Muyu is an underdocumented lowland Ok language of West New Guinea spoken by perhaps 2,000 people in the Boven Digoel regency of Papua, Indonesia. Available resources comprise several wordlists in VOORHOEVE ET AL. (1975) and HEALEY (1964), ethnographic material by SCHOORL (1993) and a short grammar sketch by DRABBE (1950). In this talk, I will present recent findings from ongoing fieldwork on Muyu as part of my PhD project. So far, 9 hours of various genres have been recorded on video during 6 months in the field.

Muyu is a clause chaining language. Verbs fall in one of three types based on finiteness: finite verbs (TAM marking + argument indexes), semi-finite verbs (switch reference marker + argument indexes), and non-finite verbs (bare roots + default -e). Only finite verbs occur in finite clauses. TAM features and subjects are spread left to all preceding verbs in the clause chain. Since non-finite and semi-finite verbs rely on subject continuity, finite verbs tend to signalise subject discontinuity in subsequent discourse.

Multiple non-finite verbs often co-occur in the same clause as can be seen in (2). Therefore, they can be interpreted as serial verb constructions (SVCs) based on the criterion of monoclusality (HASPELMATH (2016), AIKHENVALD (2018)). However, at the present state of research it is not clear if we are dealing with a homogeneous phenomenon. Chances are high that serial verbs and medial (non-finite) verbs in clause chains are homophonous and can be confounded easily. Diagnostics have to find independent tests to determine monoclusality (e.g. intonation, scope of adverbials/negation, etc.). In this talk, I won’t give a definitive answer to these questions. Rather some data is presented to discuss further possibilities for my ongoing fieldwork.

References


