

Abstract:

## Writing grammars of linguistic practices

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The grammars of underdescribed and endangered languages have continued to focus on “structural grammar” of the Boasian Trilogy. Linguistic typology continues to investigate the structural similarities between languages. However, from the beginnings of digital language documentation, it has been abundantly clear that speakers of endangered languages find records of the structures of their languages of limited value in their quest to discover how their ancestors may have used the languages. Hence “the aim of a language documentation ... is to provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community” (Himmelmann 1998:166). There is some realisation in the wider linguistic community among practitioners of different backgrounds that “structural grammar” does not capture all aspects of linguistic practices. Newmeyer (2003: 683), for example, notes that “grammars are shaped in part by performance considerations” but keeps usage apart from grammar. Others have found it hard to account for certain linguistic forms in “structural grammar”: Haselow (2013), for instance, suggests a distinction between “micro-grammar” to deal with sentence internal relations and a “macro-grammar” to deal with structural relations beyond isolated sentences to address the full properties of final particles. Similarly, Haiman (2018) proposes a distinction between propositional or prosaic grammar and expressive grammar in his analysis of ideophones. Heine (forthcoming) proposes a difference between sentence grammar and interactive grammar to account for those forms of language such as interjections ideophones and routines that are not easily accounted for in sentence grammar. Withcskho (2021) proposes a grammar of interactional language where she argues that the dichotomy between competence and performance which divides frameworks is a spurious one. In formal semantics, Kaplan (1999) identifies truth conditional vs, use-functional meanings.

In this talk, I want to suggest that the documentation of the grammatical aspects of linguistic practices of speech communities should move beyond “structural grammar” of the “Boasian trilogy” to “grammars of language use and ethnography of communication” of the Communicative Practices Pentagon ( see e.g. Wilkins and Margetts 2011, Ameka 2018). I will outline some methodological issues in the process and introduce key theoretical constructs such as “activity types”, “utterance types” (e.g. Levinson 2000) and the implications of these for the conception of grammar in descriptive and documentary linguistics. I will demonstrate how a fragment of such a grammar of language use can be written. I will conclude by suggesting that the trends in documentary linguistic methodology for the documentation of communicative ecologies (Di Carlo et al. 2021) and humanities of speaking (Epps et al 2017) align with the call for expanding grammatical descriptions of endangered languages to grammars of language use. The question of the link of such grammars to typology will be raised.

### References

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