

William A. Foley, *The Papuan Languages of New Guinea*. Cambridge Language Surveys. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. xiv, 305. \$54.50 cloth. \$19.95 paper.

*Reviewed by Niko Besnier, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

The Cambridge Language Surveys series aims to provide general descriptions of the language families and language areas of the world. Foley's *Papuan Languages of New Guinea*, the fourth volume in the series, is an ambitious book on several counts. It is a survey of the 750 Papuan languages spoken in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya (also known as Non-Austronesian languages), which represent no less than a fifth of the world's total languages. The structure of only a handful of these languages is documented in any detail. Of many Papuan languages, we know little more than their names. What we do know about the better-documented languages of the area indicates that some aspects of the grammatical structure of Papuan languages are very complex and very diverse. Despite the difficulties involved in surveying such a large, poorly documented, diverse, and structurally complex group of languages, Foley's *The Papuan Languages of New Guinea* is detailed, well documented, and informative.

The book begins with a chapter on "Language in Its Social Context," which describes patterns of multilingualism, language loyalty, and language convergence and divergence, as well as the role of lingua francas such as Hiri Motu and Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin). In this chapter,

Foley establishes one of the central metaphors that ingeniously runs through the entire book: the tension between diversity and unity in the New Guinea linguistic situation. Drawing on the work of anthropologists like Margaret Mead, Foley states that the ethos of many New Guinea cultures is characterized by a tug-of-war between self-directedness (that is, looking after one's own interests and the interests of one's immediate kin group) and other-directedness (that is, cooperation, altruism, and openness to things foreign). The author then shows that this balance is also at play in patterns of language use: self-directedness is reflected in the extreme linguistic diversity of the region, while other-directedness is evident in patterns of structural convergence in many Papuan languages. Indeed, despite the extreme structural diversity of these 750-odd languages, it is still possible to identify common features in them all.

One of these features is the relative simplicity of their phonological systems, the theme of chapter 3. Typically, Papuan languages have small inventories of basic sounds; indeed, some of the smallest vowel inventories of any language in the world are found in the Papuan linguistic area. Similarly, the pronoun systems of many Papuan languages, described in chapter 4, are extremely restricted. Some languages conflate number and person in very unusual ways; Awa, for example, has a single pronoun to refer to both first- and second-person plural entities (we and plural you), a pattern that until recently was unknown.

In contrast, the morphological structure of verbs and nouns in Papuan languages, which is covered in chapters 4 and 5, is very complex. Verbs, in particular, have complex inflection systems that encode grammatical notions such as agreement with the subject and the direct object, tense and aspect, and deixis. Furthermore, many Papuan languages have an unusual type of construction called verb serialization, whereby actions are broken down into sub-actions, each of which is represented by a separate verb in a series (for example, fetch translates as go-hold-come-put). Foley discusses the syntax of verb serialization in chapter 6. Some languages also have switch-reference systems, in which verbs are obligatorily marked with affixes that indicate whether the subject of the verb is identical to or different from the subject of the previous verb in the discourse. For example, the verb left in the sentence *he ate and he left* is marked with one affix if the two pronouns *he* in the sentence have the same referent, and with another affix if they refer to two different individuals. Verb serialization and switch-reference are characteristics found in few language areas of the world.

The volume closes with two chapters that deal with the historical

evolution of Papuan languages and the relationship of this evolution to cultural prehistory. Papuan languages are so diverse that very few genetic links can be firmly established among them. They fall into more than sixty families that, as far as we know, are unrelated to each other.

The book's only major flaw is its unsatisfactory treatment of the sociolinguistic situation of the Papuan language area. The chapter on language in its social context examines only the most traditional issues of language choice in a multilingual setting. Although it does so very well, this narrow view of "social context" fails to provide any information on such topics as stylistic variation, literacy, oratory, and language acquisition. The reader will search in vain for references to research such as Rena Lederman's on gender differences in language use in Mendi, William McKellin's on Managalase oratory, Bambi Schieffelin's on language acquisition among the Kaluli, and Andrew Strathern's on Mount Hagen "veiled speech" (metaphorical language used in oratory). Neglecting such important aspects of language and concentrating almost exclusively on language structure is difficult to justify in a general linguistic survey.

Nevertheless, Foley's book does bring together a fascinating body of research. It is well illustrated and clearly written. The volume will not only appeal to linguists, but also to anthropologists and other fieldworkers interested in Papuan-speaking areas of Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya, who will find it very readable.