LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION & CONSERVATION

Vol. 16 (2022), pp. 25-31
http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/
http://hdl.handle.net/10125/74674
Revised Version Received: 31 Oct 2021

JONES, MARI C. & DAMIEN MOONEY (EDS.). 2020. *Creating orthographies for endangered languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ix + 333 pp. ISBN 978-1-316-60258-4. $32.99 paperback, $26 eBook.

Reviewed by Bryn Hauk, *University of Hawai'i at Mānoa*

It is widely accepted in the field of language documentation and conservation that an orthography is an essential component of language revitalization (Lüpke 1999), and yet neither expertise in linguistics nor native proficiency in the target language *alone* is sufficient to ensure the success of a new or reformed orthography in the community undergoing shift. These observations are illustrated in their full complexity in Mari C. Jones and Damien Mooney's *Creating Orthographies for Endangered Languages*. This edited volume brings together fourteen case studies pertaining to the study of orthography in endangered languages spanning the globe, introduced and contextualized by the editors' introductory chapter. The case studies are thematically and sociopolitically diverse, addressing questions of orthography creation, standardization, testing, and reform; the assignment of decision-making power among stakeholders in orthography planning; the challenges of balancing dialectal variation with cohesion across linked communities; and the effects of ideologies of correctness or localness, among others.

This book is a constructive and useful addition to previous literature, building on Cahill & Rice 2014, which addresses orthography development from scratch in more general terms, by providing in-depth examples with rich, language- and culture-specific context pertaining to communities at various stages of orthography development or reform. Like much scholarship in the field (Lüpke 1999; Seifart 2006; Sebba 2009), the book rightly highlights the importance of extralinguistic factors to the success of a writing system, convincingly illustrating that a new orthography, no matter how linguistically sound, will likely fail without consideration of the sociopolitical context, values, and motivation of the community. For readers familiar with the works I cited in this paragraph, the main contribution of *Creating Orthographies for Endangered Languages* is the assembly of diverse case studies where established frameworks in graphization are illustrated and evaluated. For readers new to the topic, the book succeeds in contextualizing these studies with necessary background information and limiting technical jargon such that the discussion remains, for the most part, accessible to more novice audiences.

In Chapter 1, the editors Mari C. Jones and Damien Mooney summarize the goals, challenges, and principles of orthography development for language communities undergoing shift and define key terms and concepts underlying the remainder of the book. Literacy and standardization – important concepts in the writing of any language – are discussed in the context of language endangerment, with special at-

E-ISSN 1934-5275

tention to different approaches to representing (or not representing) dialectal variation in orthographies. The chapter then lays out the linguistic factors in orthography development, presenting several viewpoints on what makes an orthography successful (the phonemic principle, morphophonemic spelling, the lexical orthographic hypothesis) and other linguistic considerations (orthographic depth, functional load, word boundaries, the marking of tone). Addressed next are extralinguistic factors: participation of native speakers, the community's interest in keeping their orthography distinct from that of other languages (ideological distanciation), transfer of literacy skills when orthographies resemble each other, learnability, and other practical concerns. The chapter ends with an overview of the volume.

In Chapter 2 "Who owns vernacular literacy? Assessing the sustainability of written vernaculars," Christopher Moseley reports results from a survey of thirty missionaries and linguists engaged in Roman-based orthography development projects. Responses from a pair of missionaries working on Tanna (Austronesian, Vanuatu) serve as a representative sample of the linguistic and extralinguistic factors at play in typical orthography projects surveyed. The discussion of survey results is followed by a consideration of factors involved in supporting vernacular literacy and the creation of written media.

In Chapter 3 "Hearing local voices, creating local content: Participatory approaches in orthography development for non-dominant language communities," Mansueto Casquite and Catherine Young describe the process of applying SIL's Alphabet Design Workshop approach (Easton & Wroge 2002) among several local language communities in the Philippines, with the goal of developing orthographies for mother-tongue-based multilingual education. The participatory workshops guide local language experts through writing a story in their language, compiling a phoneme inventory, selecting symbols to represent phonemes, plotting vowel formants, and rewriting participants' stories to reflect group decisions on the best graphemic representation of the languages. Limitations of the approach and the role of the facilitator are critically examined as well.

In Chapter 4 "Orthographies 'in the making': The dynamic construction of community-based writing systems among the Náayeri of North-Western Mexico," Margarita Valdovinos presents a case study of the social dynamics of orthography development for the Chwíse'etaana Náayeri language. The chapter details several previous unsuccessful attempts at introducing an orthography, which had failed to involve members of the language community. The author then describes the process and outcomes of her own week-long community-based workshop in 2012, which centered repeated interactions among "mediating actors" – teachers, local experts, political leaders, and outsider researchers – in the development of a provisional alphabet with far greater community buy-in, emphasizing that orthography planning is a long, dynamic, social process that is always "in the making."

In Chapter 5 "Community-driven, goal-centred orthography development: A Tsakhur case study," Kathleen Sackett presents another example of community-centered, participatory orthography development among the Tsakhur (Northeast Caucasian) community of Azerbaijan. With the Russian border separating communities of Tsakhur speakers, the Azerbaijan-based project faced additional chal-

lenges in developing a Roman-based alphabet that meets the community's chosen goals: a sustainable, technologically portable orthography that will appeal to young speakers and correspond straightforwardly to the Cyrillic-based orthography used by Tsakhurs in Russia. The chapter is rich with examples of linguistic challenges addressed through community-based decision-making, such as representing semivowels and glottal stops, selectively marking palatalization to facilitate learnability among the youth, and capturing a large phonemic inventory on a standard Azerbaijani Roman keyboard.

In Chapter 6 "Writing for speaking: The N|uu orthography," Sheena Shah and Matthias Brenzinger describe a joint effort among community members and linguists to develop an orthography for N|uu, a phonemically rich non-Bantu click language of South Africa. Given the challenge of producing pedagogical materials in a situation where "the speakers are non-literate and the literate are non-speakers" (124), the choice was made to design a shallow orthography, purposefully overrepresenting the remarkably large phoneme inventory of N|uu – to facilitate learning by new speakers and increase the accessibility of archival materials written in various transcription systems. The many interesting examples in this chapter illustrate the linguistic and extralinguistic challenges in creating a complex orthography that suits the community's pedagogical needs.

In Chapter 7 "Reflections on the Kala biŋatuwã, a three-year-old alphabet from Papua New Guinea," Christine Schreyer discusses the reflections of the Kala (Austronesian, Papua New Guinea) community three years after the initial development of the *Kala biŋatuwã* (Kala alphabet). The alphabet was developed through a community-based project using a parallel dialectal approach, where speakers write in their own dialect using a standardized set of symbols that represents the sounds of all dialects, in contrast to a previous attempt by SIL linguists to develop a unilectal Kala orthography. The chapter then details the process of facilitating group discussions on community members' experiences with the parallel dialectal alphabet three years after initial decision-making, showing the value of treating graphization as a dynamic, ongoing, and collaborative process.

In Chapter 8 "When letters represent more than sounds: Ideology versus practicality in the development of a standard orthography for Ch'orti' Mayan," Kerry Hull provides a case study in which ideological factors play a major role in the adoption of an orthography in the Ch'orti' Mayan community of Guatemala. Earlier orthographies for this language included a pan-Mayan alphabet designed to follow Spanish conventions as closely as possible. Grassroots revitalization efforts among Mayan communities led to the creation of a competing pan-Mayan orthography that deliberately distanced the alphabet from the Spanish-centric, SIL-backed orthography in use. The Ch'orti' activists quoted in this chapter highlight where questions of linguistic "accuracy" of the alphabet pale in comparison to the need for a sense of Indigenous ownership and distance from colonial and Christian authority.

In Chapter 9 "The difficult task of finding a standard writing system for the Sioux languages," Avelino Corral Esteban reviews twenty-five existing transcription systems for Sioux (Siouan, US/Canada) with the goal of identifying which most faithfully reflects the pronunciation of both major dialect groups, Dakota and Lakota.

The chapter details the many orthographic representations of Siouan phonology at length. The author also factors in extralinguistic issues, including transferability from English literacy and other aspects of learnability, political and ideological concerns, and technological factors such as Unicode compatibility.

In Chapter 10 "Orthography development in Sardinia: The case of *Limba Sarda Comuna*," Rosangela Lai evaluates the *Limba Sarda Comuna* (LSC) orthography of Sardinian (Indo-European, Autonomous Region of Sardinia, Italy). Adopted in 2006 without testing and without consulting speakers of Sardinian, the LSC purportedly followed a multidialectal approach (attempting to represent both dialects) while adhering to two principles: the etymological criterion, privileging closeness to Latin, and the distinctiveness criterion, highlighting unique features of Sardinian. The author shows that adherence to the etymological criterion undermined any attempted multidialectalism, favoring the more conservative Logudorese dialect over Campidanese Sardinian. Further, the distinctiveness criterion resulted in discrepancies with the Italian alphabet, hindering literacy and negatively impacting language planning and conservation efforts.

In Chapter 11 "Breton orthographies: An increasingly awkward fit," Steve Hewitt compares choices for an orthography for Breton (Indo-European, France) on linguistic criteria, arguing for his own etymologically based, supradialectal proposal as an approach to cover Breton's four partially mutually intelligible dialects. The social divide between native speakers and "neo-speakers" is also taken under consideration, with Hewitt concluding that the "authentic" pronunciation of traditional native speakers should take precedence over the varieties spoken by new speakers.

In Chapter 12 "Spelling trouble: Ideologies and practices in Giernesiei/Dgernesiais/Guernesiais/Guernésiais/Djernezié...," Julia Sallabank and Yan Marquis present the case of Guernesiais (one possible spelling of the language spoken on Guernsey, off the coast of France), where transfer of literacy from both English and French results in challenging inconsistencies in the not-yet-standardized written language. Where the orthographic conventions of French bring prestige and a sense of historic "correctness" or "purity," the dominance of English on Guernsey makes English spelling conventions more immediately accessible to many learners. After consideration of linguistic and social factors, with examples from speakers' and learners' writings, the authors propose an orthography that makes use of conventions from both French and English, intending to ease the burden on learners in balance with the symbolic value of certain graphemic choices.

In Chapter 13 "Orthography development on the Internet: Romani on YouTube," D. Viktor Leggio and Yaron Matras explore new communication technologies to shed light on writing Romani, a geographically dispersed minority language of Europe with no standardized orthography. By analyzing comments on YouTube videos, the authors uncover multiple networks of Romani writers connecting with each other throughout the diaspora, utilizing spelling conventions of their respective regional languages of wider communication. In the absence of prescriptive attitudes about proper Romani spelling, this bottom-up, polycentric graphization process mediated by online social networks breaks through the geographic fragmentation of the language community. Emergent practices of flexible, creative, unstructured literacy

maintain cultural pluralism and enable communication without a strictly uniform standard.

In Chapter 14 "Orthography creation for postvernacular languages: Case studies of Rama and Francoprovençal revitalization," Bénédicte Pivot and Michel Bert demonstrate the value and function of new orthographies of postvernacular languages, which exhibit "dynamics of social practices when the semiotic symbolic function of language prevails over its semiotic-communicative functions" (277). For both Rama (Chibchan, Nicaragua) and Francoprovençal (Indo-European, Western Europe), the language communities value the maintenance of the heritage language in certain social and symbolic functions, without undertaking practices that will result in "re-vernacularization." For these communities, orthography development is undertaken to legitimize the language, per the ideology that "true" languages have writing systems, and to increase the visibility of the language through written materials. Writing therefore becomes an identity marker without claiming to restore the lost communicative functions of these languages.

In Chapter 15 "Changing script in a threatened language: Reactions to romanization at Bantia in the first century BC," Katherine McDonald and Nicholas Zair offer a paleographic study of Oscan, an extinct Indo-European language of the ancient Mediterranean. The authors examine an Oscan inscription from Bantia, in present-day Italy, which dates to a time of transition: many languages were waning in face of a shift to Latin. The *Tabula Bantina* analyzed in this chapter had previously been suggested to be an attempt at language revitalization by introducing a new script – writing Oscan in a romanized alphabet instead of the older National Oscan alphabet. Through detailed examination of this inscription, the authors present evidence against the revitalization hypothesis, finding that Oscan should not be considered endangered at that time and cautioning scholars against viewing ancient writing through modern lenses of endangerment and revitalization.

Altogether, I believe this volume succeeds in its goals, addressing such questions as who should be involved in orthography development, how to balance the needs of different stakeholders, and, in particular, how current orthography development initiatives for endangered languages address linguistic and extralinguistic factors across a variety of sociopolitical contexts. Multiple case studies of orthography projects in languages with considerable dialectal variation provide useful examples that can apply to a wide range of endangered language communities. Further, discussions of the symbolic value of the written representation of language are especially valuable in the context of endangered languages, where community goals might not necessarily include restoration of the full communicative functions of the language.

A place where this volume deserves praise, and yet leaves room for expansion in future scholarship, is the diversity of orthography-planning projects presented as case studies. To clarify this point, Figure 1 presents a map of languages for which orthography projects were described at some length in this book.[1]

[1] I thank Bradley Rentz for rendering the finalized version of this map in QGIS.

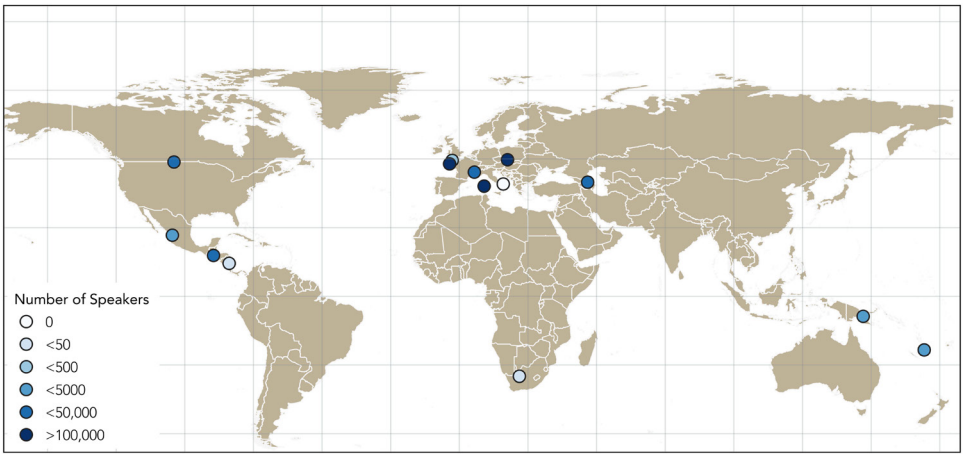

Figure 1. Geographic distribution of language communities represented in orthography case studies in Jones & Mooney 2020, color-coded by approximate number of speakers. Made with Natural Earth.

As shown in this map, there is considerable geographic and sociopolitical diversity among the projects discussed in this volume. (I chose to color the languages by approximate number of speakers as an admittedly poor stand-in for the appreciably different social and political contexts surrounding these languages.) At the same time, there are certainly gaps in the coverage, likely attributable to existing imbalances in available scholarship and documentation. Of particular note is the fact that all orthography projects in this volume use the Roman script. In future books of a similar nature, it would be desirable to see more attention paid to languages where community literacy is predominantly in a non-Roman script, which likely creates additional hurdles to technological accessibility.

One criticism I have is that, in places, the works in this volume sometimes default to a framework that I find problematic: the assumption that a linguist's chief consideration is always the linguistic "accuracy" of a proposed orthography, while native speakers' motivations are ideological and, by nature, dismissive of scientific validity. For example, the introductory chapter describes how Chapters 3–8 in this book "examine tensions between the linguist's mission to achieve maximum representation of speech, maximum ease of use in the newly developed orthography, and the (changing) will of natives speakers and community members – whose motivations are often identity based and ideological in nature" (32). This statement presents a false dichotomy in two ways: first that 'linguists' and 'native speakers' are necessarily different people and, even worse, that the former group is always logical, practical, and scientific, while the latter group is ideological and capricious. One need only to look to Hewitt's contribution to this volume (Chapter 11) to find an example to the contrary. Hewitt's choice to argue for representing "traditional," "authentic"

pronunciations of Breton while levying considerable blame on "neo-speakers" for their incorrect pronunciations is itself an ideology – and an especially alarming one in the context of language revitalization, where a lack of new speakers is a certain death sentence.

While such statements (ascribing purely scientific motivations to linguists and ideological motivations to native speakers) are fortunately rare in this volume, it is still important to remind ourselves not to fall into this flawed logic. Linguists too are ideologically driven, subject to caprices, and bound by political considerations. Native speakers are frequently scientifically motivated, interested in the accuracy of their writing systems, and may be linguists themselves.

Finally, in terms of readability, while this book largely succeeds in using straightforward language with limited jargon, there are some exceptions (Chapter 9 would be challenging for nonspecialists, and an overuse of nonce abbreviations limits the usefulness of Chapter 11). Unfortunately, in the print edition, numerous graphs, tables, and maps are difficult to read due to bad color scaling or small font sizes.

Creating Orthographies for Endangered Languages is an impressive, important, and, in places, inspirational work. I recommend it to anyone grappling with the many challenges of orthography development or revitalization in an endangered language community.

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Bryn Hauk
bhauk@hawaii.edu
orcid.org/0000-0003-4535-3689