

Austronesian Inheritances, Papuan Substrates, Areal Features and Internal Developments in Roon

This paper presents a preliminary grammatical sketch of Roon, a hitherto undescribed Austronesian language of the South-Halmahera-West-New-Guinea subgroup, closely related to Biak, spoken by some 1100 people on the eponymous island, just off the south coast of the Cenderawasih bay in West Papua.

Language-specific features of Roon may be categorized with respect to their historical provenance in accordance with the following four-part diachronic classificatory schema:

1. *Ancient Austronesian Inheritances*
Features whose origins can be traced back to an earlier stage of Austronesian prior to the arrival of Austronesian languages in Melanesia (eg. proto-Malayo-Polynesian or proto-Austronesian).
2. *Papuan Substrate Features*
Features that are absent from earlier Austronesian and that instead can be attributed to contact between a language ancestral to Roon and other non-Austronesian languages in the East Indonesia and New Guinea region.
3. *Areal Features*
Features characteristic of some geographical region including the island of Roon (eg. New Guinea, the north coast of New Guinea, East Indonesia and the western part of New Guinea) and containing both Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages.
4. *Recent Internal Developments*
Features that occur only in Roon and possibly other closely related Austronesian languages.

It should be noted, however, that the category of areal features is not a "real-world" category but rather an epistemological one, reflecting our current difficulties in disentangling a complex history involving multiple contacts and inheritances of the feature in question: ultimately, however, every areal feature will have originated either in an Austronesian language, subsequently spreading to Papuan ones, or else in a Papuan language, subsequently spreading to Austronesian ones. Indeed, some areal features, eg. SVO and GN word orders, and the presence of an alienable/inalienable distinction in possessive constructions, have already been discussed extensively, with some scholars supporting an Austronesian origin and others a Papuan provenance.

This paper examines examples of features in Roon belonging to each of the above four diachronic categories. Among the ancient Austronesian inheritances are the lions share of the lexicon, plus additional grammatical features such as the presence of an inclusive/exclusive distinction in first-person pronouns. Some of the Papuan substrate features include clause-final negatives, clause-final copulas in predicate nominal constructions, and a handful of postpositions. Some of the areal features are the system of subject-verb agreement prefixes found across a large swathe of East Indonesia and West New Guinea, and the verbalizing prefix *be-* characteristic of the Cenderawasih bay and east Birds Head region. Finally, some of the recent internal developments in Roon include the complex internal structure of the copula, shared with Biak, and the complete formal parallelism between subject-verb and noun-article agreement paradigms, which, to the best of my knowledge, is a feature unique to Roon.