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On the role and utility of grammars in language documentation and conservation

Kenneth L. Rehg
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

The National Science Foundation warns that at least half of the world's approximately seven thousand languages are soon to be lost. In response to this impending crisis, a new subfield of linguistics has emerged, called *language documentation* or, alternatively, *documentary linguistics*. The goal of this discipline is to create lasting, multipurpose records of endangered languages before they are lost forever. However, while there is widespread agreement among linguists concerning the methods of language documentation, there are considerable differences of opinion concerning what its products should be. Some documentary linguists argue that the outcome of language documentation should be a large corpus of extensively annotated data. Reference grammars and dictionaries, they contend, are the products of language description and are not essential products of language documentation. I argue, however, that grammars (and dictionaries) should normally be included in the documentary record, if our goal is to produce products that are maximally useful to both linguists and speakers, now and in the future. I also show that an appropriately planned reference grammar can serve as a foundation for a variety of community grammars, the purposes of which are to support and conserve threatened languages.

1. **INTRODUCTION.**[1] During the past decade, an increasing number of linguists have taken up the task of creating a lasting, multipurpose record of the world's many endangered and minority languages. These efforts, commonly referred to as 'language documentation' or alternatively 'documentary linguistics', have drawn new attention to the tools, methods, and products of basic linguistic research.

The emerging field of language documentation arose in response to an increasing awareness that many of the world's approximately 7,000 languages are likely to be dead or moribund by the end of this century. How many languages will be lost is, of course, unknown; estimates range between 30 and 90 percent. What is certain, however, is that the empirical foundation of our discipline is rapidly eroding.

There is much to be done. Michael Noonan (2006:352) estimates that we have adequate documentation for approximately 500 languages, preliminary documentation in the form of short grammars and dictionaries for perhaps 2,000 languages, and little or no documentation for the remaining 4,500. If Noonan is right, this means that we have satisfactory documentation for only approximately 7% of the world's languages, typically those that are *least* endangered.

Clearly, then, the central challenge to the discipline of linguistics is to document as many endangered languages as possible, and, where appropriate, to assist in their maintenance. The issue I wish to address in this chapter is the role of grammars in language documentation. More specifically, I want to argue that a grammar that is produced for,

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with, and by speakers of the target language can play an essential role in both language documentation and conservation.

2. THE ROLE OF REFERENCE GRAMMARS IN LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION. While there is widespread agreement about the goals and methods of language documentation, not everyone agrees on what its products should be. The traditional goals of fieldwork were to produce a grammar, a dictionary, and a collection of texts, commonly prioritized in that order. Documentary linguistics, as conceived by Himmelmann, stands those goals on their head. He argues that the primary goal of language documentation is to build an extensive corpus of texts, while the position of grammars and dictionaries is less certain.

In part, this reordering of priorities is a consequence of how one defines language documentation. Himmelmann broadly characterizes language documentation and its goals as follows:

> Language documentation is concerned with the methods, tools, and theoretical underpinnings for compiling a representative and lasting multipurpose record of a natural language or one of its varieties. (Himmelmann 2006:v)

> The goal [of language documentation] is to create a record of a language in the sense of a comprehensive corpus of primary data which leaves nothing to be desired by later generations wanting to explore whatever aspect of the language they are interested in… (Himmelmann 2006:3).

In Himmelmann's view (2006:17), the "well-established format for language documentation consisting primarily of a reference grammar and a dictionary…is, strictly speaking, a format for language *description* and not for language *documentation* proper".

While one can, of course, establish such a division of labor in theorizing about the tasks involved in compiling a comprehensive record of a language, in practice, one cannot easily separate language documentation from language description, nor is it necessarily desirable to do so. At the University of Melbourne, for example, language documentation and language description are seen as yin and yang components of an undertaking that, tongue in cheek, they suggest might be called 'descriptamentation'.[2] Similarly, at the University of Hawai'i, the goal of our program in language documentation and conservation is to bring data, documentation, analysis, description, and theory together in one seamless whole, which we simply call 'documentation'.

Drawing a distinction between language documentation and language description is, in a more fundamental sense, beside the point. The primary concern ought to be about what kinds of materials will best serve the potential users of the records we compile for languages. Himmelmann's characterization of the goal of a language documentation—that it provide a record of a language for 'later generations'—is well-taken. However, it runs the risk of being far-sighted in both senses of this term. That is, it is forward-looking, but, like visual far-sightedness, it may result in an inability to focus clearly on the near present. I believe that language documentation should be concerned not only with future utility, but with present value as well.

2   See <http://www.linguistics.unimelb.edu.au/research/projects/greatthings.html>.

What then might be the role of reference grammars in language documentation? I would argue that the answer to this question is contextually contingent. If one is working with a language spoken by only a very small number of elderly speakers, and if there is no interest in revitalizing the language, then the best strategy is probably to build as large a corpus as possible, based on an on-going analysis of the language to insure that critical data is not being overlooked. A reference grammar can come later.

Regardless of the vitality of a language, however, the compilation of a large corpus of data is an essential part of the record.[3]   I do not contest this claim. However, if one is working with an endangered or threatened language that might be revitalized, then the development of a grammar that is comprehensive and theoretically-informed should be assigned high priority, *if* our goal is to produce a record of a language that is not only representative and lasting, but one that is also maximally *useful*. The question, of course, is useful for whom?

3. THE UTILITY OF REFERENCE GRAMMARS FOR LINGUISTS. Reference grammars are, or at least ought to be, useful to linguists, both in their roles as consumers and producers, as I discuss below.

3.1   LINGUISTS AS USERS OF GRAMMARS. One issue that has been given insufficient attention in the literature on language documentation is the usefulness of a corpus of data for which there is no grammar, or for which there is only a sketch grammar. It might be interesting to query those who manage the archives in which such corpora are stored to see to what extent linguists make use of them. I have never undertaken this task formally, but the anecdotal information I have is that they are, in fact, underutilized by linguists, presumably because linguists judge the effort required to make effective use these corpora to be incommensurate with the potential reward. This is hardly surprising. Except for those specialists who are working on a particular language, or perhaps a specific language family, linguists will always prefer to work with those languages for which we have reliable reference grammars (and dictionaries). A reference grammar provides a one-stop source of basic information on a language and, if available, is typically the first resource that a linguist will go to if his/her interest is in the grammar of the language.

This volume and other like it (e.g. Ameka, Dench, & Evans 2006; Payne & Weber 2006) are, in fact, typically focused on how reference grammars can be made more useful to linguists. Why? Because reference grammars are as basic to linguistic research as ingredients are to chefs. The impact on our discipline of compiling corpora *instead* of writing reference grammars is unlikely to be positive.

3.2   LINGUISTS AS AUTHORS OF GRAMMARS. While it is obvious that reference grammars are useful to linguists as users, it is perhaps less commonly observed that

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3   Himmelmann (2006:24) speaks of 'economy of effort', suggesting that "it may be more productive to spend more time on expanding the corpus of primary data rather than to use it for writing a descriptive grammar". I disagree. Much of the work involved in compiling a corpus for a language can be better carried out by trained native speakers, thus leaving the linguist free to undertake the analysis and description of the language.

reference grammars can also play an important role for linguists as the producers of such products.

First, it should be noted that the kind of careful analysis of data required to write a reference grammar provides at least a partial check on the adequacy of the corpus. Simply collecting a massive amount of data without a detailed analysis of its content is certain to result in an inadequate sample of the language. I witnessed an extreme example of this as a graduate student. A number of faculty and graduate students in anthropology were preparing to work in Melanesia and, during the course of a preliminary site visit, had recorded many hours of narratives in the language of the community in which they planned to work. No analysis of the data was done until they returned to the university, whereupon they discovered that that did not have a *single* example of how to ask a question. A basic rule-of-thumb among experienced field workers is that analysis must be an on-going task, so that one has a clearer idea of where the holes are in the data. The idea that one could collect a sufficiently large corpus that would provide answers to any question one might have about the data is simply unrealistic. Analysis provides a check on the adequacy of the data, and writing a description of the data provides a check on the adequacy of one's analysis.[4]

Second, the writing of a grammar provides the linguist with an important 'discovery procedure'. The idea of discovery procedures emerged during the heyday of structuralist linguistics. The goal of such procedures was to provide the linguist with a set of tools which, if properly employed, would lead one to a unique and accurate analysis of a language. In phonology, this resulted in 'tests' such as those for 'minimal pairs', 'complementary distribution', and 'free variation'. While we now know that such discovery procedures are flawed and unreliable, working linguists also know that such procedures are nevertheless useful.[5] And working linguists who have written a reference grammar also know that writing such a grammar is a valuable discovery procedure in its own right. The challenge of writing down one's analysis of a language, in such a way that it is comprehensible to (some) others, invariably leads one to ask questions about the data that might otherwise not have arisen. (Ask anyone who has written a grammar.) The consequence is that the record of the language provided by the linguist is much enriched by this experience.

Another benefit to the linguist of writing a grammar is that it promotes 'whole-system thinking'. Much of the linguistics literature during the last four decades of the 20th century focused on developing theoretical claims about specific, and often narrowly defined, aspects of language, commonly based on limited data extracted from the work of others. While it is an incontrovertible fact that research of this nature has enormously advanced our under-standing of language, it is also true, I think, that linguists who solely engage in research of this nature are likely to have a very different view of how languages work than linguists who have attempted to provide a comprehensive description of all aspects of the grammar of a single language. The latter attempt requires one to see how isolated facts fit together to

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4   Himmelmann also advocates analysis of the data one is including in a corpus, but it is unclear what level of analysis he has in mind. His comment (2006:28) that Hockett (1958) and Gleason (1961) might serve as excellent introductions to linguistics suggests that his views of the field substantially diverge from those held by most American linguists.

5   For example, these discovery procedures fail to provide one with a means by which underlying diphthongs can be distinguished from surface diphthongs. See Rehg 2007.

form the whole, and that experience typically has a transformative experience on how one understands language and works as a linguist. It should also be noted that lasting advances in linguistic theory are typically the consequence of an encounter with data that resist analysis within the frameworks of existing theories. Fieldworkers and writers of grammars commonly experience what might be called 'theory lag'. The challenge, then, becomes one of revising the theory so that it accommodates the data—hopefully never the reverse.

Finally, the professional value of writing a grammar must be considered. In most academic institutions, contributions to the discipline, rightly or wrongly, are measured in terms of numbers of publications and the venues in which they are published. The building of corpora and work with endangered language communities typically, and most unfortunately, count for little. In some departments, perhaps especially in the United States, even the writing of reference grammars and dictionaries is not recognized as an important scholarly contribution. In response to this narrow and harmful conception of the field, the Linguistic Society of America recently endorsed a resolution put forward by its Committee on Endangered Languages and their Preservation that calls for recognition of the scholarly merits of language documentation.[6] That resolution notes that "the products of linguistic language documentation [including reference grammars and dictionaries] ...are...fundamental and permanent contributions to the foundation of linguistics, and are intellectual achievements which require sophisticated analytical skills, deep theoretical knowledge, and broad linguistic expertise".[7] Consequently, one can hope that those who do fieldwork will continue to build corpora, but, where appropriate, then take the next logical steps—to write grammars and produce dictionaries. And they should do so without guilt.

4. ARE REFERENCE GRAMMARS USEFUL ONLY TO LINGUISTS? Reference grammars are useful to linguists—or at least to some linguists.[8] Few will contest that claim. Indeed, the relatively small body of literature that exists on writing grammars typically focuses on how linguists can make grammars more useful to other linguists. And, if one's intended audience is other linguists, that is an appropriate concern. Other linguists may necessarily be one's only audience. A graduate student writing a grammar as a PhD dissertation will have other linguists as his or her primary audience—namely the members of the dissertation committee. Linguists writing grammars of languages, all of whose speakers are illiterate, or none of whom speak the language the grammar is written in, will also appropriately write for other linguists. But, are reference grammars necessarily useful only to linguists? Himmelmann (2006:19) observes:

> Grammars...provide little that is of direct use to non-linguists, including the speech community, educators, and researchers in other disciplines...

6   See <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/resolution-recognizing-scholarly-merit-language-documentation>.

7   It is remarkable that the field of linguistics pays lip-service to the importance of language documentation, but, in some cases, discourages it in practice. One is reminded of Cicero's complaints about the philosophers of his day: "…impeded by their zeal for learning, they desert those whom they ought to protect" (Strange & Zupko 2004).

8   Reference grammars are especially useful for formalists and typologists. It should therefore come as no surprise that linguists working in these areas have been some of the strongest supporters of efforts to deal with the endangered language crisis.

Lise Dobrin (2009:619), too, has observed that there is a "great gap between academically produced knowledge about language on the one hand, and real-world problems on the other".

Clearly, these concerns are well-motivated. Even when circumstances permit writing to a broader audience—that is, in contexts where non-linguists might be able to make use of a grammar—linguists nevertheless all too often write only to other linguists. This shortcoming, however, is not, and need not be, true of all grammars. The question, then, is how can we develop grammars that are useful to a broader audience, including non-linguists? More specifically, the issue I wish to consider is how do we approach the task of writing grammars so that there is some hope they might be useful for the communities with which we work?

5. WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES. What I wish to propose here is that, where appropriate and possible, we write reference grammars that are accessible to the speakers of the language and then subsequently make use of these grammars to develop community grammars.[9] To illustrate this approach, I will provide a case study of a reference grammar that was written *on* Pohnpeian, both *for* and *with* speakers of this language, and then discuss a community grammar that was written *by* two Pohnpeians, utilizing the content of this reference grammar.[10]

5.1   THE UTILITY OF THE POHNPEIAN REFERENCE GRAMMAR. Pohnpeian is a Nuclear Micronesian (Austronesian) language spoken on the island of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia. At present, the language has approximately 28,000 speakers. While most speakers of the language under the age of 50 are, to varying degrees, bilingual in English, the use of Pohnpeian remains robust.

The *Ponapean Reference Grammar* (reflecting an older name for the language that was in use at the time this grammar was written) was developed at the University of Hawai'i as part of a project called the *Pacific Languages Development Project* (PLDP: 1970-1974). The PLDP targeted all the major and several of the minor languages of what at that time was known as The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.[11] Its goals were (1) to develop standard orthographies, (2) to produce reference grammars, (3) to compile bilingual dictionaries, and (4) to train Micronesians to serve as indigenous linguists. The grammar for Pohnpeian was written by the author of this chapter with the assistance of Damian Sohl, a native speaker who was a participant in this project.[12]

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9   Of course, even reference grammars written exclusively for linguists can serve as the foundation for community grammars, assuming a linguist is available to explain the grammar to the community.

10 See Czaykowska-Higgins (2009:22-25) for an insightful discussion of various approaches to fieldwork. The model I am advocating here is the one she calls *community-based research*.

11 The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was later partitioned into the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

12 A sister publication in the form of a bilingual Pohnpeian-English Dictionary was published as Rehg & Sohl: 1979.

A second project, called the *Bilingual Education Program for Micronesia* (BEPM: 1974-1983), brought Micronesian educators to the University of Hawai'i to train them in the principles and practices of bilingual education and to teach them to use the literacy documents that were developed in association with the PLDP.[13] Consequently, prior to publication, I was able to use various drafts of this grammar in a seminar on the structure of Pohnpeian that I regularly taught in conjunction with this project. The grammar was thus reviewed, commented on, and revised as a result of input from approximately thirty native speakers over the course of approximately six years.[14]

The Ponapean Reference Grammar (PRG) was specifically targeted for speakers of Pohnpeian. In the first sentence of the first paragraph of the Preface, I noted:

> My purpose in writing this book has been to provide a description of the major grammatical features of Ponapean for the reader who has little or no training in the analysis of language. Although this work is intended primarily for native speakers of Ponapean who are bilingual in English, I hope it will also be useful to others whose interests have brought them to the study of this language.

I further commented:

> I have endeavored throughout this volume to keep its content as clear and as simple as possible….I have tried to minimize the usage of [technical linguistic terms], but where they permitted a better or more efficient explanation of the data, I have not shied away from them. I have taken care, though, to define each technical term as it is introduced and to illustrate it with numerous examples.

That is, this grammar was written using the tools of linguistic theory that were available at that time, but the analyses resulting from the use of those tools were presented so as to be comprehensible to a broad audience, most especially educated Pohnpeians. It is thus useful to bear in mind that one's theoretical framework need not dictate one's descriptive framework.

I hasten to point out that I take no credit for deciding on the audience for this grammar, nor for this approach to writing it. These were the guidelines for all the grammars published as part of this project. I also do not intend to hold the content of this grammar up as a model for others. It was largely written while I was a graduate student, and though the data it contains are accurate (having been examined by multiple speakers), the scope of the grammar, as well as the analyses it contains, could certainly be improved upon.[15] Further,

13 A third undertaking, called the Pacific Area Language Materials Development Project (PALM: 1975–1983) developed vernacular language materials in a variety of content areas for many of the languages of Micronesia, including Pohnpeian.

14 See Rehg 2004 for a brief description of the Micronesian projects in which this grammar was written and taught.

15 Some linguists have told me that it is not possible to write such a grammar, that explaining linguistic concepts to non-linguists would result in grammars of excessive length. I would recommend to those who take this position that they examine the grammars produced for the Micronesian languages to see how this task was managed and to judge for themselves the extent to which these grammars succeeded.

because this grammar was written for a broad audience, and, because the publication of these grammars and dictionaries was subsidized in part by the Micronesian government, they were made available at a very low cost and continue to be relatively inexpensive.[16] I fully recognize, of course, that the PRG was produced under highly advantageous circumstances that are far from typical. Nevertheless, a consideration of the ways in which this grammar has been useful has potential relevance for linguists and language communities elsewhere.

What then has this grammar been good for? Some linguists have been able to make use of it, perhaps especially phonologists. But, one would hope this to be a minimal outcome. The more central question for this chapter is of what use has it been to the Pohnpeian community? Because I have continued to work on Pohnpeian and have made multiple visits to the island since the grammar was published in 1981, I now feel qualified to provide at least a brief response to this question.[17]

First, the grammar has clearly impacted the way in which speakers, especially younger speakers, view their language. When I first began work on this grammar, teenage speakers of the language who were learning English would often tell me that Pohnpeian, unlike English, had no grammar. By this, they meant *both* that it had no written grammar *and* that there were no rules for speaking the language. I no longer hear such comments.[18] As many linguists report, the prestige of a language can be enhanced by providing it with a reference grammar, and a dictionary.

Second, the grammar has been utilized by both learners and teachers in the teaching of Pohnpeian to speakers of other languages. Pohnpei is currently the site of the capitol of the Federated States of Micronesia, and consequently many outsiders are resident on the island. Because Pohnpeians encourage others to learn their language, and because they are supportive of such efforts, the College of Micronesia periodically offers a course in spoken Pohnpeian. Peace Corps volunteers coming to the island also receive instruction in the language. As a consequence, the language is utilized by both native and non-native speakers. Clearly, this is an important factor in maintaining the vitality of the language.

Third, the grammar has served as the basis for on-going efforts to teach the standard orthography of Pohnpeian, both in the form of workshops as well as in courses at the College of Micronesia. The grammar is useful for this purpose because it contains a six page appendix that lists and explains the recommendations of two Pohnpeian Orthography Workshops that were conducted on Pohnpei in 1972 and 1973. Each of these recommendations is summarized and references are provided to those sections of the grammar that describe the structural properties of Pohnpeian that prompted the recommendations. More importantly, it is this feature of the grammar that gave rise to a *community grammar* written *by* two Pohnpeians, *for* a Pohnpeian speaking audience.

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16   The Ponapean Reference Grammar—xv + 393 pages—currently sells for $26 dollars and can be purchased by the Pohnpei Department of Education at a discount of 40%.
17   I began work on Pohnpeian in 1968 while a Peace Corps staff member.
18   It is likely, however, that many young speakers are unaware of the PRG's existence, even though it is still in print. Current attitudes about the language are clearly a consequence of attitudes shaped in the past.

5.2   WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GRAMMAR? A community grammar, as described by Michael Noonan (n.d.), is "a kind of reference grammar created for, and sometimes by, members of a linguistic community as an aid to establishing [or reestablishing] a language in the schools, for teaching the language to adults, [etc.]".

At the meeting in Tokyo that spawned this volume, I gave a paper entitled 'FINE Grammars for Small Languages'. FINE is an acronym for what I believe to be the essential properties of a community grammar. These are:

> F = *focused*. A community grammar should be written for a specific purpose, responding to what in Peace Corps jargon was once called a 'felt need'—that is, a need that is *felt* in the community, rather than one that is merely *voiced*, or worse, *imposed* from the outside.[19]

> I = *interesting*. The grammar should be constructed so that it will engage and entertain its readers.

> N = *naturalistic*. The grammar should be based on real data or, at the very least, realistic data.

> E = *educational*. The grammar should not only engage its readers, but instruct them as well. That is, the grammar should have either an overt or covert pedagogical function.

While I have since abandoned the use of this acronym (acronyms have a way of becoming intellectual straightjackets), it nevertheless remains a useful mnemonic.

The type of FINE or community grammar that I had envisioned at that conference (among many possible types) was one designed to teach speakers of Pohnpeian about the structure of their language as it bears on the conventions used in the standard orthography. Pohnpeian has, in fact, been written since the middle of the 19th century and most Pohnpeians can read and write their language, but there is, at present, a great deal of inconsistency in how the language is written. With the introduction of Pohnpeian into the school system, however, the Pohnpei Department of Education has become increasingly concerned that all teachers and students employ the standard system that was devised for the language in the early 1970s.[20] Inconsistencies in spelling by teachers obviously cause problems for children who are learning to read and write. Further, many teachers are insecure about writing Pohnpeian, primarily because they do not know or understand the conventions employed in the standard orthography.

At this point, let me slightly diverge to talk about what I mean by an 'orthography'. First, I should note that an orthography is not the same as a phonemic transcription, nor is it just an alphabet. Good orthographies (and linguists do not always produce good orthographies) address all areas of the grammar. The alphabet requires a solid understanding

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19   As Peace Corps and other community development workers can testify, it is often very difficult to determine what a 'felt' need is. Extended contact and interaction with a community are usually required before one can make such a determination.

20   See Rehg 2004.

of the phonology of the language, as well as of phonological variation. Word division requires a good grasp of the morphology and, to a lesser extent, the syntax of the language. In addition, orthographies must address such matters as punctuation, capitalization, the treatment of loan words, and more. Above all, the designer of an orthography must have a good understanding of the dynamics of the culture in which the orthography is to be employed. Perhaps more than any other undertaking, it is essential that the development of an orthography be carried out as a community-based endeavor.

So, in what sense might a book focused on orthography be considered a grammar? Well, first it is a community grammar with a pedagogical function. It necessarily deals with phonology, morphology, syntax, and dialect variation. Further, it aspires to teach its users not only about the orthography, but about the structure of Pohnpeian as well.

My belief when I gave this talk in Tokyo was that such a community grammar would/could meet the FINE criteria I previously outlined. Such a grammar would be *focused* on a *felt* need in the community, namely to support and teach the standard orthography that has been endorsed by both church and state. It could be written, I believed, so that it would be *interesting*, it would focus on *natural* data, the kinds of mistakes that people commonly make in attempting to use the standard orthography, and it would be overtly *educational*.

6.0   AN EXACT REPLICA OF A FIGMENT OF MY IMAGINATION. The talk I gave in Tokyo took place in December of 2009. Six months later, in May of 2010, I went to Pohnpei, primarily to work with colleagues there on a second edition of the Pohnpeian dictionary. In the course of our work, I brought up the idea of developing a community grammar for the purpose of supporting the teaching of the Pohnpeian standard orthography. One of my colleagues, Damian Sohl, was a participant in the PLDP project previously mentioned and holds a BA in Linguistics from the University of Hawai‘i. He was a co-author of the Pohnpeian dictionary and an assistant in the preparation of the grammar, a consultant to the Pohnpeian Orthography Workshop, and had previously served as the Pohnpei State Director of Education. My other colleague, Robert Andreas, holds an MA in Linguistics from the University of Hawai‘i and is currently a Professor in the Division of Education at the College of Micronesia. Both have extensive experience teaching workshops and courses in Pohnpeian orthography, and both have been strong supporters of it. Consequently, I was confident that they would support the idea of developing such a community grammar.

Much to my astonishment, I discovered that they had already written almost exactly the kind of community grammar that I had envisioned. It was, in the words of Elizabeth McCracken (2008), an "exact replica of a figment of my imagination". While I was in frequent contact with both Sohl and Andreas during the time they were developing this grammar, neither had previously mentioned it to me. Our correspondence had focused on matters related to Pohnpeian grammar and lexicography. I was, of course, delighted that they had undertaken this project and, I must confess, reassured that my idea about what kind of community grammar the people of Pohnpei might want was on target.

6.1   THE STRUCTURE OF THIS COMMUNITY GRAMMAR. The community grammar developed by Sohl and Andreas contains 103 pages of material on Pohnpeian orthography,

divided into ten 'lessons', all written in Pohnpeian.[21] The target audience is primarily teachers and students at the College of Micronesia, but it is, in fact, an invaluable resource for any speaker of Pohnpeian interested in learning the standard orthography of this language. The structure of these lesson varies somewhat, but each typically provides (a) a statement of goals and objectives, (b) information about one or more of the conventions employed in the standard orthography, along with a discussion of relevant aspects of Pohnpeian grammar, (c) a list of technical terms used in the lesson, and (4) a self-test on its content.

These materials are overtly pedagogical. They are designed to serve essentially as a textbook and as a reference source for those wanting to master the standard orthography of Pohnpeian. They are appropriately designed to meet this need, but, in fact, they go well beyond this purpose. What is especially interesting about these materials is that they not only provide information about Pohnpeian orthography, but they also use the teaching of orthography as a vehicle for teaching a very substantial amount about the structure of Pohnpeian. The scope of these materials is such that any Pohnpeian completing them will have a relatively sophisticated understanding of the major grammatical features of his/her language.

Of course, a common problem in describing the grammar of a language that does not have a long tradition of grammatical description is the lack of suitable technical vocabulary. In the case of the Pohnpeian, this problem was dealt with in three ways—(1) by 'Pohnpei-anizing' English words already known to most Pohnpeians, (2) by extending the meaning of Pohnpeian words to fill lexical gaps, and (3) by introducing new terms from English.

It is likely that most Pohnpeians will already be familiar with some grammatical terminology as a result of their schooling, which places a heavy emphasis on the teaching of English. Therefore, words like 'consonant', 'vowel', 'noun', 'verb', and 'sentence' are certain to be familiar to any Pohnpeian with a high school education. In these lessons, however, such words are spelled so that they reflect the way a monolingual speaker of Pohnpeian would pronounce them. That is, they are adapted to confirm to the constraints of Pohnpeian phonology. Examples are:

English	Pohnpeian[22]
consonant	*kansonan*
vowel	*pawel*
noun	*naun*
verb	*perip*
adverb	*adperip*
sentence	*sendens*

Damian Sohl reports that, during the first workshop in which he used these materials, the participants laughed when he said 'perip' rather than 'verb'. They were unaccustomed to hearing this word pronounced as it would be by a monolingual Pohnpeian speaker.

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21 This grammar is currently unpublished and has been distributed to students in Xeroxed form. (See Sohl & Andreas n.d.)

22 For an explanation of the conventions of Pohnpeian orthography, see the PRG or Rehg 2004.

However, he reports that, by the end of the first day, everyone was using 'perip' without hesitation and without being self-conscious about it.

A second strategy to solve the terminology problem was to extend the meaning of existing Pohnpeian words. Sometimes this was done by using an English loan in combination with a Pohnpeian word to create a compound with a new meaning. For example:

English	Pohnpeian
base vowel	*pawel poad*
insert vowel	*pawel peidaid*

Poad in Pohnpeian means 'planted'. Therefore, a 'base vowel' is a planted or rooted vowel. An insert vowel is one that is *peidaid*, meaning 'transported.'

Other technical terms were created using only Pohnpeian words. An especially interesting set employing the word *pwuloi* follows. *Pwuloi* is a noun meaning 'the part of the stem between the joints, of cane-like plants (like bamboo)'. It can also be used to refer to the stanza of a song, and it is additionally used as a numeral classifier in counting sections of a stem from joint to joint, or stanzas in a song. Examples follow.

English	Pohnpeian
phone/speech sound	*pwuloin ngihl* section-of voice
suffix	*pwuloimwur* section-behind
locative phrase	*pwuloin lokaiahn wasa* section-of utterance-of place
temporal phrase	*pwuloin lokaiahn ansou* section-of utterance-of time
relative clause	*pwuloin koasoai idengek* section-of speech-of lean (against)

In the preceding examples, I have glossed *lokaia* as 'utterance' and *koasoai* as 'speech'; the actual meaning difference between these two words, however, is quite subtle. *Lokaia* generally refers to a speech act that lacks the formality and completeness of one called *koasoai*, although at present these two words are often used synonymously. I did not fully understand this distinction before reading this community grammar.

Third, new technical vocabulary was introduced from English. In some cases, such forms were 'Pohnpeianized'. That is, they were spelled to reflect how a Pohnpeian monolingual speaker might pronounce them; for example 'enclitic' is rendered as *enklidik*. In other cases, English spellings were retained, as for example 'demonstrative pronoun' and 'prepositional noun'.

6.2 THE VALUE OF THIS COMMUNITY GRAMMAR. It is certain that this grammar represents a valuable contribution to the community. The view of some Pohnpeians, rightly or wrongly, is that their language will be accorded respect to the extent that it mirrors the attributes of major languages like English. Consequently, they are very much concerned about 'standards' for the language, in both its spoken and written forms. In the case of spoken Pohnpeian, there are already complex and widely-accepted notions of what constitutes excellence. A proficient speaker of Pohnpeian, therefore, is one who is controls all levels of honorific speech, has an extensive vocabulary, commands all oratorical styles, etc. Comparable standards for written Pohnpeian, however, are still in the formative stage, but being able to spell Pohnpeian 'correctly', in accord with the rules of the standard orthography, is considered by some to be an essential foundation for developing such standards. The community grammar developed by Sohl and Andreas supports the teaching of the standard orthography, but, in and of itself, it also serves as an example of 'best practices' in writing the language. Perhaps more significantly, it represents the beginning of an indigenous grammatical tradition.

This community grammar is also of value to linguists and other students of the language. Because this grammar is written in Pohnpeian, it provides a rich source of textual material in a relatively new genre. It further demonstrates to linguists working with small languages that our reference grammars can be put to practical uses that serve community needs, but only if we insure that they are accessible to speakers of the language and that some speakers are trained to use them.

6. 3 COMMUNITY GRAMMARS FOR THE FUTURE. It is easy to envision still other types of community grammars that could play a significant role in advancing the aspirations that the people of Pohnpei have for their language and culture. One idea that was suggested to me by an educator there is the development of a community grammar to teach honorific speech, or *meing* as it is called in Pohnpeian. Control of this speech style is considered essential if one is to be viewed as a person of consequence. In the PRG, we noted "since not all speakers of Ponapean are able to use honorific speech with equal facility, command of this speech style is typically equated with sophistication, cultivation, and the ability to speak Ponapean well" (Rehg & Sohl 1981:359).[23] When I mentioned this idea to a younger speaker of Pohnpeian, who in all likelihood did not yet fully command honorific speech styles, he reacted extremely positively and assured me that if I charged $5 for the book, I could make lots of money![24]

Other types of community grammars were also suggested to me during my last visit to Pohnpei. These include a pedagogical grammar designed specifically for second language learners, a comparative grammar that would discuss differences and similarities among Pohnpeian and neighboring languages, a contrastive grammar that would compare English and Pohnpeian grammatical structures, and a historical grammar that would discuss the origins of Pohnpeian and how it evolved. It is easy to think of still others, all of which would likely gain an audience on the island.

23　See also Rehg 1998 for comments on the acquisition of Pohnpeian honorific speech.
24　While completing the final draft of this chapter, I received a telephone call from a Pohnpeian who currently lives in Honolulu telling me of his plans to write a 'manual of meing' and asking for my advice. Clearly, this is an idea whose time has come.

7.0   CONCLUSION: WHAT ARE LINGUISTS GOOD FOR? So, what are linguists good for? The defining mission of our discipline is the scientific study of language, but, as I hope to have illustrated in this chapter, our work, properly envisioned and presented, can also play a valuable role in language conservation efforts.

I am by no means holding up the Pohnpeian experience as a model for others. Each field situation is unique and must be approached with great sensitivity to the dynamics and aspirations of the community. I am also not suggesting that linguists abandon their current research to take up the task of sustaining minority languages. What I am instead proposing is that, even those who are most deeply committed to the development of linguistic theory might try to combine that work with the documentation and conservation of endangered languages. The simple fact is that there are more endangered and threatened languages than there are linguists to work on them. Connecting with these communities and working with such languages clearly has the potential to enrich all concerned. As Dobrin and Good (2009:629) have noted: "Linguistics could come to more closely resemble fields like medicine and economics, where interplay between theory and practice is welcomed in adding to their richness, and where 'applied' forms of work are not seen as belonging to a separate discipline."

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rehg@hawaii.edu