

The Pronominal System of the Ambai Language

Ambai is a Malayo-Polynesian language spoken on Yapen Island in Cenderawasih Bay, Indonesia. Recent research which was conducted together with a native speaker has exposed some new data regarding the phonology and morphology of the language. One of the interesting features of the system is a complex pronominal system, which includes marking of 4 different person categories: 3rd, 2nd and 1st Inclusive/Exclusive as well as marking of 4 number categories: Singular, Dual, Trial and Plural. Some evidence for case marking has also been found. The pronouns appear both as an independent form and as proclitics attached to verbal stems, showing complicated patterns of morphological fusion. Nouns can be inflected as well by a set of pronominal possessive suffixes. This inflection is mandatory for inalienable nouns. The evidence points to the fact that the current pronominal forms are formed by fusion of historically independent person and number morphemes, a hypothesis which is supported by the synchronic form of the numerals.