MAYBRAT

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Maybrat is a Papuan language which is spoken in the central area of the Bird’s Head. The total number of speakers is approximately 22,000 (Brown 1991:1). Maybrat has originally been classified as a family-level isolate of the West Papuan Phylum (Voorhoeve 1987a:717), but subsequent research has indicated that this classification may well be untenable (Reesink 1996). The name Maybrat is morphologically a compound noun, consisting of two members. The first is may, a noun meaning ‘sound’. The second part, brat, seems to refer to the type of sound, in other words, the particular language variety. However, in isolation the form brat is unattested. The people who speak Maybrat refer to themselves as rae ro Maybrat, lit. ‘man REL sound brat’. Maybrat is spoken in six dialects, namely Maybapeh, Mayasmaun, Karon, Maymare, Maymaru and Mayte. Speakers of these dialects all refer to themselves as rae ro Maybrat.

Previous work on Maybrat includes work by the anthropologists J.-E. Elmberg and H. Schoorl, and by the linguist B. Brown. Both Elmberg and Brown worked in the Ayamaru area, while Schoorl worked in the Ayat area. A complete grammar in the form of a PhD thesis was completed in 1999 by the present author. Apart from a grammar and texts, this work also gives the background information and references on previous research on the Maybrat.

Maybrat has five vocalic phonemes, i, e, a, o, u. In word-final position [j] and [w] occur as allophones of t and u respectively. There are eleven consonantal phonemes: /p, t, k, m, n, l, s, s, r, w, y/. Sequences of consonants are invariably broken up by an epenthetic [a]. Monomorphemic words mostly consist of one or two syllable. Stress usually falls on the first syllable of a word, unless this syllable contains [a].

Verbs and inalienably possessed nouns (i.e. kinship terms, body parts and spatial nouns) receive an obligatory person prefix, which is coreferent with the subject of the clause or with the possessor of the noun. The phonological realisation of this prefix is determined by the form of the verb or noun: trisyllabic forms in which the first and the second syllable are C-initial receive a covert person prefix Ø. All other forms receive an overt person prefix according to the following paradigm: t- ‘1SG’; p- ‘1PL’; n- ‘2SG and 2PL’; y- ‘3M’; m- ‘3U’. The unmarked prefix indicates third person singular feminine and third person plural. Gender is only distinguished on 3SG.

Demonstratives are morphologically complex: a demonstrative base -f- ‘very near’; -t- ‘near’ and -n- ‘far’ indicates distance from the point of view of the speaker, and prefixes mark specificity, attributive or adverbial use and, in some cases, the nature of what is described such as ‘area’ or ‘side’. Suffixes may indicate gender. Location markers and question words are partially derived from these demonstrative morphemes.

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Maybrat has four (and in some dialects five) unique terms for numbers. The rest is based on body-parts, which is a typically Papuan feature (Laycock (1975) and de Vries (1992; 1993)).

Word order is fairly rigidly SVO, and in the NP the adjective, numeral and demonstrative follow the head noun, in this order. In possessive constructions in which the possessed is an inalienable noun the order is possessor-possessed, whereas in the case of an alienable noun the word order is possessed-possessor, where the possessor is marked by ro, as illustrated in (1).

(1) Tfo ro-Yan y-ati
    machete POS-Yan 3SM-father

Yan's father's knife.

The restrictive relative clause, which follows the head, is also marked by ro, as in (2).

(2) Eok ro m-hu amah m-aim po-it
    two REL 3U-stay house 3U-cook NOM-eat.PL

The two who stay home cook food.

Negation occurs by placing the negator fe in clause-final position. In ‘yes/no' questions, the interrogative marker a is placed in sentence-final position. Content questions are formed with question words, which take the position of the constituent being questioned.

Syntactically, one of the most striking features of Maybrat are sequences of verbs, which can be classified into a number of different types of sequence. A problematic category are sequences which include verbs of position, motion, and which have shared arguments. These resemble coordinating constructions, but at the same time also seem similar to so-called 'serial verb constructions'. An example is given as (3), see further Dol (1999).

(3) Aof ro y-fat O m-tie m-ai tapam m-anes oh
    sago REL 3M-fell (it) 3U-break 3U-hit ground 3U-old already

The sago tree that he felled and it broke and hit the ground, was already old.

The story below was written by Didimus Bame, a fifteen year-old boy who often helped to write out recorded Maybrat stories told by other people. At some point, Didimus said that he knew many Maybrat stories which his father had told him, and asked me if he could simply write out a few stories instead of recording them first. Eventually, other people also occasionally brought in written stories.

**Po mna Tehaya**

The story of Tehaya, written by Didimus Bame in Ayawasi, 13 November 1994

(1) Po mna Tehaya
    thing fairy.tale Tehaya

The story of Tehaya.

(2) Pi ait y-sia y-fain y-sia y-are s-au ro ano
    man he 3M-with 3M-wife 3M-with 3M-child one-3U POS² female

² It is unclear whether the marker ro in this context is a possessive marker or a relative clause marker. The same applies to ro in ku ro sme ‘boy’ in line 63. For a discussion see Dol (1999:103).
ana m-ana tuf m-hu ora r-ana s-au  
3PL 3U-head three 3U-stay garden POS-3PL one-3U

A man and his wife and their one daughter, the three lived together in their garden.

(3) Ana m-hu ora r-ana re-t-o nene  
3PL 3U-stay garden POS-3PL location.SPEC-near-U near
aya m-api s-au  
water 3U-big one-3U

They stayed in their garden there near a big river.

(4) Ana m-hu m-kah ora r-ana re-t-o  
3PL 3U-stay 3U-burn garden POS-3PL location.SPEC-near-U
m-hu m-aikut ora r-ira re-t-o  
3U-stay 3U-eat garden REL-just.now location.SPEC-near-U
m-ake r-au to  
3U-fruit POS-3U LOC

They stayed and burned their garden there, they stayed and they ate from the garden (mentioned) just now, and the garden bore its own fruit.

(5) Ana m-aikut m-hu mpair r-ana re-t-o  
3PL 3U-eat 3U-stay place POS-3U location.SPEC-near-U

They ate and they stayed in their place there.

(6) Ana m-hu ewa to pi re-f-i y-kias  
3PL 3U-stay always LOC man location.SPEC-very.near-M 3M-tell
ana y-awe anu n-mo n-teh asah suek m-siar war  
they 3M-say 2PL 2-go.PL 2PL-feel shrimp well 3U-many very

They stayed there as usual, and this man told them, he said: You go and catch shrimps well until you have very many.

(7) N-po n-ma, k-tuo Ø-tawer aya  
2PL-hold 2PL-come.PL EMP-1SG Ø-fish.with.rod water

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1to 'LOC' refers to location (Dol 1999:130-131; 184-187), but is normally left untranslated to avoid a tortured English translation.
2'man' in this context refers to the father of the family, although pi is normally used to refer to a man in the general sense of the word, or to 'mister'.
3'teh asah' lit. 'feel shrimps' refers to fishing with hands. In the dry season shrimps (and also other fish) are manually fished out of the water by feeling and grabbing for them. In the free translations, -teh asah is translated as 'catch shrimps' or 'fish' to accommodate a more fluent translation.
4'suek' means 'well' when used as a manner adverbial, and 'immediately' or 'straight away' when used as a temporal adverbial.
5A few verbs, -amo 'go' is one of them, substitute the initial a by [a], when prefixed for first or second person plural. Similarly -ama 'come' in (7).
6The prefix k- before a first person singular pronoun tuo is in some northern dialects used for emphasis. The author of this story, at the time a sixteen-year-old boy, grew up in Konya, 10 km to the north of Ayawasi.
You take it and come, I will fish with a rod in the river. fish and other things will bite like this, and we will cook food and we will have things to mix with it.

They listened and went and stood (in the river) and they caught these large amounts of shrimps.

They brought them and gave them to the man.

He went to fish with a rod in the river.

Night and day and then like this aaaaaall the time.

Now, one time the man told them to go again like this, and catch shrimps.

When they went to fish, the man went too and fished with a rod.

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"The expression po p-ka, lit. 'things we mix' is used to refer to fish, meat and vegetables which are used to mix with staple food such as taro, cassava and, nowadays, rice.

"The expression mti mali is adequately translated as 'night and day'.

"The adverb term 'continuously', here with a long vowel to mark emphasis, is a loan from Indonesian.

"This exclamation marks the beginning of a change in the story."
The woman with her child, the two went and fished

The two fished for a long time, they caught many shrimps, until they saw they had a lot.

The two got up and filled (the shrimps) well into five dry bamboos.

Now this time when they were fishing, they felt like this and they found shrimps, real fish, crabs and things like this.

They selected (the fish) and they filled four bamboos, at the same time they filled the shrimps into a bamboo and so they had five bamboos.

They got up and they returned again and they immediately went to the 'Buah Raja' tree.
They saw that the man had already gone to fish in the river with a rod.

They saw that the man was not there, and then they got up and they made a fire.

Then the woman told the child to just cook the bamboo with the shrimps and the fish and the crab.

The things that (they had) just (caught) they put into the bamboos.

The woman told the child to just cook the bamboos.

And then the woman climbed into a tree and stayed up there.

She stayed above and ordered the child to begin cooking the bamboos.

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18 a is an interjection that expresses hesitation by the speaker. Dol (1999:138).
19 In the sequence akah u, u intensifies the meaning of akah. Dol (1999:131).
20 komando is a loanword from Indonesian.
21 The demonstrative form fo can either be an attributive demonstrative meaning 'this' (also expressed as re-f-o, where re is an attributive demonstrative prefix), or it can mark the beginning of an action, here called 'INCEPTive' (Dol 1999:107, 178).
(27) Fai m-itah m-itah na ku au m-aim pron 
woman 3U-order and.then child 3U 3U-cook bamboo
f-o Ø-samer Ø-prut
very-near-U Ø-cooked Ø-everything

The woman ordered and ordered and the child cooked the bamboos until they were all done.

(28) Fai m-he Ø-samer m-itah tipuo ku au m-o 
woman 3U-see Ø-cooked 3U-order immediately child 3U 3U-take
sa r-ira m-kah pron f-o 
fish REL-just.now 3U-with bamboo very.near-U

The woman saw it was done and she immediately ordered the child to take the fish with the bamboo.

(29) M-o m-e au akah u ara ti-au m-hu 
3U-take 3U-give she above up tree side-U.DIST 3U-stay
akah ara m-apo 
above tree 3U-eat.meat

She took it and gave it to her up on the side in the tree, she stayed above in the tree, she was eating (there).

(30) Ku au m-o sa f-o m-kah pron tuf m-o 
child 3U 3U-take fish very.near-U 3U-with bamboo three 3U-take
m-e fai au na pron eok m-awe m-hu 
3U-give woman 3U then bamboo two 3U-say 3U-stay
si au 
also DIST.U

The child took this fish with three bamboos, she took them and gave them to the woman, and she said that the other two bamboos should stay here (i.e. on the ground with the child).

(31) M-fe na fai au m-awe wa m-atak, m-awe fe 
3U-NEG and.then woman 3U 3U-say hey! 3U-angry 3U-say No!

It was not allowed,²⁴ and then the woman said: hey! She was angry, and she said: No!

(32) Ku au m-o m-e Ø-prut 
child 3U 3U-take 3U-give Ø-everything

²² Repetition of words is often used to intensify the meaning, Dol (1999:277-278). See also lines 37, 63.
²³ Words that express quantifying notions are formally verbs in Maybrat, Dol (1999:79-82).
²⁴ In Dol (1999:190) I argued that an accurate translation of predicative m-fe in sentence-initial position is ‘it is not the case’, making explicit that the content of the previous utterance does not apply. An example:

rae s-ait y-per m-ana eok. M-fe na y-per m-ana s-au 
person one-3M 3M-educate 3U-head two 3U-NEG and.then 3M-educate 3U-head one-3U

One man educates two (boys). If that is not the case, he educates one (boy).

However, in the context of (31), ‘it is not allowed” would seem a better translation.
The child took it and gave everything.

[33]  O-Soh
O-deceive

She (i.e. the woman) deceived (her).

[34]  Ku  au  ira  Ø-fais  o  m-aim  o  po
child  3U  just.now  Ø-fill  ENUM  3U-cook  ENUM  thing

we-t-o  Ø-prut-prut\(^2\)  ira
location.GENR-near-U  Ø-everything-RED  just.now

The child, just now she filled and cooked all the things in a messy manner.

[35]  M-nan  na  fai  au  m-e  fe  sa  aro  m-kah
3U-enough  and.then  woman  3U  3U-give  NEG  fish  other  3U-to

ku  au  fe\(^6\)
child  3U  NEG

Then the woman, she did not give the fish and other things to the child.

[36]  Ku  au  m-he  fai  m-itah  fi-t-o  fi-t-o
child  she  3U-see  woman  3U-order  similar-to-near-U  similar-to-near-U

na  ku  au  m-o  m-e  Ø-prut  m-ae  fai  au
and.then  child  3U  3U-take  3U-give  Ø-everything  3U-at  woman  3U

The child saw the woman order like this and that, and then she took and gave everything to the woman.

[37]  Ku  au  m-he  fai  au  m-apo  Ø-prut  na  m-ros
child  3U  3U-see  woman  3U  3U-eat  Ø-everything  and.then  3U-stand

m-awia  m-awia  m-awia  m-awia  m-awia  m-awia  suek
3U-cry  3U-cry  3U-cry  3U-cry  3U-cry  3U-cry  well

The child saw that the woman ate everything and then she got up and cried hard for a very long time.

[38]  M-he  fai  f-o  m-apo\(^2\)  sa  f-o  Ø-prut
3U-see  woman  very.near-U  3U-eat.meat  fish  very.near-U  Ø-everything

ku  au  m-awia  m-awia  m-awia
child  3U  3U-cry  3U-cry  3U-cry

She saw that the woman had eaten all this fish, and she cried for a very long time.

\(^2\)The function of reduplication is to intensify the meaning of a word, adding an element of randomness (Dol 1999:63).
\(^6\)It is unclear why the negator fe is used twice in this sentence. Possibly this creates extra emphasis.
\(^{22}\)Normally the form -apo refers to eating meat, while -tah is used to refer to eating small meat or, as in this case, fish. Possibly here -apo is used because large amounts of fish are eaten.
(39)  Fai  au  m-he  ku  au  m-awia  yom  yom
woman 3U  3U-see  child 3U  3U-cry  continuously  continuously
na  m-roh  m-o  tfo  Ḟ-saraf  ku  au  m-amuom
and.then 3U-descend 3U-take  machete  Ḟ-cut  child 3U  3U-neck
 attraversi  Ḟ-saraf  ku  m-ana  Ḟ-ktus  tipuo  m-ros
François  Ḟ-cut  child 3U-head  Ḟ-break  immediately  3U-stand
m-o  ku  f-o  m-asom  m-amo  Ḟ-peyak
3U-take  child  very.near-U  3U-carry.on.shoulder  3U-go  Ḟ-throw.away
war  m-aro ²⁸
reject 3U-hole

The woman saw that the child cried continuously and then she descended and she fetched a machete and cut the child's neck loose. She cut the child's head off and then she stood and she took the child and carried her on her shoulder and she went and threw her away in a hole.

(40)  Fai  au  m-e  u  m-hu  au  amah  Ḟ-ste  pi
woman 3U  3U-return  again 3U-stay  DIST.U  house  Ḟ-wait  man
ait  y-ama
3M  3M-come

The woman returned and stayed at the house and waited for the man to come.

(41)  Pi  ait  Ḟ-tumuk  y-ave  ku  mi-yo
man 3M  Ḟ-ask  3M-say  child  PRESTT-Q

The man asked: Where is the child?

(42)  Fai  au  m-kias  m-ave  ku  m-amo  m-teh  aya
woman 3U  3U-tell  3U-say  child 3U-go  3U-feel.fish  water

The woman answered saying: The child has gone to feel fish in the river.

(43)  Pi  ait  y-kias  y-ave  a  ku  au  m-amo  m-teh  aya
man 3M  3M-tell  3M-say  eh  child 3U  3U-go  3U-feel.fish  water

A  m-kias  k-tuo  t-har
similar.to-near-U  3U-tell  EMP-1SG  1SG-know

The man answered saying: If the child goes to feel fish in the river, like this she tells (me) so that I know.

(44)  Na  pi  Ḟ-tumuk  u  ku  mi-yo
and.then  man  Ḟ-ask  again  child  PRESTT-Q

Then the man asked again: Where is the child?

²⁸m-aro 'hole' is a spatial noun. Spatial nouns refer to relational parts of objects. In Maybrat, spatial nouns are formally inalienably possessed nouns, which means that they receive a person-prefix, see Döl (1999:95ff).
(45) Fai m-kias m-awe ku m-amo Ø-saraf am
woman 3U-tell 3U-say child 3U-go Ø-cut raincape

The woman said: The child went to cut a raincape.²⁹

(46) Na pi ait y-kias y-awe a ku au m-amo Ø-saraf
then man 3M 3M-tell 3M-say eh child 3U 3U-go Ø-cut
am fi-t-o mi³⁰ m-kias k-tuo t-har
raincape similar.to-near-U so.that 3U-tell EMP-1SG 1SG-know

Then the man answered saying: If the child goes to cut a raincape, like this she tells (me) so that I know.

(47) Pi ait Ø-tumuk fi-t-o terus terus
man he Ø-ask similar.to-near-U continuously continuously

The man continuously asked like this.

(48) Fai au m-he m-fe na m-ros m-kias m-awe
woman 3U 3U-see 3U-NEG and.then 3U-stand 3U-tell 3U-say
ku m-awia parir o sa o kpai o po
child 3U-cry shrimp ENUM fish ENUM crab ENUM thing
r-ira k-tuo t-no wo-f-o
REL-just.now EMP-1SG 1SG-do location.GENR-very.near-U

The woman saw that it did not work, and she got up and said: The child cried for shrimps, fish, crab and things I made here.

(49) K-tuo t-haf.ko³¹ t-ros t-o tfo Ø-saraf
EMP-1SG 1SG-stomach.not.want 1sg-stand 1SG-take machete Ø-cut
m-ama
3U-head

I got angry and I got up and fetched a machete and cut her head.

(50) T-tor t-amö t-ruk war m-ato
1sg-carry.on.shoulder 1SG-go 1SG-submerge reject 3U-hole

I carried her on my shoulder and threw her away in a hole.

(51) Pi ait y-ari fi-t-o na y-ros y-o
man 3M 3M-hear similar.to-near-U and.then 3M-stand 3M-take
tfo y-toh m-ae fra suek y-he m-aon
machete 3M-sharpen 3U-at stone well 3M-see 3U-sharp

²⁹ 'raincapes' are made from pandanus leaves. They are also used as mats to sleep on.

³⁰ 'so that' is used while in line 43, which is parallel in syntactic structure and meaning mi is absent.

³¹ The form ko, which here together with -haf 'stomach' refers to 'anger', is derived from -ako 'not want'. In Maybrat, many forms expressing emotion are formed in this way, e.g. t-haf fri 'I feel for', lit. '1SG-stomach.meet'.
The man heard it (was) like this, and then he got up and fetched a knife and sharpened it well on a stone until he saw it was sharp.

(52) Y-ros y-kias y-awe t-ano n-yum tafoh
3M-stand 3M-tell 3M-say 1SG-sibling.opposite.sex 2-improve fire
m-aît re p-im po-it o p-im
3U-burn in.order.to 1PL-cook.PL thing-eat.PL ENUM 1SG-cook.PL
sa o po p-it ke p-hai awiah
fish ENUM thing 1PL-eat.PL because 1PL-die taro

He got up and he said: My sister, you improve the fire and it burns, so that we cook food and we cook fish and things to eat because we are hungry.

(53) Fai au m-ari na m-ros m-yum tafoh
woman 3U 3U-hear and.then 3U-stand 3U-improve fire

The woman heard it and then she got up and she improved the fire.

(54) Pi aît y-ros y-o tfø Ø-saraf tipuo m-amuom
man he 3M-stand 3M-take machete Ø-cut immediately 3U-neck
Ø-ktus m-amo ete poh
Ø-broken 3U-go below ashes

The man got up and fetched a knife and immediately cut her neck off and it fell down in the ashes.

(55) Pi y-ros y-ko tipuo tafoh na y-ros
man 3M-stand 3M-roast immediately fire and.then 3M-stand
y-o fai f-o Ø-smoh tipuo
3M-take woman very.near-U Ø-roast immediately

The man got up immediately and burned the fire and then he got up and took the woman and roasted her over the fire straight away.

(56) Y-ros Ø-safa tipuo m-siar na y-ros Ø-fais
3M-stand Ø-cut immediately 3U-many and.then 3M-stand fill
pron m-siar suek Ø-frok mat
bamboo 3U-many well Ø-emerge five

He got up and cut (the flesh) immediately until there was a lot and then he got up and filled many bamboos well (with the flesh) until there were five.

(57) Sa f-o Ø-fais si pron eok
fish very.near-U Ø-fill also bamboo two
He also filled two bamboos with the fish.

32The form -hai awiah, lit. ‘die taro’ is accurately translated as ‘be hungry.’
33The form frok ‘emerge’ is in many contexts adequately be translated as ‘arrive’. 
(58) Y-ros y-aim tipuo y-he Ø-samer na y-ros
3M-stand 3M-cook immediately 3M-see Ø-cooked and.then 3M-stand
y-seh tipuo y-kai pruo
3M-cut.in.half immediately 3M-smoke rack.over.fireplace

He got up and cooked it (the fish) until he saw they were done, and then he got up and immediately cut (the bamboo) in half and he smoked them on the rack over the fireplace.

(59) Y-he Ø-srak na y-ros y-o y-fau yu⁴ s-au
3M-see Ø-cooked and.then 3M-stand 3M-take 3M-fill bag one-3U
na y-ros y-amo sasu y-kit y-atia o
and.then 3M-stand 3M-go coast 3M-towards 3M-father ENUM
y-me o ana to sasu
3M-mother ENUM 3PL LOC coast

He saw that it was cooked, and then he got up, took a bag and filled it and he got up and went to the coast to his father and his mother and the others at the coast.

(60) Y-amo Ø-frok ana na ana Ø-tumuk m-awe. ku pi
3M-go Ø-emerge they and.then 3PL Ø-ask 3U-say child man
Ø-soh e
Ø-deceive eh

He went and arrived (at them) and then they asked saying: The child, you (lit. the man) deceive eh?³³

(61) Finia o ku
woman ENUM child

The woman and the child.

(62) Fai m-o tfo Ø-saraj m-amuom Ø-ktus na
woman 3U-take machete Ø-cut 3U-neck Ø-break and.then
m-asom m-amo m-rak m-ato na fai au
3U-carry.on.shoulder 3U-go 3U-submerge 3U-hole and.then woman 3U
k-tuo t-o tfo Ø-saraj m-amuom Ø-ktus na
EMP-1SG 1SG-take machete Ø-cut 3U-neck Ø-break and.then
m-hai si ou
3U-die also ouw!

The woman fetched a knife and cut the (child's) neck off and then carried (the child) and went and submerged it in a hole, and then the woman. I took a knife and cut the neck off and then she also died.

³³yu is a traditional bag woven from pandanus leaves, with a long strap, carried over the head.
³³This part of the sentence is not entirely clear. A possible interpretation is that this is an exclamation by the parents of the man, expressing surprise at the fact that he has arrived alone, without his family.
The son heard what his father just now told like this, and he began to cry and got up very angrily and went and he arrived at the middle of the road and a white snake was there and bit the child and the child died.

The man wanted to follow so that he could chase the child.

The white snake was there it bit the man and he also died.

REFERENCES


*papoh* is a very poisonous white snake with black dots, which is found in the Bird’s Head of Papua.