

The Meyah grammatical system is not highly complex, but it does have a greater number of verbal inflections than its East Bird's Head neighbors. Meyah is a SVO language with person-number agreement on possessed nouns and verbs. Alienable nouns are generally marked by the fossilized alienable noun class marker *m-* as in: *mek* 'pig', *meg* 'tree', *mod* 'house'. Adjectives and inalienable noun stems can function as predicates in that they can take the same person-number, aspect, and mode inflections that verb stems take and can be negated by sentence final negative *guru* 'not': *di-en-eteb* [*dineteb*] *guru* '1SG-DUR-large not' (I am not big). Adjectival stems function attributively following noun heads. However, verbs do not function attributively.

Meyah does have a rather complex morphophonemic system involving coalescence between prefix vowels and stem vowels. The prefixes indicating person-number, aspect, mode, and instrument are all (CV) structures. Meyah verb, adjective, and inalienable nouns stems have an

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<sup>1</sup>The data in this text was collected under the auspices of a cooperative agreement between SIL International and the Department of Social Affairs, Republic of Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup>Government organized population centers.

<sup>3</sup>Mansibaber is a derogatory name used by Biak/Numfor language speakers.

initial vowel limited to /e, a, o/. When a person-number prefix is attached to one of these stems, its final vowel coalesces with a front or back vowel [-Low] of the stem or intervening prefix. The resulting vowel then becomes [+High Front] or [+High Back] as in (1-2).

- (1) *bi-et* [bit]    *bi-en-et* [binet]    *bi-e-n-t* [bint]    *bi-em-et* [bimet]  
 2SG-eat    2SG-DUR-eat    2SG-PERF-eat    2SG-MOD-eat  
 You eat.    You are eating.    You have eaten.    You might eat.
- (2) *di-ofij* [dufij]    *di-en-ofij* [dunofij]    *di-o-m-fij* [dumfij]    *di-em-ofij* [dumofij]  
 1SG-help    1SG-DUR-help    1SG-PERF-help    1SG-MOD-help  
 I help.    I am helping.    I have helped.    I might help.

The vowel -a is dominant and does not coalesce. Therefore, if the stem vowel is -a, the prefix vowel is elided, and if the prefix vowel is a-, then the stem vowel is elided as in (3).

- (3) *Bi-agot* [bagot]    *Na-ofij* [nafij]  
 2SG-speak    1DU.INC-help  
 You speak.    We two help.

The time of an event is indicated through the use of temporal adverbs that usually occur initially in the sentence as in (4), but can occur at the end. Verbal inflections include durative *en*, perfective aspect infix -N- (nasal), inceptive aspect *ej-*, modal *em-*, and instrument *er-* as illustrated in (4-6).

- (4) *Monog*    *di-em-eja*    *jah*    *Manokwari*  
 tomorrow    1SG-MOD-go    to    Manokwari  
 Tomorrow I might go to Manokwari.
- (5) *Bua*    *bi-n-t*    *mat*    *insa*    *ke-uma*  
 you    2SG-PERF-eat    food    ANA    NOM-that  
 S/he had eaten that food.
- (6) *Era*    *meiteb*    *er-of*    *mega*  
 use    machete    INST-fell    tree  
 S/he uses a machete to fell the tree.

Meyah uses a three term system for demonstrative and spatial deixis. The deictic stems are prefixed by nominalizer *ke-* or adverbializer *si-* as in (7).

- (7) *ke-if* [kef]    'this'    *si-if* [sif]    'here'  
*ke-uma* [koma]    'that'    *si-uma* [suma]    'there'  
*ke-unj* [konj]    'that yonder'    *si-unj* [sunj]    'there yonder'

The uninflected stems in (7) function as clitics attaching to nouns or prepositions such as:

- (8) a. *orka meic-if*    *eker*    *gij mod-uma*  
 bring ladle-this    sit    in house-that  
 S/he brings this ladle.    S/he sits in that house.
- b. *ojuj-if*    *eja*    *jah-uma*  
 descend-here    go    to-there

S/he descends here.      S/he goes there.

Meyah locative deictic constructions include demonstrative and locative adverb stems that denote elevational orientation to the deictic center such as:

- (9)    *ke-imba*    this below    *si-imba*    there below  
      *ke-inda*    this above    *si-inda*    there above

Movement toward or away from the deictic center is indicated by *en* 'come' and *eja* 'go', as in (10). When these stems function adverbially they remain unmarked as 3SG.

- (10)    *Di-ecira*        *jah*    *mei*    *okoka*    *ke-imba*        *eja*  
      1SG-travel    to    river    okoka    NOM-below    go

I travel going (away) to Okoka river village down below.

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