

## **Striking a balance in grammar writing: combining typology, areal studies, theories of language, and methodologies**

The theory behind grammar writing has received increased attention over the last years (e.g. Ameka et al. 2006, Toshhide & Rice 2014, Weber 2005). Core issues in organizing a reference grammar typically are whether to follow a form-to-function or function-to-form approach, which topics should get covered, and whether and to what extent the grammar should engage with a theoretical perspective (Haspelmath 2012). Yet, the choices facing grammar writers are far more varied and nuanced, and engage with multiple (sub-)fields and cultures, academic and otherwise. In this talk, I discuss from a grammar writer's perspective some of the challenges of accommodating multiple communities and traditions, while adhering to a form-to-function organizing principle. I show that grammar writing involves negotiating the convenience for different user groups, in my case the broader linguistic community, typologists, Bantuists, documentarians, and the speech community, while attempting to strictly adhere to a form-to-function organizing principle.

Grammars often incorporate different perspectives in their organization and presentation of data (see Evans' 2008 various "ideals"), likely depending on the exposure and "linguistic upbringing" of the grammar writer. As such, the grammarian is informed to a varying extent by certain grammatical theories and central topics in these theories, advances in typological research, and descriptive traditions in areal studies. Fieldwork methodologies (e.g. documentarian, experimental) also have an impact on the kind of information and its distribution in the grammar. Tracing my own experience of grammar writing, I examine these diverse factors that the grammar writer combines to achieve a balanced compromise to meet at times conflicting goals, having a diverse audience in mind.

First, I discuss my broader organizational principles of a form-to-function approach and the distribution of information. While a form-to-function approach is thought to be the default choice for most grammar writers, Payne (2014: 99) notes that many grammars mix form-driven and function-driven description without providing principled reasons. My solution to this issue is to adopt a stricter version of the form-driven approach with a separate discussion of function categories in the introductory part of a chapter. For instance, verbal predicates are strictly organized by construction type, irrespective of the function they encode. In order to transparently connect the forms to functional categories, I provide a chapter-initial overview of tense, aspect, mood, and negation expressions and use cross-references extensively.

Another challenge concerns the distribution of information. I address the various principles of organizing chapters across grammars, e.g. by linguistic areas (phonology, morphology, syntax), word class (nouns, verbs), or unit (words, phrases, sentences). I then present my own compromise between a smaller-to-larger units approach combined with linguistic areas, while integrating ethnographic information.

I then speak to relation of grammatography to typology. As Cristofaro (2006) notes, typological research has had an increasing impact on grammar writing in recent decades. Terminology, glossing conventions, typological questionnaires, and typological literature (especially Shopen 2007) significantly shaped my data collection, analysis, and presentation, while typological and language-specific categories are yet distinct (see Haspelmath 2010). The conflict that most often arises is between typological user convenience and formal accuracy. In some instances, I decided for convenience, for instance glossing non-subject pronouns as object pronouns. In other instances, I chose formal accuracy over over-simplification, for example overtly marking noun prefixes for both noun prefix and agreement class. Equally important, but less recognized, is that grammars also interact with an areal tradition of how particular languages are described, for instance, Bantu studies, which results in the use of a Bantu-influenced orthography and Bantu-typical labels, e.g. in the verbal structure.

In sum, this talk brings into focus many of the conflicting pressures a grammar writer has to navigate, in the ideal case striking a satisfactory compromise.

## References

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