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## BOOK REVIEW

**A Grammar of Nungon: A Papuan Language of Northeast New Guinea by  
Hannah S. Sarvasy**

Reviewed by Robert L. Bradshaw (JCU)

**A Grammar of Nungon: A Papuan Language of Northeast New Guinea by Hannah S. Sarvasy.** Grammars and Language Sketches of the World's Languages – Mainland and Insular South East Asia, (Sidwell, Paul (ed.), Australian National University), Koninklijke Brill NV: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2017, xxi + 637 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-33750-3 (hardback €160), ISBN 978-90-04-34010-7 (e-book €145).

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This is a comprehensive grammar of a Papuan language in the Kabwum District, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea. One can greatly appreciate the straightforward and thorough approach in which it was written, according to the Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Dryer 2006) (p. 1). Nungon appears to be a rather 'typical' Papuan language, and yet I found it quite enlightening, having had no previous experience with Finisterre-Huon Papuan languages. Below are included a few highlights; hopefully something to whet the appetite to have a further look.

*Chapter 1 - Setting* includes many helpful anthropological observations that set the background on the way of life amongst the people of the Urawa River valley. Included are discussion of word origins from the Kâte church language, and various aspects of the history of the Nungon language community, including origins, missionary and church activities, World War II and post-World War II activities, on up to the present-day situation.

Particularly intriguing is the no-longer used story conclusion formula:

1.2) [Oyek        bangam tumon]o hi-ng gee-ng  
       winged.bean cucumber melon put-DEP dangle-DEP  
       gee-ng,     tung!  
       dangle-DEP New.Guinea.eagle  
       'Winged beans, cucumbers, melon dangling: New Guinea eagle!' (Field notes) (p. 45)

One is left wondering just how it came about, and why it fell into disuse, and how many other such formulas were used in the past that we'll never know about.

Many other typical special types of language are discussed, but also included were baby talk (pp. 47-48) and nonverbal communication (pp. 51-55); some great topics for further study in other Papuan languages as well.

*Chapter 2 - Phonology* includes detailed examples of phoneme distribution and phonological rules, highlighted with a vowel formant chart (p. 67) and spectrogram and waveform figures (p. 78). One could especially enjoy the euphonic pairs such as *gindingding gondongdong* 'pitter-patter noise, such as that made by rats at night' (p. 83). In Nungon, these pairs exhibit "...identical consonant patterns, but [have] the vowel /i/ in all syllables of the first word, and a low or back vowel in all or at least the first syllable of the second... (ibid).

*Chapter 3 – Word Classes* covers the open classes of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs as well as various closed classes, which include personal pronouns, demonstratives, interrogatives, polar question marker and doubt marker, conjunction *orin* ‘and’, negative word *muuno*, interjections, and hunting-related calls and commands. An interesting topic is that of multiple groupings; for example water becomes plural when it is referred to as a group, i.e., ‘droplets’:

3.4) [*Daar*-*o<sub>Pe/Pr</sub>* *yamug*-*o<sub>Pe</sub>*]<sub>S</sub> *hönggot-nang-ka-ng*.  
 eye-3SG.POSS water-3SG.POSS emerge-PROB.PL-NF-2/3PL  
 ‘Its eye’s water (droplets) will emerge.’ (Field notes) (p. 136)

Likewise this also applies to *gaam* ‘kunai grass’, as to whether it refers to a pile or to individual sheaves (p. 137).

There are three classes of adjectives: Class 1, which are monomorphemic, and Classes 2 and 3 which are formed with different suffixes. Class 3, the most productive, adds the adjectivizing suffix *-ni* to nouns, forming such adjectives as *sugik-ni* ‘ashy (of skin)’ from *sugik* ‘skin disease’ (p. 144). Since the distinction between adjectives and nouns can be blurred in Papuan languages, it is very helpful to see an outline of the differences between them in Nungon (pp. 153-154).

*Chapter 4 – Nominal Morphology and Noun Phrase Structure* discusses such things as number marking, plural constructions, deverbal nominalization, reduplication, participles, adjectives as NPs, just to name a few. Rather productive are two-noun NPs in which one noun modifies another as in *top arap* sea+game ‘fish’, or *yup dirong* bird+hair ‘feather’ (p. 199).

Person terms can also act as modifiers, as in *hawek amna* theft+man ‘man of theft’ (p. 211). Order plays an important role; when preceding it acts as a head. So *gugak amna* child+male ‘male child’ versus after, *amna ketket* man+boy ‘still-youthful man’ (ibid).

The intensifier *hinom* has an interesting effect with *amna* ‘man’ or *oe* ‘woman’, as in *oe hinom* ‘woman INTENS’ meaning the ‘old/elderly woman’ (p.221).

*Chapter 5 – Final Verbs* discusses tenses and mood, among other things. Verbal transitive classes are different from the morphologic classes (p. 245). Moods include immediate and delayed imperative, prohibitive, irrealis, probable and contrafactual. A rather rare inflection is Probable, describing events that could reasonably occur in the future, as seen below:

5.72) *Mee, ga-mo-wang*.  
 later 2SG.O-give-PROB.SG  
 ‘Later I will give it to you.’ (Field notes) (p. 287)

*Chapter 6 – Non-Final Verbs* are of two types: dependent and medial formation. They function differently:

Dependent verbs prototypically occur as non-final elements in tight multi-verb constructions (§11.2), a type of complex predicate. Medial verbs prototypically occur as final predicative elements in medial clauses. The action denoted by a Dependent

verb is conceived of as composing a single predicate with succeeding verb(s), while actions denoted by verbs in Medial form are conceived of as separate predicates from succeeding verbs... (p. 294).

Switch reference in Nungon uses 'marked clause' and 'controlling clause'. "...the marked clause is a medial clause with Medial verb predicate, and the controlling clause immediately follows the marked clause in the same clause chain." (p. 297)

Aspect marking includes habitual, continuous, continuous habitual, inferred imperfective, completive, imminent and perfect.

Evidentiality is usually only marked in a certain tense or aspect, but in Nungon, the inferred imperfective aspect combines habitual or imperfective aspect and non-firsthand evidentiality and occurs only in the present tense final verb form, not in the usual past tense or perfect aspect as per Aikenvald 2004:264 (p. 323). An example of inferred imperfective is seen in the following: *na-ng-a ta-ga-morok* 'the two of you/them seem to be eating' (p. 325).

There are a couple of other ways to indicate aspect. One being durative through use of *ku-* 'take away'):

6.97) {[*Babiyā*<sub>MOD</sub> *bög-in*<sub>HEAD</sub>]<sub>OBL</sub> *öö-ng* *ku-ng-a*}...  
 paper house-LOC ascend-DEP SG.O.take.away-RP-1SG  
 'I (sic) going to school for a long time.' (Anita inoin hat 0:30) (p. 344)

Nungon has two causative constructions: 1) with intransitive change-of-state verbs and 2) with intransitive verbs of motion, and *it-* 'be'.

In *Chapter 7 – Pronouns and Demonstratives*, the basic personal pronouns are shown to combine with several postpositions: focus, genitive, benefactive, comitative, restrictive and locative (p. 353).

As well there are emphatic and genitive emphatic sets of pronouns.

The topographical and distance-referencing demonstratives vary for level and distance respectively. Topographical on three levels: lower, same, and higher; distance-referencing on proximal and distal (p. 361).

*Chapter 8 – Grammatical Relation-Marking Postpositions* include focus, instrument, topic, possessor, benefactive, beneficiary, and reason/purpose/goal.

A unique phenomenon is shape-shifting, used in legends. In these, characters change into animals and inanimate objects (p. 399). The most common verb for this is *kore-* 'hide' as in:

8.59) ...{*t-uny-a*}... {{*amna*<sub>O</sub> *kore-go-c*}}  
 do-DS.2/3DU-MV man hide-RP-3SG  
 'The two of them doing so... (first, one) disguised (herself as) a man.'  
 (Manggirai tic korong 10:20) (p. 400)

The locative postposition =*dek* is used for location in space and time, for psychological and rhetorical location, for personal responsibility and with instrument.

The restrictive and durative postposition =*gon* is used with location NPs, with NPS not denoting location, with medial verbs, with adverbs and with other postpositions.

*Chapter 9 – Possession* discusses such things as genitive, pertensive, alienable and inalienable pertensive marking, labile adjective and headless NPS, endearment, mismatches in number indexing, among others.

Labile adjectives take pertensive markers when acting as a noun:

9.20) *Hum-o*<sub>VCC</sub>, *iwiw-o-no*<sub>VCS</sub>      *muuno*<sub>VCC</sub>.  
 cold-ADJ    tasty-ADJ-3SG.POSS not  
 ‘(It is) bland, its tastiness does not exist.’ (Field notes) (p. 436)

*Chapter 10 – Clause Types* incorporates verbless, imperatives and commands, stative, questions and polar questions.

The question word *numa* ‘who’ can be marked for number:

*numa* ‘who (sg. or unknown number)’    *numa-rin* ‘who (2)’      *numa-ri* ‘who (3+)’ (p. 477)

*Chapter 11 – Complex Predicates* include causative, light verb, tight multi-verb, afflictive light verb construction and causation and forcefulness.

Afflictive light verb constructions are as in the following:

11.12) *Meep ga-mo-wang-ka-k*.  
 heavy 2SG.O-give-PROB.SG-NF-3SG  
 ‘You will feel heavy.’ (Field notes) (p. 501)

*Chapter 12 – Clause Combining* includes final clause coordination, relative constructions, complementation, subordinate final clauses, relativizer/specifier =*ma* and speech acts.

*Chapter 13 – Discourse* includes attention-commanding suffix –*a*, topicalizing suffix –*u*, topicalizing and linking, focus, topicalization and tail-head linkage, among other things.

An example of the attention-commanding suffix –*a*:

13.7) {{*Nok*<sub>A</sub>    *youp*<sub>O2</sub>    *ga-mo-ha-r*}}-*a*.  
 1SG.PRO work    2SG.O-give-PRES.SG-1SG-ATT  
 ‘I’m giving you work, indeed.’ (Field notes) (p. 548)

**Appendix:** Nungon Texts include two dialogues and two narrative texts – over 30 pages of texts. I am a bit concerned that both of the dialogues were contrived, as stated: “The two were asked to pretend...” (p. 585). I would have liked to see more spontaneous natural texts. I did appreciate how the details on the idiosyncratic feature of the speech were pointed out in Narrative II (p. 600). Nevertheless, reference to those features in the body of the book would have been helpful, as they weren’t apparent in looking through the Subject index.

The indices (Author index, Languages index and Subject index) should prove helpful, though I think the most beneficial would be the Subject index.

The layout of the book is quite nice. There were very few typographical errors that I noticed. For the most part, one was directed to sections below, but occasionally I was left wondering what some items were, hoping that I would learn more about them later, which I eventually did. The in-depth discussions of each issue covered in the grammar were very good; however, I would have appreciated some more examples. At times it was a bit difficult to get a handle on what was being presented. The numerous tables greatly helped.

There were a few items that I questioned. On p. 1 twice *Ethnologue* was mentioned without citation or entry in the References. Two linguistics analysis programmes (*Toolbox* and *Fieldworks*) were named with no reference to them (*ibid*), but *Praat* (pp. 77, 110) **was** included in the References. The languages map 1.1 on p. 7 says that the “Austronesian language names are in italics”, but I couldn’t determine why some other language names were bolded, and some not. Since it was adapted from another of the author’s works (Sarvasy 2013), perhaps it was explained there, but would have been helpful to include in this work as well.

On p. 24, in reference to World War II, there is an added comment about Japanese or **German** soldiers. However, from the information I could gather, I believe there were no German soldiers at that time in New Guinea as the Australians began to administer the territory after World War I.

I would highly recommend this book as an ideal reference resource to a previously unstudied Papuan language. On the negative side, the price of the hardback is quite prohibitive, and the e-book only a little better.

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