered. The rich pronoun system is discussed in detail, fitting its 30+ forms; the derivational processes discussed are not restricted to only the most productive, but even the rare cases are explored (as with nominal reduplication and reciprocal kinship relations); and a final summary of the NP near the end of the chapter serves well to synthesize the various components of the NP structure.

The fifth chapter, *Verbs and the verbal complex*, similar to the previous chapter, thoroughly details the individual components of the verbal complex and its constituent parts, presenting a template of the complex and attending to each position in turn. This lends to discussions on serial constructions consisting of two and even three verbs, modal markers and the apparent variability in the position of modal *ga*, the role of the language's only object suffix, and the function of intervening adverbs.

The sixth chapter, *Prepositional phrases*, befitting the low number of prepositions in Bola, is a short one describing the formation of various oblique roles and dipping into further discussion of oblique pronouns. Of particular interest are the unique locative preposition *o* and the use of oblique pronouns in an anticipatory manner.

The seventh chapter, *The clause*, focuses on the various simple sentence constructions, tackling equative, locative, and existential clauses as well as the differences in clauses with intransitive and with transitive verbs. The end of the chapter provides a welcome overview of the variability in word order for transitive clauses and briefly introduces a few possible reasons for this variation.

The eighth chapter, *Clausal modifiers*, tackles remaining concepts relevant to simple sentences, including negation, imperative and interrogative moods, and the methods for representing tense, aspect, and mood in Bola. This last point takes a brief deviation from the remarkably descriptive nature of the grammar to discuss how the three traditional TAM notions are realized via various constructions in Bola. Though turning away from a Bola-sourced analysis for a short moment, the section is refreshingly accessible in its identification of how familiar concepts are realized in Bola.

The ninth chapter, *Complex sentences*, discusses manners of both coordination as well as relativization. The last sections of the chapter also serve to discuss topics that do not fit well elsewhere in the text, covering manners of representing direct and indirect speech and the implications of verbal repetition.

The tenth and final chapter, *Residue*, points out various questions that had been left unanswered throughout the text and areas which need more research for a better understanding of their function in the Bola language.

The text closes with an appendix consisting of three detailed interlinear texts of stories in the Bola language, giving needed context and reference to the source material from which provided examples were taken.

Throughout the entirety of the volume, a large body of source material is called on for naturalistic and textual examples that thoroughly portray the topic at hand. With this, the ample examples ensure there is not a single point whose meaning is left unclear or ambiguous while at the same time providing more than adequate support for the presented analysis. Though the use of examples is certainly abundant, it at no point causes a choke in the text or provides

unnecessary redundancy. Terms with ambiguous definitions or that may be new to the reader are defined where necessary so that no confusion is caused by the authors' terminology. The content material itself provides rich and thorough descriptions of all the syntactic constructions one would expect from a full descriptive grammar, again indicating the humility of the work's title. Where relevant, the text and explanations are enriched with remarks about historical derivations from Proto-Malayo-Polynesian and Proto-Oceanic, and notes about loans from, influence from, and similarities with Tok Pisin bring greater relevance to one with knowledge of the language.

There is very little to say about the shortcomings of the text that the authors have not already pointed out themselves in the final chapter. In fact, even throughout the text, deficiencies in analysis are noted by the authors and presented as topics for further research. The most apparent of these would certainly be the brief discussion on Bola phonetics and phonology, consisting of less than twenty pages and expanding little upon the phonological work of Wiebe & Wiebe (2000); many questions are left unanswered regarding medial vowel reduction/elision, the role of semivowels and the possibility of diphthongs, changes between careful and casual speech, and many suprasegmental factors. Certain syntactic processes are left with questions unanswered, such as what appears to be oblique promotion in passive constructions and the seemingly variable presence/absence of traces in relativized clauses. Finally, the sketch is entirely lacking in any and all differences between the primary dialect and the Harua dialect mentioned in the introduction; though the Harua-speaking population may be comparatively small, variation between the two dialects is surely relevant for a descriptive grammar of the language.

Those points being made, it is very hard to find any deep shortcomings in the text itself. It is no secret that there is always more analysis to be done with any given language. The book provides a remarkably rich and exceedingly thorough description of a broad range of aspects of the language. More than plenty of examples are provided to grasp a deeper understanding of the language itself, and the volume lends itself as a thorough resource with which comparative analyses alongside other Western Oceanic languages could certainly be performed. The

grammar sketch is well worth reading and its academic merit surely goes without question. This volume makes a welcome addition to the collection of any scholar of Western Oceanic languages or the languages of Papua New Guinea.

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