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Introduction

Peter K. Austin and Andrew Simpson

It is generally agreed that today there are about 6,700 languages spoken across the world and at least half of these are under threat of extinction. Current language distribution shows that there is a small number of very large languages (the top 20 are spoken by 50% of the world's population) and very many small languages with speaker communities in their thousands or hundreds. Economic, political, social and cultural power is generally in the hands of the speakers of the large languages, while the many thousands of small languages are marginalised and under pressure. In the past six decades, from about the end of the Second World War onwards, there has been radical reduction in speaker numbers of smaller autochthonous languages, especially in Australia and the Americas. In addition, speaker communities show increasing age profiles where older people continue to speak the languages but younger ones do not and have shifted towards the few larger regional or multinational languages. This process can take place rapidly, over a generation or two, often via a period of unstable multilingualism, or it can be gradual, but inexorable, and extend over several generations.

Beginning in 1990, linguists such as Ken Hale, Michael Krauss, Akira Yamamoto and Colette Grinevald began to bring the loss of languages to the attention of the community of linguistic scholars, with Krauss (1992) making the radical prediction that in the 21st century up to 90% of human languages would become extinct. While this figure may be overstated, even more widely accepted lower estimates of 50% loss (see Gordon 2005) still mean that more than 3,000 languages will disappear over the next 100 years. Loss of linguistic diversity on this scale is unprecedented in the history of the world, and represents a massive social and cultural loss, not only to the speakers of the particular languages but to humanity and science in general. This has been pointed out clearly in works intended for linguists and the general public by David Crystal, Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, Lenore Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley, Andrew Dalby and others. Unesco has also promoted the issue under the banner of loss of 'intangible cultural heritage', focusing on how unique human knowledge and experience encoded in languages is lost when they cease to be spoken and passed on to future generations.

In these various works and in other publicity about endangered languages, it is often asserted that one of the reasons for concern is that world-wide linguistic extinction will lead to loss of important information to linguistic science. Hale (1998:192) states:

The loss of linguistic diversity is a loss to scholarship and science. ... While a major goal of linguistic science is to define universal grammar, i.e. to determine what is constant and invariant in the grammars of all natural languages, attainment of that goal is severely hampered, some would say impossible, in the absence of linguistic diversity.

and again Hale (1998:193) says:

without linguistic diversity it would be impossible for us to perform the central task of linguistic science, i.e. the task of developing a realistic theory of human linguistic competence, realistic in the sense that it properly reflects not only the limits on the manner in which grammatical structure is determined by the properties of lexical items, for example, but also the impressive diversity of surface form in the observable structures of natural languages.

Similar sentiments may be found in Nettle and Romaine (2000:10–11), with further emphasis on the necessarily limited range of data currently available in linguistic descriptions:

[f]or scientific reasons alone, languages are worth preserving. Linguists need to study as many different languages as possible if they are to perfect their theories of language structure and to train future generations of students in linguistic analysis. ... New and exciting discoveries about language are still being made. There is every reason to believe that what we know now is but the tip of the iceberg. ... Satisfying answers to many current puzzles about languages and their origins will not emerge until linguists have studied many languages. To exclude exotic languages from our study is like expecting botanists to study only florist shop roses and greenhouse tomatoes and then tell us what the plant world is like.

In planning and putting together this volume, we decided that its primary goal should be showcasing the valuable contributions which the study of endangered languages can bring to the field of linguistics in general. We sent out an invitation to a range of specialists soliciting chapters based either on new research or on previous studies which would illustrate the richness of the endangered languages they had experience working with, drawing attention to potentially uncommon and informative features in these languages, or significant variations of more widespread linguistic properties which help shed light on the parameters of cross-linguistic variation and the range of diversity in natural language. In attempting to present a broad picture of the large amount of valuable work being carried out on endangered languages, we have included chapters on endangered languages from different parts of the world, including Australia, Africa, North, Central and South America, the Asia-Pacific region, South Asia, and the Caucasus. The volume also offers studies on a wide variety of different phenomena, with chapters focusing on specific aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, as well as the general development of studies on endangered languages. In the following we give a brief introduction and overview of the various chapters, highlighting certain of the important contributions and claims they each make and how they frequently illustrate typologically unusual and intriguing patterns. In terms of the physical organization of the volume, it should be noted that the contributions have been ordered in a way to maximize variety in terms of subject matter and language provenance as readers work their way

through the volume, so we have deliberately avoided grouping chapters according to linguistic sub-field (syntax, phonology etc) or continent of reference.

The first contribution, chapter 1 written by **Nicholas Evans**, is a fascinating overview of endangered languages and their characteristics in Australia, where language loss is more severe and more accelerated than in any other continent, with a 95% extinction rate expected to be reached during the course of the coming decades. Evans documents a variety of ways in which Australian languages provide important information about the syntactic, semantic, phonological and sociolinguistic systems of human language, showing a number of features that may not be attested anywhere else in the world's documented languages. Referring to Kayardild as "a superb example of an 'unimaginable language'", Evans describes the highly complex way in which syntactic information relating to the integration of nouns in noun-phrases and clauses is encoded in an extremely rich system of case-marking which can in certain environments result in a single noun being marked with as many as four different case suffixes. In one example carefully dissected in the chapter, the nominal element 'brother' in a noun-phrase meaning 'with brother's boomerang' appears marked with genitive case, instrumental case, ablative case and oblique case all stacked as suffixes on the single noun 'brother' and partially repeated elsewhere on other elements in the surrounding syntactic structure. One of these case-markers is furthermore noted to be an instance of a 'modal case' system which provides information about tense and mood, spread onto various elements within a clause, Kayardild being one of only two languages in the world having such a system (the other being the related Australian language Lardil).

Evans' chapter also observes that a pronounced sensitivity to kinship relations often manifests itself in highly developed linguistic ways in Australian languages, such as the occurrence of semantically complex lexical items (e.g. in Gun-djehmi a full system of 'tri-relational' kin terms allowing for the expression of different perspectives on kinship relations), particular types of verbal agreement morphology (e.g. 'harmonic' agreement, encoding whether members of a plural subject are perceived as being of the same generation), and special 'respect registers' sometimes referred to as 'brother-in-law languages' or 'mother-in-law languages', which deviate substantially from neutral registers in the occurrence of lexical but not functional elements. Interesting and sometimes unique patterns of linguistic variation are furthermore found in the existence of 'initiation registers' associated with certain languages in Australia. In one such phonologically very rich system known as Damin, learned and spoken by Lardil male initiates, five distinct airstream types are made use of, giving rise to sounds attested nowhere else in the world as phonemic elements. In charting all of this exotic variation Evans stresses that many of the particularly special linguistic properties of Australia's endangered languages may be very fragile, easily missed by casual investigation and in need of careful and immediate documentation before last speakers pass away together with their languages over the years to come. He adds that much of what is currently known about languages such as

Kayardild in fact could not have been discovered had not documentary work begun twenty to thirty years ago, before the stock of speakers was reduced to its present low level (under ten in the case of Kayardild). For other indigenous languages of Australia it may now be too late to record and understand the fullness of their structures due to language loss and the continued encroachment of monolingual English culture among younger generations.

Chapter 2 by **Knut Olawsky** considers issues of word order and specifically the potential existence of Object-Verb-Subject (OVS) sequences as the basic word order of a language. As has often been pointed out in the literature, the combination of a verb with a subject and an object in theory permits six different word order formats: (i) SVO, (ii) SOV, (iii) VSO, (iv) VOS, (v) OSV, and (vi) OVS. Pre-theoretically, these might be expected to occur in the languages of the world with equal or similar frequency. However, in instances where a neutral, basic order of S/V/O elements can indeed be identified in a language, it is overwhelmingly found that this will be one of the first three types (i–iii), where the common factor is that the subject regularly precedes the object (S>O). Extremely few languages have been confirmed as having as basic any of the alternative O>S sequencings in (iv–vi). Furthermore, where O>S languages are known to exist, they commonly seem to be of type (iv) with VOS order (such as, for example, Malagasy), rather than types (v) OSV and (vi) OVS. Though occasional reports of languages having OVS orders have filtered through over the forty years since Greenberg's pioneering work on word order typology, there is considerable and serious doubt about the reliability of past descriptions of 'OVS' languages. In various instances it is conceded that S-final word orders (such as OVS) may in fact only occur under certain conditions, indicating an inconsistency in the ordering of S/V/O, and the possibility that OVS is actually not the basic word order of the language. Coupled with a lack of statistical evidence on the occurrence of OVS versus other orders attested in the languages described, and a poor level of general detail on the syntactic properties of such 'OVS' languages, many have questioned whether there are any languages that can be reliably characterized as basic OVS. By presenting patterns from Urarina, a language isolate with close to 3,000 speakers located in Peru, Olawsky's chapter very convincingly shows that this language can indeed finally and most definitely be confirmed as having the elusive OVS word order as basic. He shows that OVS is the unmarked order in both main and subordinate clauses, and is statistically much more common than other orders found in the language. With careful and clear description and statistical support, he significantly shows that deviations from the basic OVS (and VS) pattern are also entirely predictable and related to instances of focus and emphasis (as well as negative-marking and the occurrence of a particular modal construction), resulting in an overall picture of Urarina as an OVS language that is fully plausible and linguistically robust in a way that previous descriptions of OVS arguably have not been.

Olawsky's chapter is an important and very welcome piece of documentation and analysis which should prove to be very useful as a resource and inspira-

tion for typologists, functionalists and those working within formal frameworks. In addition to information on the ordering of S/V/O elements, the chapter provides a clear description of the positioning of postpositional phrases (PPs), adjuncts, adverbs and subordinate clauses, and so allows the structure of the language to be compared with word order properties of other languages along a broad range of parameters. A brief comparison of Urarina with other O>S languages of the VOS type in section 7 of Olawsky's chapter indicates that typologically the O>S property may be a poor predictor of other word orders, and that Urarina has much more clearly in common with other OV (head-final) languages than with VOS languages, having postpositions, clause-final subordinators and TAM suffixes. While the general linguistic puzzle as to why there are not more occurrences of OVS languages in the world still remains at the end of the chapter, significantly 'ObViuS OVS in Urarina syntax' makes it clear, perhaps for the first time, that neutral OVS is a possibility that natural languages really do exhibit, and thereby challenges linguists to incorporate this information into global theoretical models.

In chapter 3 the volume moves from syntax to phonology with an investigation by **Larry Hyman** and **Imelda Udoh** of a potential case of vowel length harmony in an Upper Cross language of Nigeria. Commonly it is assumed that the features involved in processes of vowel harmony are restricted to front (palatal harmony), round (labial harmony), open/close (height harmony), and ATR/RTR (cross-height harmony; tense-lax harmony), and that length harmony does not occur. With a consideration of data from Leggbó, however, Hyman and Udoh offer convincing arguments that length harmony may in fact need to be accepted as a further potential form of vowel harmony. When certain pronominal object enclitics in Leggbó are added to bi-syllabic stems and undergo fusion with an underlying -a suffix, the result is a clear lengthening of the vowel of the root in apparent harmony with the coalesced long vowel caused by cliticization. If this is indeed an instance of length harmony and length harmony has to be concluded to exist, a number of important questions are immediately raised relating to the way that length is represented and the fundamental nature and source of vowel harmony in general. Though there are additional reasons which hold the authors back from declaring outright that Leggbó unquestionably proves the existence of length harmony – notably other language-internal factors which conspire to reduce the potential visibility of the posited process of length harmony – the patterns discussed are nevertheless very clearly supportive of a length harmony analysis and less convincingly analyzed in other ways, as the authors demonstrate. The chapter therefore provocatively re-opens debate on the issue of length in phonology and challenges widely-held assumptions concerning the limits of variation in systems of vowel harmony.

Chapter 4 of the volume, by **Nora England**, is not so directly concerned with any uncommon individual properties of the endangered languages it refers to from the Mayan group, but rather with the special process of their study over recent decades, and the way that impressive progress has increasingly been

made in linguistic documentation by indigenous linguists, who have now come to lead efforts to describe and revitalize threatened Mayan languages in Guatemala. From an earlier situation in which outside linguists were the primary force in documenting languages of the Mayan group in Guatemala, years of serious civil disturbance from 1978 to 1984 led to a major reduction in the presence of the outside specialists in the country, and the possibility that documentation of the Mayan languages might be largely discontinued. However, as part of a reaction to general pressure on the Mayan languages created by widespread language shift to Spanish, a new movement of Mayan cultural affirmation emphasized the central importance of Mayan languages for Mayan identity and resulted in a number of Mayas taking up the study of linguistics both in domestic university programs and also institutes abroad. This in turn led to an ‘explosion of linguistic productivity’ on the part of speakers of Mayan languages, and the application of linguistics to education and language policy, as well as the development of high quality description and analysis of the Mayan languages. England points out that around the world it is still rather uncommon for speakers of endangered languages to be so actively involved in the documentation and analysis of their own languages and the situation in Guatemala may indeed be unparalleled elsewhere in Latin America, though is a clear inspiration for the growth of programs of domestically-led minority language description in all parts of the world. The establishment of such a new generation of indigenous, well-trained and proficient Mayan linguists in Guatemala is also likely to have the further potential benefit that certain of these individuals may in future accede to positions of influence and authority in areas of government and education which directly effect language policy, and so bring speakers of Mayan languages into roles where they can help direct official policy towards the country’s endangered languages in more positive and equitable ways.

Chapter 5, by **Pamela Munro**, considers the development and patterning of ‘quirky subjects’ in an Arawakan language of Central America, Garifuna. The term ‘quirky subject’ is commonly applied to nominal elements bearing experiencer roles in languages such as Icelandic and Hindi which display only a partial set of the properties commonly associated with subjects of other clauses in the particular language, such as verbal agreement, anaphor control, control of reference in equi-deletion, the possibility of raising to higher subject positions etc. Other typical, formal, identificational properties of subjects including nominative case (in nominative-accusative languages) may however be absent from ‘subject’ experiencer arguments, leading to such elements also being referred to as ‘non-nominative subjects’ and frequently being found marked with a case-form such as dative. One aspect of Munro’s study of Garifuna which is particularly interesting and important is that it shows, perhaps for the first time ever, that quirky ‘non-nominative’ subjects may also develop in languages with no overt case-marking. Quirky subjects in Garifuna are in fact preposition-marked oblique nominals rather than dative-case-marked NPs, and interestingly occur

marked with a variety of prepositions, including the equivalents of benefactive ‘for’ and comitative ‘with’ as well as a more dative-like goal equivalent of ‘to’.

In leading the reader to the conclusion that quirky subjects do indeed exist in Garifuna, Munro carefully describes a range of both morphological and syntactic features identifying subjects in the language and observes that these can be divided into two distinct groups which she calls ‘subject coding properties’ and ‘subject behavioral properties’. The former includes control of agreement on the verb, and occurrence in immediately post-verbal position (resulting in typical VS(O) structures occurring in Garifuna). The latter includes the ability to undergo raising to a higher subject position with the verb ‘to start’ (*gumesaru*), the ability to occur as a causee in causative constructions (both properties not open to objects or regular obliques), the triggering of a certain configuration when extracted in *wh*-questions and relative clauses quite distinct from the relativization and questioning of objects and obliques, and various other relational properties in passive constructions and with the use of anaphors. Munro then notes that though the majority of subjects in Garifuna commonly show both sets of (subject) properties, in certain instances where an experiencer occurs as part of the argument structure of a predicate, the coding and behavioral properties may be associated with two separate nominal elements in the clause, and the experiencer argument may show the full range of behavioral properties of subjects but critically not the coding properties. The latter are instead found to be linked with theme-like nominals in transitive predicates, or expletive elements (enclitic on the verb) in semantically intransitive predicates. In all these cases where canonical subject properties are split between two elements in the clause, Munro refers to the experiencer argument as the ‘functional subject’ and the immediately post-verbal theme nominal or expletive enclitic as the ‘formal subject’. Importantly, the experiencer functional subjects in such formally transitive structures are all clearly prepositional phrases, but show a syntactic patterning that is quite distinct from regular obliques formed with prepositions, strongly supporting their treatment as the ‘logical subjects’ of the clauses they occur in.

With its demonstration that Garifuna has a class of quirky ‘non-nominative’ subjects which are actually prepositional phrases occurring in a language with no morphological case distinctions, Munro’s study allows for a broader and potentially better understanding of the notion of quirky subject, taking it beyond overt case-marking languages and inviting researchers to consider the possible occurrence of quirky functional subjects in languages without case. The wealth of detail provided on Garifuna and the particular properties that identify subjects in the language will also be a valuable resource for the cross-linguistic comparison of subject properties and how these may be split between (and incrementally acquired by) different elements (and in somewhat different and informative ways – e.g. quirky subjects in Icelandic occur in the canonical subject position but those in Garifuna do not). Finally, the multiple preposition source of quirky subjects in Garifuna adds a strong argument for a particular view of the directionality of diachronic development present in non-nominative subject struc-

tures, and does this in a way that is often not possible in languages where quirky subjects occur marked with a single default case such as dative.

Next we have chapter 6 of the volume, written by the team of **Marina Chumakina, Anna Kibort and Greville Corbett**. At the theoretical level this piece of new research is concerned with the general nature and distribution of morpho-syntactic features, and at the empirical level with arguing for the existence of a particular feature in Archi, a Daghestanian language of the Caucasus. The authors work with the assumption that not all languages make use of the same inventories of morpho-syntactic features, and that explicit evidence for the occurrence and effects of a feature must be found before its presence can be posited in any specific language. Such a task of discovery and identification may in various instances not be straightforward and require careful consideration of a wide range of patterns in a language. In the particular illustrative case examined in the chapter, the authors present extended argumentation that the feature *person* exists in the active feature inventory of Archi, despite common assumptions that person is not made use of in the language and the observation that there are no phonologically distinct forms which realize such a category. Quite generally, they suggest that an important distinction needs to be made between the cognitive category of person, and morpho-syntactic features which may correspond to this category in any individual language. While the former cognitive category may be assumed to exist in a language if it allows for a distinction to be made between two or more of the basic participants in a speech act, the morpho-syntactic feature of person as a grammaticalization of the cognitive category may only be concluded to occur if such a feature can be shown to participate in (overt) agreement phenomena in the language. The chapter therefore sets out to show that person does indeed play a role in agreement within Archi, despite having no independent phonological form.

Chumakina et al begin with a detailed and highly informative review of common agreement phenomena in Archi which can be satisfactorily modeled via the categories of gender and number alone and without reference to any category of person. They then focus specifically on agreement patterns with personal pronouns, including those that may be used for non-human reference. Once speakers' intuitions are tested in the generation of a full paradigm of such forms, the authors find a clear need for an extension of the pure gender-number-based analysis of agreement in the language. They argue that while it might in theory be possible to develop a gender-number-based analysis further to account for the personal pronoun patterns, such an analysis would be considerably complicated and counterintuitive in nature, and a more parsimonious and preferable alternative is to assume that person is indeed active in Archi as a morpho-syntactic feature determining agreement, though often considerably hidden. Once such a feature is posited as playing a role in the language, the agreement rules are seen to be less complicated, the gender system simpler in design, and an unnecessary homonymy is eliminated from the system of personal pronouns. The authors also note that though the posited Archi person feature may appear

somewhat out-of-the-ordinary from an Indo-European perspective, having no unique phonology and being restricted to (dependent) realization in plural agreement forms only, if such a feature is considered from a Daghestinian view, it is significantly less unusual. Daghestinian languages have person marking and personal agreement that is rather different in nature from that found in Indo-European languages. The chapter therefore not only makes its theoretical point that the active feature inventories of languages may vary and need to be unearthed by careful procedures of discovery, but in the full discussion of person as a potential feature of Archi it also provides a very interesting description of agreement phenomena in a set of unfamiliar endangered languages which is likely to be highly instructive for most readers.

Chapter 7 by **Friederike Lüpke** considers Jalonke, a Central Mande language of Guinea, West Africa, and a construction in which transitive verbs appear with a single (typically) patient argument. Although there is no morphological marking of voice change on the verb in such instances, Lüpke presents a set of empirical arguments that configurations of this kind should be considered occurrences of passive, on a par with more commonly accepted periphrastic or auxiliary-signalled passive constructions, and that morphologically zero-coded passive forms should be added to the cross-linguistic typology of passive despite having generally been excluded in the past. Lüpke observes that there are no strong a priori theoretical reasons for discounting the occurrence of passive constructions in largely isolating languages such as Jalonke and that if such languages incorporate constructions which are semantically, pragmatically and syntactically equivalent to passives in other languages, the common criteria for determination of passive should be expanded to include constructions of this kind.

Jalonke itself, like other Mande languages, has many interesting features, and shows an unusual SOVX word order, where X is the position of adjuncts (hence Mande languages are unlike more commonly described SOV languages such as Japanese, Korean and Turkish which are strictly verb-final, with adjuncts preceding the verb in various positions). In the putative passive construction, Lüpke shows that [NP_{PATIENT} V] sequences cannot be analyzed as simple active forms with an empty subject, as Jalonke does not permit null arguments, and the position of negation (following the NP_{PATIENT} in such sequences) unequivocally indicates that the patient ‘object’ is in surface subject position. Topicalization is also ruled out as a potential analysis of [NP_{PATIENT} V] forms as topicalization in Jalonke regularly requires the use of a resumptive pronoun. The very natural conclusion is therefore that Jalonke indeed has a passive syntactic construction despite the absence of overt voice morphology on the verb or the appearance of any special auxiliary. Such a conclusion not only has interesting consequences for the theoretical analysis of passive (whatever framework this may be carried out in, Lexical Functional Grammar, Relational Grammar, Minimalism etc), it also makes the broader point that typologically oriented definitions of linguistic phenomena based on existing restricted knowledge can some-

times result in normative statements which actually hinder rather than help further linguistic discovery. In the particular instance of passive, an acceptance of the genuine occurrence of passive structures with zero morphological coding might well lead to a wider cross-linguistic recognition of such forms and result in a revision of descriptions of the prototypical properties of active/passive alternations.

The subject matter of chapter 8, by **Anju Saxena**, is the distribution and use of the ergative marker in Kinnauri, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Himachel Pradesh state of northern India. The ergative marker in this language occurs regularly, and almost obligatorily, on the subject of clauses which introduce direct speech. It also occurs with the subject of transitive verbs in other environments, but with considerably less frequency and apparent optionality. This difference in distribution is rather puzzling and presents the challenge of trying to understand whether a unified analysis of the usage of the ergative marker is possible and what common factors may dictate or encourage use of the ergative marker in different contexts. Saxena shows that a careful study of narrative structures in Kinnauri does indeed allow for a unified analysis and argues that the occurrence of the ergative marker is specifically linked to the construction of discourse perspective and shifts in the presentation of narrative context. Concerning the first prominent use of the ergative marker in introducing direct speech, referred to as the '*he-said* construction', she suggests that this critically functions to highlight a shift in the deictic center of a narrative, from descriptive narration to the expressive mode of direct speech, drawing the listeners' attention to the change in the mode of narration and bringing into focus "the identity of the speaker whose world the listener is about to enter." As for its apparently much more optional use in other environments, a detailed tracking of the occurrence of the ergative marker through bodies of narrative discourse leads Saxena to the conclusion that it regularly functions as a contrastive focus marker in non-*he-said* contexts marking information which diverges from the normal or default expectation, often describing surprise. Such a conclusion is also well supported by the frequent presence of emphatic pronoun forms and a marked word order when the ergative marker is present in such non-*he-said* environments. In both cases of *he-said* and contrastive focus usage, Saxena suggests that the ergative marker seems to have the function of encoding and emphasizing a shift in narrative perspective that is perceived as being significant by the narrator/speaker, either being a shift away from the narrator as the source of the content of the narration, or being a shift away from default expectations that listeners might have with regard to the events being described in the narration.

Saxena's chapter will certainly be interesting for readers who are more accustomed to languages in which case-marking is fully obligatory in all environments in which it may be licensed. The patterns and their analysis in Kinnauri are also instructive for potentially improving our understanding of the way that case systems may operate in close interaction with discourse functions, and whether it should be assumed that structural case-markers develop from parti-

cles which originate with discourse functions (as might be suggested by patterns in classical Japanese), or whether the discourse functions of a particle might alternatively result from prior establishment as the marker of a syntactic relation (as might perhaps be concluded in Kinnauri from the restriction of the ‘focus’ particle to occurrence with the subjects of transitive verbs).

Chapter 9 of the volume is a broad typological sampling and presentation of some of the particularly unusual and striking phonological properties of languages of the Asia-Pacific region stretching from southern China through Southeast Asia to New Guinea and the Pacific Ocean, where many thousands of endangered languages from dozens of language families are located. Beginning with an overview of phoneme inventory size and structure in different parts of the region, **John Hajek** points out that both very small and extremely large phoneme systems are found in languages of the region, with Nyaheun (Mon-Khmer) being at the top of the scale with as many as 85 phonemes (58 consonants, 27 vowels) and a typologically exceptional seven-way stop system produced via different combinations of length, preglottalization, voice and aspiration. At the other end of the scale, Taba and Leti, both spoken in Eastern Indonesia, have comparatively small phoneme inventories, but make use of these to produce an unusual range of consonant clusters in word-initial position. Taba, for example, permits twelve different word-onset geminates, including very unusual forms such as /ww/ and /hh/. Taba and Leti also present counterexamples to certain of Greenberg’s generalizations about permissible phonotactic structures in the languages of the world, e.g. both his Principle 15 that an initial lateral can never be followed by an r-type sound, and Principle 21 that a prevocalic consonant cannot be preceded by a voiced consonant (unless it is a homorganic nasal). Elsewhere in his useful and engaging description of both areal tendencies and individual points of interest of phonological systems found in the Asia-Pacific Hajek draws attention to the occurrence of further uncommon segmental phenomena such as linguolabial consonants (articulated with the tongue protruding between the teeth and making direct contact with the upper lip), bilabial trills, velar laterals, creaky voiced glottal approximants, epiglottal stops, labial flaps and other exotic, contrastive sounds sometimes unattested outside the Asia-Pacific area. Hajek emphasizes that the diversity reported in the chapter is only a small part of the broad variation that exists in the region which has still to be discovered as many hundreds of endangered languages in the area continue to remain largely undescribed and little known.

Next in the volume is a formal study aimed at modeling evidentials and evidentiality in Cusco Quechua, chapter 10 by **Martina Faller**. In recent years there has been a dramatic increase of interest in the topic of evidentiality and reports of much variation in the cross-linguistic occurrence of evidential systems, their meaning, range, and morpho-syntactic encoding. Faller sets out to explore some of the issues evidentials raise for current semantic/pragmatic theories through the focused study of one particular evidential in Cusco Quechua, the Reportative marker, and its interaction with speech act theory. Faller notes that

sentences containing the Reportative evidential might seem to have two contradictory properties: they participate in veridical rhetorical relations such as *Narration*, *Result* etc, and can be used to express the same types of speech acts as standard assertives, yet the speaker does not assert that s/he believes the propositional content expressed in such sentences. In order to account for this situation and resolve the apparent conflict present in sentences incorporating the Reportative evidential, Faller makes use of Segmented Discourse Representation Theory (SDRT), an approach which draws a clear distinction between discourse information and information about the speech act participants' beliefs and intentions. She arrives at a well-defined formal model of the Reportative and its semantic and pragmatic contribution to discourse. Such an exploratory but plausible analysis of the Cusco Quechua Reportative raises the question whether evidentials in other languages might potentially be modeled in similar ways, and, as Faller notes, also raises broader questions concerning differences between illocutionary meaning and propositional meaning. Given the widespread occurrence and variety of evidential markers documented in the indigenous languages of the Americas and endangered languages elsewhere, the topic of evidentiality is one which furthermore poignantly underlines the urgent need for documentation of languages currently under threat before information on the extent of the systems they contain may no longer be available.

In chapter 11, **Emmon Bach** presents a detailed description of the rich demonstrative/determiner system in Northern Wakashan languages of the Pacific Northwest. Features incorporated in the demonstrative/determiner systems of these languages include two or three way deictic distinctions, the category of visibility (visible/not visible), modality (existent/non-existent), and temporal contrasts. Bach shows that in translating an English expression such as 'his house', the combination of different features and categories gives rise to 36 different forms in one of the languages considered. A further distinction is encoded in the grammar in a second language he examines, and here 49 different forms of 'his house' become available. Much of the variation in such instances is caused by the combination of two deictic elements, one expressing the location and visibility of the head noun ('house'), and the other referring to the location and visibility of the (3rd person) possessor. As each of these deictic elements may vary in a number of ways, the total number of theoretically possible combinations is unusually large. Such striking precision of reference is heightened further in the Upper North Wakashan languages where an additional, interesting category 'just gone' augments the regular features represented in demonstratives, being used to refer to elements that were recently present but are no longer present at the actual time of speech. Encoding something like a present perfect tense-aspect within nominal structures, native speakers have been noted to refer to the 'just gone' specification as past tense, opening up the possibility that some kind of nominal tense category has been grammaticalized in noun-phrases in these languages (as has been suggested also for a number of languages elsewhere, including Somali). Together with the category of visibility, which appears to involve notions of ex-

istence and speaker's knowledge in at least one North Wakashan language, the 'just gone/present perfect' category and other features represented in demonstrative elements illustrate just how highly developed spatio-temporal deictic reference is in this group of languages in comparison with the demonstrative systems of more familiar Indo-European languages. Given the highly endangered nature of all Pacific North-west languages, Bach's contribution is a timely reminder of the deictic complexity that needs to be documented across the world.

The final chapter of the volume is an extended, very thorough investigation of the realization of inverse/direct marking and obviation systems in five languages of Mesoamerica, by **Roberto Zavala**. The core of the discussion relates to a widely recognized cross-linguistic person/animacy hierarchy, where 1st and 2nd person event participants are found to universally outrank 3rd person participants, which may be further ranked relative to each other according to animacy, commonly human > non-human animate > inanimate. The ranking of 1st and 2nd persons relative to each other appears to be subject to variation and is found to occur as either 1st > 2nd or 2nd > 1st, depending on the language considered. Similar to the Algonquian languages of North America, Zavala shows that in various Mesoamerican languages a person and animacy-based hierarchical ranking of the arguments of transitive verbs is often manifested in special morphology on the verb. Either 'inverse' or 'direct' marking appears in verb forms, dictated by the way that the semantic roles of the arguments relate to the person/animacy hierarchy in the language. If an element higher on the hierarchy occurs as the Agent/Originator of an event and an element lower on the hierarchy occurs as Patient/Goal, direct-marking is encoded on the verb, whereas if a lower-ranked element instantiates the Agent acting on a higher-ranked Patient, verbs appear with inverse-marking. In their sensitivity to the perceived relative salience of argument participants in described events, inverse systems may be compared to the use of active/passive voice alternations in other languages, with direct-marking being used when the Agent is more topical than the Patient, and inverse-marking occurring when the Patient is more topical than the Agent.

In addition to providing a wealth of information on how inverse/direct constructions are realized in different languages, Zavala's chapter also investigates how the general phenomenon of obviation and the structuring of a clause and its arguments according to person, animacy and also (in)definiteness hierarchies may also be present in languages which in fact do *not* exhibit direct/inverse morphology on verbs. In a way that is similar to Friederike Lüpke's proposal for the existence of a morphologically zero-coded passive in Jalonke in chapter 7, Zavala presents (extensive) arguments that the system underlying direct/inverse constructions may in fact be present in languages without this necessarily being associated with any special morphological realization. With its clear exposition on what is (or seems to be) universal and what is subject to cross-linguistic variation in the formation and interplay of hierarchies and constraints, chapter 12 will be of great interest to all those intrigued by the way that forces such as animacy, definiteness and general discourse prominence are formalized in

grammar and morpho-syntax. It will also inspire readers to reflect on the possibility that the syntax of obviation may indeed extend well beyond those languages with overt morphological expression of inverse and direct linking.

Having outlined in brief just some of the interesting phenomena discussed in the volume, we now invite readers to begin a more detailed consideration of its contents. With the range of topics, sub-disciplines and foci of research presented in chapters 1–12, we hope that readers will in general gain a good appreciation for the kind of work that is currently being carried out on endangered languages, the level of sophistication this work is being effected at, and the potential importance such explorations may have for the advancement of linguistics in general, whether approached from typological-descriptive, formal, or functional perspectives. We also hope that the chapters may be an encouragement to some readers to delve further into and even engage in the description of languages whose continued existence is now under threat, so that the ongoing massive global loss of human linguistic knowledge may at least be counter-balanced in a small way by documentation of some of the languages disappearing from the globe.

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