Muyu Grammar Sketch - A lowland Ok language of New Guinea

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Muyu is an underdocumented lowland Ok language (Trans New Guinea) spoken by estimated 2.000 people in the Boven Digoel Regency of Papua, Indonesia. Its dialectal subdivision is somewhat unclear yet. While available ressources based on wordlists (see Voorhoeve 1975, Healey 1964) suggest two different varieties, North Muyu and South Muyu, speakers are aware of a continuum of 9 mutually intelligible dialects including two that have been previously considered seperate languages (Yonggom, Ninggerum).

During a first field trip in July-August 2018, I was able to make audio recordings of texts from the genres of personal biography and myths. From these texts 36 minutes were fully transcribed, translated and annotated with the help of a field assistent. Additionally, I have access to a yet unfinished dictionary Muyu-Indonesian of approximately 2.500 entries which is compiled by a very devoted member of the language community. In this paper, I will present a summary of first data on Muyu.

In several respects, Muyu exhibits typical features of TNG languages: SOV as most frequent word order, clear distinction between nouns and verbs, little or no morphology on the noun, complex verb morphology. Unlike other well studied Ok languages like Mian (Fedden 2011) and Telefol (Healey 1964), no evidence for the existence of tone has been found yet.

Muyu is a head-marking language. Grammatical relations are exclusively marked with affixes on the verb. The verb agrees with the subject at least in number, person, and in 3P also gender. There is evidence for object agreement via prefixes at least in number and gender for the 3P and also via suppletion. Muyu exhibits a well differentiated tense-aspect system. Categories that were identified yet comprise: perfective, habitualis, durative, future tense.

Pronouns do not switch forms between subject, object or possessive uses (sg. *ne, kep, ye*(M)/*yu*(F); pl. *nup, kip, yi*). These forms are clear reflections of pTNG pronouns as reconstructed by Ross (2005).

NP word order is *(possessive)-head noun-(adjective)-(determiner)*. Furthermore, Muyu makes exclusive use of postpositions although there seems to be some code mixing with Papuan Malay prepositions.

Literature

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