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Linguistic News Lines

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- Jicaltec Directionals: Their Meaning and their Function by Colette G. Craig (Eugene)
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Reports:

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Information on: CHILDES-in-Antwerp; Cologne Summer Course on Language Description and Field Methods; Symposium on threatened and endangered languages of the Americas; Association Internationale des Études Arménienes (AIEA); IX. (Deutsche) Afrikanistentag in Leipzig; The First International Conference on Oceanic Linguistics; 2nd International Congress of Specialists in Ukrainian Studies; Vocabulario dei dialetti della Svizzera italiana; The First Conference on Theoretical Linguistics at the Russian State University of Humanities.

& Calendar, brief notes and back information.
metaphor. The reader is left in the lurch as to where conversational implicatures come from, how they actually arise, and how they become conventionalized, thus facilitating grammaticalization. More exploration and research must be carried out on the relationship between metaphor and pragmatics. The authors claim that their theory of grammaticalization is dynamic, not static, in that it recognizes grammaticalization as a continuous, gradual phenomenon, not as a discrete, discontinuous phenomenon. But unless more research is done on the pragmatic force vis-à-vis grammaticalization, its theory can be truly dynamic, since metaphor by definition represents a transfer from one discrete cognitive domain to another. Finally, it is a pity that the authors do not take a further step to develop such an internal reconstruction method as in Traugott (1986, 1988) on the basis of their theory of grammaticalization. As is well known, the majority of the world's languages lack historical documentation that may shed light on their histories. If processes of grammaticalization are as regular as the authors convincingly demonstrate, it will be possible to develop a predictive theory of grammaticalization so that one can choose any language (i.e. not historically documented) from any period and project change back into the past (Traugott 1989, 1991). The entire discussion to that effect is completely missing from the book.

The foregoing all sounds very negative, that is, in the context of the objectives that the authors set for the book. So let me close on a more positive note. The authors have produced a book which provides a wealth of data, a set of significant observations, and a theory of grammaticalization. It is full of examples, primarily from African languages, that anyone interested in grammaticalization cannot afford to miss out on. It is sprinkled with a number of interesting observations, most of which can further be tested against languages from other families, and can then be developed into theoretical statements. And it represents one of the few consolidated attempts at theorizing about the phenomenon of grammaticalization, which continues to make language such an intriguingly dynamic object as we all marvel at.

References


Material Ambitions (Comments welcome)

Nikolaus P. Himmelmann, Köln

Given the increasing concern in recording1 endangered languages and dialects the new series Materials by UCLom Euroslav is quite timely and eagerly welcome. In my opinion, however, this initiative and similar ones like it2 are not sufficient in meeting the challenge posed by the imminent extinction of many if not the majority of the world's languages. One major problem is the demand for linguistic expertise and the considerable amount of time needed for analysis that the established formats of presenting linguistic materials require. If, on the other hand, I would like to suggest a shift of attention away from such ambitious formats, I also would like to suggest the preoccupation with grammatical materials be reconsidered. Established formats for publishing documentary materials such as dictionaries, descriptive grammars or text collections are extremely time-consuming tasks requiring a great deal of stamina from both the native speakers and the researchers. In the best case scenario, the collected data are of no use unless the fieldworker, until she or he eventually manages to publish all or most of the collected materials according to these formats. In the worst case scenario, however, the fieldworker may not achieve any of these goals, resulting in a tremendous waste of work and data. Standards for a good grammar or dictionary have risen considerably in the last 40 years. The thorough documentation of a language, as envisioned by Lehmann (1989) for example, can be a life achievement in a lifetime. This means that every fieldworker is faced with the choice of what to do first and foremost. Given the high prestige of grammars and given that a reasonably good dictionary can rarely be produced within a decade, as well as the preparation of a text volume being tedious and unrewarding work,3 it comes as no surprise that dictionary and text collections are more often than not simply stuck from the researcher's agenda. Even very good, large grammars, in an absolute majority of the cases, are not completed, that is, the fieldworker produces a certain fraction of the material collected, while the remainder disappears forever in the fieldworker's drawer. Thus, information on many aspects of a given language remains unavailing, apart from that deemed grammatical at the time of writing the grammar. Less ambitious formats with titles such as "Notes on ...,", "A sketch of ...," etc. may be produced somewhat easier. They have the advantage of focusing on constraints on the amount and quality of data to be incorporated. The bulk of data usually remains inaccessible.

2 Cf., for example, Derek Nurse's appeal to publish sketches of endangered languages in Studies in the Linguistic Sciences 22/1 (1992: vii).

3 Lehmann's 4th edition of the "description of the historical situation of the language" (1989:136), has been considered thus far only as a matter for incidental remarks in prefaces and footnotes. Guidelines as to how to organize such an enclosure have yet to be worked out. Furthermore, I suspect that many fieldworkers who have received training only in narrow linguistics would need something more concrete in order to be able to prepare such a description. There is no doubt as to the value and need of such a description as part of a 'complete documentation of a language'. But it is also obvious that it adds considerably to the already heavy work load required for such a documentation.

All of the formats mentioned, then, have in common their allotment of extra time for analyzing the data and their "division of labor": the linguist tries to meet the problem if we had an infinite amount of time in which we could record, check, and recheck the data. This is, however, obviously not the case. It would be much more productive to use the current way of processing and distributing fieldwork data. One way to do this, I propose, is to encourage the presentation of recorded materials in less ambitious, less comprehensive, less polished formats, which would still be of use to both the native population as well as the scientific community, but also much more readily available. What I have in mind here are slightly edited versions of (sections of) the field notes, which are somewhat more accessible and consistent in spelling and glossing than the field notes proper4 but lay no claims to the systematic and comprehensive characteristic of the standard formats mentioned above. These include, for example, the proportion and distribution of a single text, even if morpheme boundaries remain unclear and interlinear glosses are incomplete. This was a task for this century, but seems to be less fashionable at present. Lists of elicited words, paradigms and/or sentences with notes and comments on uncertainties, problems, and other kinds of observations made during recording... notes on 'special interest items' such as place names, proper names (and naming practices), terms for measures, etc. Notes on the social and historical setting of the speech community, including notes on language usage, speech forms, text genres, geographic, cultural practices, etc.

All of this could also be compiled and presented in book-form, in which extensive indexes and cross-references would make the data even more accessible. Ideally, updated versions of such a compilation would be prepared whenever new data is recorded, or major advances are achieved in analyzing existing materials. The present state of computer technology makes such a procedure feasible. This less ambitious format could also be of use in the following respects:

2 Storing field notes as they are in a public archive or library is something else that, to date, is not done in a systematic and transparent way, though to do so would obviously be highly useful. The only exception I am aware of is the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, in which all field notes on Australian languages are stored.
I believe that the native population, and especially the 'respondents', have a right to witness the fruit of their labor, and cooperation is readily possible. In drastic terms: It will not be much of a reward to them to have their death lamented in the preface of a 'complete' grammar. More importantly, however, data should be presented in a format useful to them. Among other things, this means that at least part of the presentation has to be in a language they know, and should also address issues of interest to them. In the presently established formats there is generally no space for such sections. Practically speaking, they are generally less interested in scientific grammars and more interested in dictionaries (wordlists) and texts which provide documentation of their own culture in this fast-changing world, as well as the simple fact of seeing their own language in print next to a standard language of high prestige may be instrumental in preserving (or even rebuilding) self-esteem and cultural identity.

Furthermore, to my knowledge, present consensus sees terms like 'respondent' or 'informant' as inadequate in paying tribute to their achievement. The make-up of a less ambitious format would provide the setting for calling the respondents: contributors to a compilation of material languages.

Much fieldwork is done with a clearly limited goal in mind, such as preparing a thesis or investigating one specific aspect of a given language or language community, with a substantive amount of data recorded and observations made during such work having no direct relevance for the intended topic. And often, these data will not suffice for a presentation in one of the established formats. The researcher may not have the present time to prepare it in the required way. A less ambitious format could provide a convenient outlet for such materials, which would otherwise remain inaccessible.

The same holds true for researchers and professionals from other fields (anthropologists, geographers, developers, workers, teachers, etc.), and interested native speakers. They often lack the expertise and time to present linguistic materials in one of the established formats. They may be interested in having them standardly made available if all those materials are of such a nature that they are appropriate for the development of a component of the language community. Perhaps the new Lincom series is open to the idea of such a format, and thus could help in making language recording more attractive and productive. The title Materials lends to such a format a perfect fit.

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References

CHILDES-in-Antwerp
A new CHILDES center for Europe

What is CHILDES?
The Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) is a computerized exchange system for language data. It was originally conceived in 1983 with the aim of providing a tool to facilitate the sharing of transcribed language data of children's spontaneous speech (MacWhinney and Snow 1985). From its inception in 1985 the CHILDES project has been continuously funded by major sponsoring organizations such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Currently it is funded by a grant from the NICHD.

The CHILDES center is located at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh under the direction of Brian MacWhinney. Of central concern throughout has been to achieve and sustain general access for the scientific community: although data sharing is actively encouraged, the use of the system, including its support and non-contributing members. Membership is open, but members are requested to give due acknowledgement to the system and the contributor(s) of any data used to work on MacWhinney 1991: 272.

Although the system continues to be specially geared towards child language research, it can be used for the study of any face-to-face interactive data in both normal and disordered populations (MacWhinney 1991: 272). The use of the CHAT system (Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts) computer program (CLAN project) and the Computerized Language Analytic Program (CLAN) analyze and record the data for the automated analysis of all transcripts, whatever their source. The data may be new, or taken from the CHILDES archives.

The bulk of the data currently in the CHILDES archives concern about 30 sets of transcripts of spontaneous speech produced by ca. 540 normally developing English-speaking children in the age range of 0 to 12. This archive with spontaneous speech data is complemented by a large amount of elicited narratives produced by American children between the ages of 2 and 10. In addition there are transcripts of spontaneous speech produced by children acquiring Afrikaans, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Tamil or Turkish. There are also a few corpora with data on young bilingual children. In addition, data are available on language-impaired children and agenesis adults. A few sets of second-language acquisition data are included as well.

What can CHILDES do for you?
If you are working with empirical linguistic data, making use of the CHILDES system and its technological tools could substantially boost your research output. Perhaps you need data from monolingual acquisition to compare your results for adult second language learning with? CHILDES may be able to get you what you want.

For your research you may not have a better idea of what kind of language 6-year-olds tend to produce; CHILDES gives you instant access to scores of transcripts that you can read and manipulate (without having to collect and transcribe data yourself).

Maybe you have a computerized and transcribed corpus, but no general purpose for high-level computer analysis of your data. The CLAN programs are ready for you. And what about that old handwritten transcription with very interesting material that you don't have the time for laborious manual analysis? CHILDES can probably help you. And if you are just starting out on a new project involving corpus work, maybe a closer look at CHILDES can show you an efficient way for getting started.

A new CHILDES center

Steven Gillis and Annick De Houwer are currently setting up a new European CHILDES center to help you with any queries you might have about CHILDES. You can come to visit them, or they can come to see you. They can organize workshops for a group of people, or they can see you on a one-to-one basis. They are basically willing to think through any methodological questions with you that you might have concerning the use of CHILDES - from questions about equipment to questions about what program to use.

CHILDES-in-Antwerp is being created in close co-operation with Brian MacWhinney and under the auspices of the IPA Research Centre.

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California Linguistic Notes

publishes essays, squibs, letters, and reviews on any linguistic topic; also past/future events sections, recent publications, jobs and more. Recent contributors include Charles-James Bailey, Luke Campbell, Peter Daniels, Sheila Embleton, Ives Goddard, Joseph Greenberg, Eric Hamp, Carleton Hedge, and Matt-Peter Sundström. We seek material for publication and new subscribers. Free sample: Alan Kaye, Editor, Linguistics, CSUF, Fullerton, CA 92634.

Cologne Summer Course on Language Description and Field Methods
30 August-10 September 1993

There was a time in American linguistics when field research was considered a necessary requirement for anyone wanting to get a linguistics. This is no longer the case, and on this side of the Atlantic Ocean field research never had the privilege of being considered an indispensable ingredient to a linguistic education. However, competent research on little-studied languages is becoming more and more urgent. Not only is there now a broad consensus that linguistic theory won't get anywhere without taking into account the wide variety of