

# Foreword

Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication No. 2 (May 2010):  
*Fieldwork and Linguistic Analysis in Indigenous Languages of the Americas*,  
 ed. by Andrea L. Berez, Jean Mulder, and Daisy Rosenblum, pp. iii-iv  
<http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/>  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10125/4462>

This timely special publication represents a welcome stage in the development of the field of linguistics. The discipline is witnessing an intertwining of approaches to the study of language that have been evolving, often as independent strands, for well over a century. Major progress has been made in all traditional domains: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse. The importance of understanding how linguistic categories and structures emerge over time, how children acquire them, and how social and cultural uses shape them are now widely recognized. More is being learned every day about how language is utilized by speakers for social and cultural purposes. Technological and analytic advances have opened up possibilities for discoveries unimaginable at the outset, from fine acoustic analysis to the manipulation of corpora. Theories are becoming ever stronger, more detailed, and more sophisticated as we learn more about what occurs in typologically diverse languages. This growth of knowledge has necessarily led to greater specialization on the part of individual researchers: there is simply too much for one person to master. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly clear that no aspect of language can be understood fully in isolation.

There has been a palpable shift in attitudes within the discipline, with greater respect among individual scholars for lines of research outside of their own, and greater appreciation of the contributions each can make toward understanding others. Where once distinctions were sometimes drawn between ‘description’ and ‘theory’, there is now general recognition of the fact that the two are necessarily interlocking elements of an empirically-based science. This recognition may have been stimulated, at least in part, by a heightened awareness of the immanent loss of linguistic diversity in the world. Informed documentation and description of endangered languages has become a priority for the field, as one by one, languages are slipping away before our eyes and ears.

The present collection is a fine example of the evolution of the discipline, in particular the fading of impenetrable boundaries. It is now understood that good language documentation and description require a strong theoretical foundation, an understanding of what is currently known about language and at least some of the puzzles that remain. All of the authors represented in this special publication bring such a background to their fieldwork, and each of the articles makes an incisive contribution to linguistic theory. At the same time, it is now generally accepted that any theory of value must be grounded in data. The papers collected here are exemplary in this regard. This volume represents the full range of structural domains, but each study also goes beyond the level of the specific patterns, markers, or constructions under consideration to examine the parts they play in larger domains and their import for larger issues. There is work on the phonetic values of reconstructed vowels as revealed through modern fieldwork; on the tonal foot and the role of low-level allophonic processes in the construction of phonological categories; on prosodic, morphological, and syntactic properties of a range of grammatical and lexical clitics and their implications for a general theory of clitics; on the reconstruction of a complex system of number inflection based on noun class; on non-finite inflection, its interaction with argument structure, and its syntactic function; on the semantic thread of event construal linking seemingly disparate uses of the middle voice; on the spatial, temporal, and discourse functions of determiners; and on the structural, pragmatic, and social functions of discourse markers.



Another fading boundary is that between academic linguists on one side and members of language communities on the other. Work on individual languages, particularly those spoken by smaller populations and those in danger of disappearance, must be shaped not just by current linguistic theory but equally if not more by the needs and desires of communities. Our understanding of linguistic structure would be seriously impoverished without the dedication and insight of the speakers who collaborate in this work. More and more community members are becoming scholars. A recurring theme running through this volume is the important insights provided by speakers.

The papers collected here also reflect a maturing of methodology in the field. There are rich discussions of the interplay between data and theory; between elicitation and unplanned spontaneous speech; between direct observation of speech and the insights of speakers; between qualitative and quantitative findings; between current data and analyses and earlier documentation and description. These threads have always been present in the discipline, but not necessarily within the work of individual scholars. It has long been recognized that linguistics includes elements of hard science, of social science, and of the humanities. It has an empirical basis, with strict standards of responsibility to the data. It is a social phenomenon. It is also a human phenomenon, directly concerned with a product of the human mind. The optimal methodologies for the study of language are not necessarily precisely the same as those for physics, mathematics, psychology, philosophy, or literature. In a sense we can see linguistics coming into its own as a discipline, with its own blend of methodologies. The present special publication provides a fine example of this blend.

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