

1. Introduction

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Awa is spoken by an estimated twelve hundred to fifteen hundred speakers located both north and south of the Lamari River in the southeastern corner of the Eastern Highlands District. It belongs to the Kainantu group of languages which includes Tairora, Gadsup, Auyana, and Awa as the major representatives. These in turn form the Eastern Family of the East New Guinea Highland Stock.

The following descriptions of Awa are written in a taxonomic framework. Units, both phonological and grammatical, are identified, their variations indicated, and their relationships to each other described. The phonological description concerns segmental and prosodic features, but does not deal with units larger than the syllable. The grammatical descriptions identify units on the morpheme, word, phrase, clause, and sentence levels.

The Awa sound system is fairly easy for the Westerner to duplicate. Syllables are simple, the major patterns being a single vowel nucleus (V) with preceding and/or following single consonants (C). Thus we have the following: CV, CVC, V, and VC. There are twelve consonants and seven vowels. The consonants are about the same as those found in other languages of the area. A unique feature in Awa is the seven vowel system in a group of languages that have six. Where the other related languages have two front (*i, e*), two central (*a, aa*) and two back (*u, o*), Awa has three front, one central, and three back. The low front and the low back vowels make Awa sound quite different from the other languages. We have symbolized these two vowels by the digraphs *eh* and *ah* respectively.

Tone in New Guinea languages has now been attested in many cases. Awa has a four-tone system—high, falling, rising, and low. Though these tones

are easily contrasted in lexical environments, the functional load is not seemingly as high as for the more commonly known tone languages. The range of phonetic variation within each tone is wide, varying according to preceding tones. High tones step gradually up in a sequence, and low tones step gradually down. Low tone has the highest frequency of occurrence, while the falling and rising tones together account for less than 10 percent of the total distribution. Tone perturbation obscures the basic lexical tone when items occur in phrases or sentences. The relations between tones and their relation to bases and affixes are described in Chapter III.

Most Awa sentences are composed of a verb nucleus with its various closely related elements, and substantives with their satellites. The satellites of both verbs and nouns are often enclitics. That is, the satellite elements are phonologically dependent on the nucleus preceding, but have greater freedom of occurrence than do affixes.

Many of the satellite elements occur with both nouns and verbs. For the most part, those elements that mark internal or listlike relations (modify in some way the base) are limited to a specific class, while those that mark linear or syntactic relations are not so limited. Though noun bases may occur with more than thirty different suffixes or enclitics, the noun base may optionally occur alone and often does. The satellite elements thus optionally make explicit relations that can be indicated, at least in many cases, by other syntactic devices such as order, juxtaposition, or intonation.

The Awa sentence is typical of New Guinea Highland languages in that very frequently the sentence is composed of more than one clause. In such sentences verbal affixes indicate the relation between clauses by markers in the dependent clause to anticipate the subject to follow in an independent clause, and also in certain instances to relate a contrary to fact clause or an obligation to their respective clause partners.

Besides the interclause relation markers, verbs in Awa contain morphemes, or fusions of morphemes to mark subject-tense (4 tenses), aspect (7), and mode (6), and may also with some stems indicate the direct and indirect objects. Awa stands in this instance between Tairora on the one hand whose verbs mark these categories by fusions of morphemes, and Gadsup on the other, whose verbs contain affixes that can be separated out as individual units. Awa in some instances uses fusions, and in others uses individual morphemes. At any rate, the system is complicated by morphophonemic rules, multiplicity of morphemes in a close-knit phrase or sequence, and tonal perturbation. These complications are described in the papers to follow.

A number of the papers published here have been published in scattered journals elsewhere, as indicated in the footnotes. The editor has worked closely with the Lovings on the Awa papers, co-authoring a number of them. Some of the papers published elsewhere have different orthographies.

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These, whenever possible without changing the information, have been altered for the sake of consistency both between papers on Awa and with the papers on other languages. Texts were collected by the editor with assistance from R. Loving on translation.

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