Torricelli Languages

M Donohue, National University of Singapore, Singapore

The approximately 50 languages of the Torricelli are spoken in north Papua New Guinea. The family extends from the eastern Bewani mountains in Sandaun Province; through the Torricelli ranges to Maprik, where Ndu speaking villages reach through to the north coast; and continuing east of Wewak in Sepik Province in the Marienberg ranges and ground south of the Murik lakes, with a final outpost at Bogia in Madang province. The languages are remarkable for non-Austronesian languages in New Guinea for having a basic SVO word order, whereas the norm is SOV. They have been grouped into seven subgroups, whose internal constituency appears to be valid, although the seven-way division still awaits proof. The membership of the family as a whole appears to be accurate.

There are typically no phonetically unusual segments in Torricelli languages, and, although stress is frequently contrastive, reports of tonal differences are rare. The languages near Nuku share with the adjacent Ndu languages the presence of creaky or glottalized vowels, ranging from just one (/a/) to contrasts present on the whole vowel inventory. The vowel inventories tend to be large, with seven or eight vowels being not uncommon in the western languages (a typical inventory is /i e ɛ a ɔ o u ʉ/) and five or six vowels being more common in the east. The loss of velar segments in some western languages has led to the unusual case of languages without velar contrasts at all. Voicing contrasts are usually associated with prenasalization.

There is significant diversity within the family, and the Torricelli languages are also significantly different from most other languages of New Guinea. Although they all show SVO order, typically with prefixal agreement for the subject and suffixal agreement for the object and lacking case marking on (core) nominals – all features that are unusual in New Guinea – other details of their morphological and syntactic structure show considerable diversity. In the eastern languages, such as Monumbo and Arapesh (Bukiyip, also known as Muhiang), multiple class systems with extensive concord are found, whereas in the west only remnant traces of noun classification can be found in the synchronically irregular plural endings of One and Olo.

For example, in Bukiyip 'stone' is *utom* (SING) *utabal* (PL), showing the *-m* and *-bal* suffixes typical of class 5 nouns (compare this with a class 2 noun, such as 'village' *wa-bél* SING, *wa-lúb* PL). Adjectives show

similar suffixes, agreeing in class and number with their noun, and verbs have cognate prefixes:

> yopi-**mi** uto-**m m**-a-pwe agnú
> '(the) good stone is there'

> yopi-**bili** wa-**bél bl**-a-pwe agnú
> '(the) good village is there'

In the western Torricelli language One, 'stone' is *toma* (SING) *tomu* (PL), showing an *-a* versus *-u* pattern, just as in 'flower' *sula* (SING), *sulu* (PL), indicating that, although it is a minority pattern, the alternations in 'stone' are regular. The word for 'village' *wapli* can be singular or plural, with the common *-li* plural suffix, but *wap* is only singular (this form is commonly found in compounds, such as *wap oi* 'village grounds, area'). Concord on other words is not as strong, however:

> upo toma w-ae nu
> 'the good stone is there'

This sentence shows no agreement on *upo* 'good,' and only the general second/third-person singular *w-* on the verb 'sit, be at.' The same forms as are found in:

> upo wapli w-ae nu
> 'the good village is there'

A few adjectives do show alternations:

> plola toma w-ae nu
> 'the short stone is there'

> plolu tomu n-ai n-e nu
> 'the short stones are there'

with variation for number (the verb 'sit' has irregular singular and plural forms). Different noun classes, however, do not show different agreement patterns. Using the same inflecting adjective, *plola*, with a different noun shows the same inflectional pattern:

> plola wap w-ae nu
> 'the short village is there'

> plolu wapli n-ai n-e nu
> 'the short villages are there'

There are also no differences in verbal morphology. Another striking aspect of the NP in One involves the lack of a fixed word order: Gen N as well as N Gen, Dem N as well as N Dem, and Adj N as well as N Adj are found, with only relative clauses being restricted to postnominal position.

Like most languages of New Guinea, there is no evidence of a voice system operating in any of the Torricelli languages, but applicatives are almost universal in the Torricelli languages, being found in at least fossilized form even on the more isolating

members of the family. In some languages the applicative and the verb 'give' show close similarities (One: -*ne* APPL and *an(e)* 'give'), whereas in other languages the two morphemes bear no obvious resemblance to each other (Olo: -*f(i)* APPL, *wa* 'give'; Arapesh -*'ma* APPL, *se'* 'give'). There does not seem to be a single historical source for the various applicatives attested in different branches of the family. An applicative is often required lexically by low-transitive verbs. One has *y-upa-ne* 'follow,' with a lexicalized applicative, for instance.

Serial verbs are a regular feature of Torricelli languages, although clause chaining is not. One, the westernmost Torricelli language has an unusual syntactic parameter setting whereby word order within the NP is free but the position of NPs and PPs within the clause is rigidly fixed, implying that there is configurationality at the clause level but not at the phrase level.

Over the years, there have been various suggestions concerning the history of the Torricelli languages. Authors have suggested a relationship with the Asli languages of Malaysia and with the East Bird's Head languages of western New Guinea. None of these claims has yet stood up to any serious investigation. The SVO order of the Torricelli languages, unusual in New Guinea, has been attributed to Austronesian contact (as has also been proposed for the similarly SVO languages of the Bird's Head), but it could just as easily be innate. The Torricelli languages are, indeed, not highlands languages, and there is no reason to suppose that SVO is not the original Torricelli order.

See also: Papua New Guinea: Language Situation; Papuan Languages.

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