REVIEW

Barbour, Julie. 2012. *A Grammar of Neverver.* Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

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Approximately 40 languages have been identified as distinct indigenous languages of the island of Malakula, Vanuatu (Lynch and Crowley 2001: 4). With Julie Barbour's description of the Neverver language there is now a total of nine Malakula languages for which a reasonably substantial published description is available.[1] It is a very substantial treatment (covering 476 pages) and the work brings a most welcome contribution to knowledge of Malakula languages and of Vanuatu languages more generally.

The Neverver language description is presented in 13 chapters. It has an index and five appendices, the latter including an interesting account of correspondences between the contemporary data and earlier material collected by Bernard Deacon (Deacon 1926–1927), an assessment of the vitality of the language and four sample texts. My discussion of the content of the chapters of the book that follows will be rather selective in that my focus will be on bringing out details in the description which I find to be of particular interest in the context of phenomena that have or have not been observed in other languages of Vanuatu, or, more especially in languages of Malakula.

Chapter 1 sets the scene with an informative discussion of the situation of the Neverver language, its location and its speakers, along with a review of previous research on the language.

Chapter 2 covers the phonetic characteristics of the segment inventory and the phonological processes that are implicated in the analysis. Although Neverver lacks labio-velars, it has an interesting array of consonant phonemes. Neverver has both /l/ and /r/ and a number of prenasalized consonant segments: the usual voiced stops, a bilabial trill, a voiced alveo-palatal affricate and an alveolar trill (the latter distinct from the plain trill). Geminate phonemes are in contrast with non-geminates for the liquids, nasals and voiceless plosives. The phonemic contrasts are exemplified in (near) minimal pairs and we are shown acoustic measurements for length supporting the geminate/non-geminate contrasts. We also see interesting evidence justifying the distinctions between segment sequences versus single segment complex phonemes.

One of the phonemic contrasts that might possibly have been more robustly detailed, however, is that between prenasalized /dʒ/ and the prenasalized trill /D/. In the presentation of these segments, the (near) minimal pairs show /dʒ/ in contrast with /s/, but /D/ is shown contrasting with /d/ and /r/. A distinguishing characteristic of /dʒ/ is that it occurs as [^{n}s] in final position whereas a variant of /D/ in final position is [r]. In the data that are shown on these final position occurrences, however, the contexts are not exactly parallel: vowels preceding /dʒ/ are /i/ and the diphthong /au/ (p. 36), whereas final /D/ is shown preceded by /a/, /e/ and /o/ (p. 38). In syllable-initial position, we see one occurrence each of both [d] and [D] followed by /o/, but the remaining data shows [dʒ] followed by /a/ and /e/ and [D] by /i/ and /u/. This means that it is only in the /#__ o case that we have what counts as the most plausible evidence for the claimed contrast between /dʒ/ and /D/. It would have been useful to see explicit comparison of these two segments if the relevant forms for such comparison are attested in the language.

Also of interest are a number of further phonological processes. Neverver has instances of metathesis and it has both [i] epenthesis (with fast speech realizations as [ə] in a set of restricted environments) and consonant excrescence. There is final devoicing and final /p/ and /k/ are realized as their fricative counterparts. Before /u/, /p/ is realized as a voiceless bilabial trill. The demonstrations of phonotactic effects and other phonological processes are clearly set out in autosegmental CV tier diagrams.

There are cases in the analysis of phonological data in languages where there is indeterminacy around what is the best choice for the representation of the underlying segment. For Neverver, a particular case of this type concerns the representation of the Irrealis prefix which surfaces in different contexts as [m] or as [^{m}b]. The question is whether this prefix is best analyzed as /m/ with

consonant excrescence in certain environments, or as /ᵐb/ with weakening to [m] in other environments. The solution that is argued for takes the consonant excrescence approach, with the rule statement (p. 64):

(1) m: [ᵐb] / __ r, l, j, V

In support of this analysis is the realization of epenthetic plosives, including [d] and [g] in contexts where a morpheme-final nasal is followed by a vowel. Running somewhat against this analysis is the different behaviour of the stative prefix /m/ which induces consonant excrescence before the approximant and variably before the liquids, but not before vowels (p. 64). Further discussion of the Irrealis prefix is given in section 6.1 where the variant realizations of this prefix are set out in detail. Here we see the data on alternations in contexts with following plosives in which the Irrealis prefix is realized simply as [m] or, where intervening vowel epenthesis induces the realization, as [ᵐb]. An obvious alternative treatment of the data (and one which I find more plausible) would take the Irrealis prefix to be /ᵐb/ with weakening to [m] in the absence of vowel epenthesis when the following consonant is a plosive. Lynch (2007) has proposed that comparative Malakula data points to the Irrealis markers as probably being reconstructable as $*b^{(w)}a$. Whether Neverver presents as an instance of historical weakening to /m/ for its Irrealis prefix, or whether this prefix is still a plosive in the grammars of its speakers is an interesting question in the consideration of the processes involved in the trade-off between the interacting roles of epenthesis and weakening/strengthening processes.

Chapters 3–5 present the description of nouns and pronouns and other components of noun phrases. The Neverver pronoun system maintains the Proto-Oceanic inclusive/exclusive contrast but, whilst the subject-agreement marking on the verb maintains the three-way singular/dual/plural distinction, the pronoun paradigm encodes only the singular/non-singular contrast. Nouns are divided into three classes: common nouns, personal nouns and local nouns (p. 76). Unlike in some other Malakula languages (Pearce 2007; Lynch 2007), the incorporation of the Proto-Oceanic article **na* has applied to common nouns in Neverver across-the-board, giving the result that, for the most part, aside from borrowings, such nouns in Neverver have *nV* onsets.

Very unusual for a Vanuatu language are the parameters that define the distinctions in form in the Neverver possession marking system. Nouns with synchronic final *n* are immediately followed by the possessor phrase. The form of the linker between other nouns and a possessor phrase is a function of whether the possessor is human or not. Human possessor phrases are preceded

by the genitive linker *titi* and, in possessor phrases with pronoun heads, the pronouns have a *t-* prefix (with *titi* as the third person singular form). Nonhuman possessor phrases are preceded by *an*, which is homophonous with the relative clause complementizer. Whilst the phonologically conditioned distribution of forms of possession cuts across the human/nonhuman divide, the alienable/inalienable distinction is manifested in that it is most often the case that nouns with final *n* can be viewed as nouns which inherently are inalienable (body parts, etc.). The final *n* appears to be a reflex of an earlier third person singular possessive suffix. Such singular suffixes are otherwise now relics (understood but not produced by younger speakers): as *-g* '1SG', *-m* '2SG' and *-n* '3SG' (p. 134). The synchronic outcomes of the historical third person singular *-n* incorporation now result in mismatches in forms of the type: *nevran na* 'hand.3SG 1SG' = 'my hand' (p. 132).

Adjective members of a restricted set immediately follow the noun, but other modifier expressions (including numerals) occur in relative clauses or reduced relative clauses. Full relative clauses with definite reference are introduced by the complementizer *an* and with *ang~a* 'anaphoric' at their right edge (the right edge marker can be omitted when the referent is a nonsubject). Only the numerals ≤ 9 bear the third person singular verbal agreement prefix, whether occurring in isolation or as parts of complex numbers (e.g. *nangavul* ***i-****ru nidruman* ***i-****skham* 'ten 3SG-two plus 3SG-one' = '21'). The detailing of noun phrase-internal ordering shows that relative clauses occur finally followed only by the delimiter *ang/a* and that possessives take up a position following lexical modifiers and intensifiers and before quantifiers, demonstratives and the plural marker in that order. Possessor arguments can also be preposed to come before the head noun.

Chapters 6–8 describe the verb morphology and verb complexes showing how the different forms express a range of agreement and tense/aspect and mood functions.

As has already mentioned, verbs standardly encode the inclusive/exclusive distinction and the three-way number distinction singular/dual/plural in their subject marking. There is a further prefix encoding impersonal subjects which has distinct forms in the Realis and the Irrealis. There are cases of stem-initial mutated forms, one category being phonologically conditioned and one category exhibiting a transitive/intransitive alternation. Verbs can bear an applicative suffix, but monotransitive verbs are otherwise unsuffixed. Whilst Neverver lacks a syntactic passive construction, it has a lexical passive verb *bal* 'be hit' (p. 186).

Chapter 7 presents the description and classification of various markers encoding tense, mood and aspect on and around the verb. The discussion in this chapter is especially well supported with the inclusion of input from a range of sources treating the understanding of these kinds of functions from the cross-linguistic perspective. Whilst Realis/Irrealis mood is encoded in the verb prefixes, aspectual and tense denoting functions are manifested as verb suffixes or as postverbal particles. Overall, across these two categories, the language has a total of eleven distinct such markers. The exposition covers some rather fine-grained distinctions for these functions and is very well carried through.

Chapter 8 is devoted to reduplication in verb forms from both formal (phonological) and functional perspectives. The chapter provides a well detailed treatment of the topic.

Chapter 9 lays out the basic patterns of clause structure, including coverage of negation, interrogatives, reflexives and reciprocals, impersonal constructions, comparatives, clause modifiers and non-verbal propositions. The Neverver clause has a basic SVO ordering. Subjects are not required to be overt and objects can also be omitted. There are two ditransitive constructions in which the Recipient argument precedes the Theme argument: (i) where the verb occurs as a compound *-lav-lik* 'get-pass'; and (ii) where the verb takes the applicative suffix *-ikh*. Interrogative constituents may occur in-situ or they may be preposed. The different categories of propositions which can be expressed in clauses lacking a predicate marked by subject-agreement are all matched by counterpart constructions employing a lexical verb.

Chapters 10 and 11 discuss a range of constructions that can be characterized as varieties of Serial Verb constructions. The division in the presentation between constructions with Complex Nuclei (Chapter 10) versus those with Complex Cores (Chapter 11) follows the classification set out in Foley and Olsen (1985). In essence, the Complex Nuclei constructions have two contiguous predicates, whereas in constructions with Complex Cores the two predicates are not required to be contiguous and the second predicate bears a subject-agreement prefix. In both cases, the constructions are considered to be mono-clausal on a number of tests (there is, for instance, no possible distinction in mood marking on the two predicates). The Complex Core constructions can be further subdivided in accordance with the available subject-agreement marking on the V2 of the construction: either (default) third person marking, obligatory coreferentiality between the V1 and V2 subject, or availability of non-coreferential subject-agreement marking on V1 and

V2. The different construction types are carefully detailed and the discussion provides an interesting contribution of data and analysis for the study of complex predicate constructions more generally.

In Chapter 12, complement clause constructions are classified in terms of the semantics of the higher predicates. The complement clauses may or not be preceded by one of two available complementizers (*il* or *at*), with certain predicates showing preferences for one over the other and with some possible meaning distinctions in the presence/absence of a complementizer in one or two cases. An interesting aspect of the discussion in this chapter concerns the polarity effects where a negated higher predicate imposes Irrealis marking on the verb of its complement clause.

Further kinds of complex sentences including more than one clause are described in Chapter 13: adverbial clauses and constructions with conjoined clauses. Certain intonation patterns are relevant for some distinctions in meaning and/or discourse function. Barbour points out (p, 411) that the basic conjunctive coordinator of the form *ga* has phonological identity with segments of *gang* 'be like so', and with *baga* 'then', and occurs also in the reduplicated form *gaga* 'on and on until'. The adversative linker *be* is a likely borrowing from Bislama. To this category I would also add the linker *we* which is shown as being used before a repeated verb in an augmentative/ intensifying function (pp. 414–415), comparable to one of the uses of Bislama *we* as documented in Crowley (2003).

For a grammar of a language, quite a bit of space in the book is taken up with input from a variety of sources spelling out the bases for the terms and classifications that are adopted. One has a bit the impression of gleanings from a range of offerings in the typological literature. This type of input, however, as well as providing the underpinnings of the descriptive apparatus, has the useful function of locating the phenomena that is documented for Neverver in terms of its cross-linguistic comparability. At a number of points in the description, we are also given insights into how Neverver stacks up against other Vanuatu/Malakula languages with respect to comparable morphology or syntax. To a lesser extent, particular aspects of Neverver morphology are represented with respect to hypothesized Proto-Oceanic sources. A very commendable feature of the book is the extensive input about intonation patterns which are relevant to defining and distinguishing phrases of various types. The book scores highly on readability. The explanations about the classifications and the analyses of data are presented with great clarity.

The aim of the series in which the book appears, the Mouton Grammar

Library, is stated on the back cover as that of '. . . build[ing] an extensive collection of high quality descriptions of languages around the world'. There is no doubt at all that Barbour's description of Neverver is well consonant with the definition of being a high quality description. It is a substantial and most welcome addition to the documentation of languages of Vanuatu and it makes an especially informative contribution in filling one of the gaps in our knowledge of the languages of Malakula.

Notes

1 Lynch and Crowley (2001: 17-19) cite just two Malakula languages (Port Sandwich and V'ënen Taut) as having been reasonably well described. The following six languages can now also be included in this category: Naman (Crowley 2006a), Avava (Crowley 2006b), Neve'ei (Musgrave 2007), Tirax (Brotchie 2009), Navahaq (Dimock 2009) and Unua (Pearce 2015). Available now also are descriptions of a lesser substance of Tape (Crowley 2006c) and of Nese (Crowley 2007d) and a sketch grammar of Ninde (Dimock et al 2014).

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