

Kenneth L. Rehg with the assistance of Damian G. Sohl. *Ponapean Reference Grammar*. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1981. Pp. xv, 393, appendix, bibliography, index (Donald M. Topping, ed., PALI Language Texts. Micronesia: Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawaii.) Paper \$16.00.

The book under review calls itself a “reference grammar”—it is one of a series of such grammars published (and, as far as I know, in preparation) by the Pacific and Asian Language Institute of the University of Hawaii. The initial questions to be raised, therefore, are: (1) what is a reference grammar (as opposed to, for instance, a scholarly grammar); and (2) for whose reference is it intended?

While the first of these questions is not addressed by the author, the second is answered explicitly in his Preface: “Although this work is intended primarily for native speakers of Ponapean who are bilingual in English, I hope it will also be useful to others whose interests have brought them to the study of this language” (page xiii). And more specifically: “. . . The introduction of bilingual education in Ponape and the emerging role of Ponapean as a medium of education necessitates a grammar such as this to serve as a springboard for the development of school grammars” (page xiv). These two statements raise two questions, one sociolinguistic and sociocultural, the other analytic linguistic.

The sociolinguistic question concerns the problems arising from a situation in which there is no native tradition of grammatical research, nor—to my knowledge—any significant presence of a native linguistic profes-

sion: how can language development (literacy development, educational and “cultural” use of the language, standardization) best be promoted under such circumstances? Without researching the present educational and cultural situation on Ponape, I can only raise the issue but not respond to it adequately, although I made some points relevant to the situation at the time of my field work on the island in 1947, in explaining a practical failure I experienced:

The gist of my Ponapean experience can be stated quite briefly: literacy is not the same as standard language.

In an essentially folk culture, where literacy was a realistic objective, I had wanted to introduce certain elements extending beyond it and into the initial phases of language standardization--which is an essentially urban phenomenon. (Garvin, “The Standard Language Problem . . .,” *Anthropological Linguistics*, 1:3, pp. 28-31.) [And I failed.]

The analytic linguistic question pertains to the adequacy of the grammar. Here again, there is a sociolinguistic aspect to it: how well will the grammar serve, for instance, the education of Ponapeans in their own language. Again, without researching the present situation, I can only raise, but not respond to, the issue. The core of the question is, needless to say, how well the statements contained in the reference grammar reflect the structure of the language represented. In regard to this, let me first recognize the author’s right to use his preferred frame of reference and principles of organization. This still leaves me with three bones to pick: I have reservations regarding the general design of the grammar, some factual details, and the choice of examples.

(1) The grammar lacks a uniform format--that is, the author does not seem to follow a consistent frame of reference. Thus, most of the phonology and morphology follows the American descriptivist tradition, as can be seen from the attempts to define the phoneme (pages 24-5) and morpheme (pages 67-8). On the other hand, the treatment of the syntax implies a reliance on transformational grammar and the theoretical thinking derived from it, although this is nowhere overtly acknowledged. It can, however, be inferred among other things from the frequent use of the notions of *grammatical* and *ungrammatical* (*passim*), or more specifically, of process notions such as *deletion* (pages 332-5). In all fairness, it should be noted that this perhaps reflects the state of the art more than any particular authorial inadequacy: many practical applications of linguistics of this kind are forced to follow a similar inconsistency of format, since different

schools of thought within theoretical and analytic linguistics have given different degrees of emphasis to different aspects of language.

(2) There are a number of empirical inadequacies in Rehg's treatment, of which I will give only a few illustrations.

(a) In the treatment of the phonology, nothing much is said about stress. The statement mentioning "stress, about which almost nothing is known" (page 304) must be considered a cop-out, since, even if one agreed with it, there is nothing to prevent the author from doing his own analysis.

(b) There is no separate morphophonemic (or morphonological) section in the book. This is, of course, one of those matters of organizing principle which I consider the author's privilege and hence not subject to criticism. This does not, however, excuse the insufficient attention given to morphophonemic questions (they are, after all, as important in Pona-pean as in other languages). The pertinence of these matters is acknowledged, but they are not given the detailed treatment they deserve. Thus, in the fairly adequate description of verbal suffixation, there is only superficial attention paid to "alterations in vowel length in the verb paradigm" (pages 253-4), as illustrated by the statement "This final vowel is sometimes long and sometimes short" (page 253).

(c) In the morphology, the establishment of word classes and subclasses seems to be based on rather poorly defined semantic criteria, as shown by the subcategorization of intransitive verbs, summarized as follows (page 201):

Intransitive Verb

General Intransitive Verbs

Activity

Non-Activity

Adjective

Active    Resultative    Neutral

*m w e n g e l o p    l e s m i    k e h l a i l*

'to eat'    'to be cut'    'to split, to be split'    'to exist'    'to be strong'

(d) In the syntax, what seems to be a widely distributed but functionally fairly well definable single subordinative particle *en* is treated under several separate headings, implying that more than one form (or grammatical process) is involved (not to mention that, once again,, the morphophonemics are not given adequate attention).

In the case of the role of this particle in subordinating other words to nouns, it is called a *construct suffix* (e.g., *misihn en deidei* "sewing ma-

chine"--lit., machine for sewing, page 192), while in the parallel case of subordinating other words to verbs, it is called a *conjunctive adverb* (e.g., *irail kolahn lait* "they went there in order to fish," page 341).

(3) The examples cited in the grammar look to me as though they were elicited on the basis of some checklist--they do not sound like the spontaneous material one hears in natural dialogue or tale-telling, as for instance *Pwutak silimen (me) reireio kohdo aio* "Those three boys who are tall came yesterday" (page 348). While unquestionably these examples are grammatically correct, they do not exactly illustrate the way Ponapeans use their language when they talk to each other.

In summary, it is clear that the book under review leaves much to be desired. It is equally clear that the author's task was a difficult one: it is not easy to produce a good reference grammar.

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