

The grammatical structure of Mor (ISO 639-3: moq) of Bomberai Peninsula, Papua, Indonesia

Mor [moq]¹ is a highly endangered non-Austronesian language spoken by some 30 people (out of an ethnic group of ca 100 individuals) on Bomberai peninsula, Papua, Indonesia. Comparisons of the Mor lexicon, barring Austronesian loanwords, reveals no significant connection to any neighbouring language, so Mor is best classified as a language isolate².

The language was previously known only from short wordlists³. Based on fieldwork in the village of Mitimber by the author a sketch of the grammatical structure of Mor will be presented.

The morphology of Mor distinguishes the three open word classes noun, verb and adjective. Mor distinguishes inalienable nouns (which take obligatory prefixed possession markers) and alienable nouns (which take optional possessive clitics). Some animate nouns can take suffixal plural marking but otherwise there is no overt number marking on nouns. Adjectives show (partial) reduplication. There is some suffixal verbal morphology and person subject and object markers precliticize to the verb. Mor is a strict SOV language which does not otherwise flag core arguments. The noun phrase has Noun Adjective and Possessor=Clitic Possesum order. There is one frequent converb form but otherwise little in the way of clause chaining. In addition to NP postclitics, VP subject proclitics and free proclitics (e.g., a tense marker) Mor exhibits sentence-level postclitics that serve to link clauses. Some spatial prepositions in Mor appear to derive from parts of the mouth (cheek, mouth cavity, palate).

References

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- Voorhoeve, C. L. (1975). Central and western trans-new guinea phylum languages. In Wurm, S. A., editor, *New Guinea Area Languages and Language*

¹Not to be confused with the Austronesian language Moor [mhz] of the islands northeast of Nabire, Papua, Indonesia (Kamholz 2014).

²Despite insufficient lexical cognacy to (any) Trans New Guinea language, Voorhoeve (1975:431) classified Mor as a Trans New Guinea language on the grounds that “there is no better alternative”. Clearly, a better alternative is to leave Mor as a language isolate.

³Wordlists were taken up by Anceaux [in Kokas/1956, Smits and Voorhoeve 1998], patrol officer de Jong [in Kokas/date unknown, Smits and Voorhoeve 1998], Roland Walker [in Tomage/ 1978, unpublished] and Mark Donohue [in Goras/2010, unpublished], none of whom visited the Mor speaking area.

Study Vol 1: Papuan Languages and the New Guinea linguistic scene, volume 38 of *Pacific Linguistics: Series C*, pages 345–460. Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.