

Possession in Irarutu and other SHWNG languages

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This paper deals with two issues. In the first place it presents a discussion of possessive constructions in Irarutu, an Austronesian language spoken in the Bomberai Peninsula of Indonesian Papua. Irarutu belongs to the South Halmahera/West New Guinea (SHWNG) subgroup (Blust 1993; Ross 1994). Some grammar notes have appeared in Voorhoeve (1989) and Matsumura (1991), an extended comparative wordlist is available in Voorhoeve (1994), but published data on Irarutu remains limited. The data presented here are mainly from unpublished work by former SIL linguist Takashi Matsumura, supplemented by my own field notes. Possession in Irarutu follows a typical East Malayo-Polynesian (EMP) pattern distinguishing alienable and inalienable possession, but some of the morphology used to code possession is unusual, including what appears to be possessive infixation.

The second issue to be addressed in the paper is to what extent the possessive system in Irarutu is a continuation of an older Austronesian system, and which features can be considered to have arisen under the influence of neighbouring Papuan languages (cf. Klamer et al. forthcoming). This question will entail a comparison of the possessive systems of various SHWNG languages (Buli, Sawai, Biak, Waropen, Mor, Ambai) and an attempt at reconstructing the morphology and syntax of possession in Proto-SHWNG.