

PALAUAN: A SKETCH OF THE GRAMMAR

This chapter constitutes a short introduction to Palauan grammar, including an overview of the complex morphosyntax of the language. Some grasp of these details is necessary to following later discussions that involve noun and verb morphology. The chapter also covers more general aspects of syntactic analysis as they are reflected in Palauan, including underlying constituent order and issues concerning null arguments.

0. PALAUAN; EARLIER GRAMMARS

Palauan is spoken in the Republic of Palau, a cluster of 200 beautiful islands in the Western Carolines of the Pacific. Palau is located about 800 miles southwest of Guam, 600 miles east of the Philippines, 1890 miles south of Tokyo, and 4500 miles west-southwest of Honolulu.

Palauan is a member of the Western Austronesian language family (Bender 1971). Although Palau is geographically within Micronesia, Palauan is not one of the nuclear Micronesian languages (Dempwolff 1934–38; Jackson 1984). The nuclear Micronesian languages include those of Truk, Ponape, Kosrae, the Marshalls, and Kiribati, while the nonnuclear (or western) Micronesian languages, including Palauan and Chamorro, are close to the languages of Indonesia and the Philippines.¹ Yapese is grouped with Palauan and Chamorro as one of the nonnuclear languages, though the status of Yapese within Austronesian is “problematic” (Bender 1984; see also Voegelin and Voegelin 1964, p. 102). Palauan has no close relatives within the Western Austronesian family, however, and is best regarded as an isolate within this family.

Palauan has about 17,000 speakers, of whom about 80% live in the Republic of Palau.² There is very little dialectal variation from Kayangel atoll in the north to Angaur in the south. The languages spoken in the islands of Sonsorol and Tobi, south of Angaur, are nuclear Micronesian and therefore not closely related to Palauan.

The earliest grammar of Palauan appears to have been Bishop Walleser's (1911) *Grammatik der Palausprache*, written during the German administration of Palau; Walleser was evidently a member of the original Roman Catholic mission there. My only acquaintance with his work is the references made to it in Capell (1949) and McManus (1977). Both Capell and McManus acknowledge some reliance on Walleser, and note that he also produced a dictionary of Palauan.

Micronesia came under the jurisdiction of the United States at the end of World War II, as one of the districts of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) of the UN. Several different projects were then organized to expand knowledge of the area. One such project, the Co-ordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA), produced Capell's *Grammar of the Language of Palau* (1949), among other works. Capell's grammar describes the morphology and syntax of Palauan in some detail and quite insightfully,³ with a wealth of examples.

Patzold (1968) is based primarily on Walleser (1911) and Capell (1949), and contains arguments for placing Palauan within the Indonesian subgroup of Austronesian. It is reviewed in Dyen (1971).

Josephs' *Palauan Reference Grammar* (1975) and McManus' *Palauan-English Dictionary* (1977) are both products of the TTPI-sponsored projects at the University of Hawaii of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Josephs deals systematically with all aspects of the language, including phonology, morphology, and syntax. It is the most complete work to date, and is written more from a linguist's than a grammarian's point of view. In covering such a breadth of topics, however, the book suffers from lack of depth, especially where it deals with syntactic phenomena. McManus' dictionary is the companion volume to Josephs'. It is based on extensive word lists prepared by Fr. Edwin McManus, a Jesuit missionary who lived and worked in Palau from 1948 until his death in 1969. The word lists were revised and expanded into the dictionary by Josephs, assisted by Masa-aki Emesiochel.

Flora (1969) and Carlson (1968) are the basic sources on the taxonomic phonemic analysis of Palauan. Wilson (1972) and Flora (1974) are valuable analyses of the phonology and morphology of the Palauan verb, written from within the generative phonology framework of *SPE* (Chomsky and Halle 1968). Josephs relies substantially on Wilson's work in his treatment of the morphology.

1. OVERVIEW

This grammatical sketch of Palauan draws on the sources described above as well as my field notes, 1981 to 1985. There are two reasons for including this extensive sketch, both important, I think. One is its descriptive interest, independent of the theoretical analyses that may be based upon it: the data, at a purely objective level, are fascinating. As a description of the language the sketch should be useful to Palauans who wish to study their own language, as well as to scholars in the field of Austronesian studies and to general linguists seeking to extend the coverage of linguistic theory to a wider variety of languages and language types. The second reason the sketch is included is its indispensability