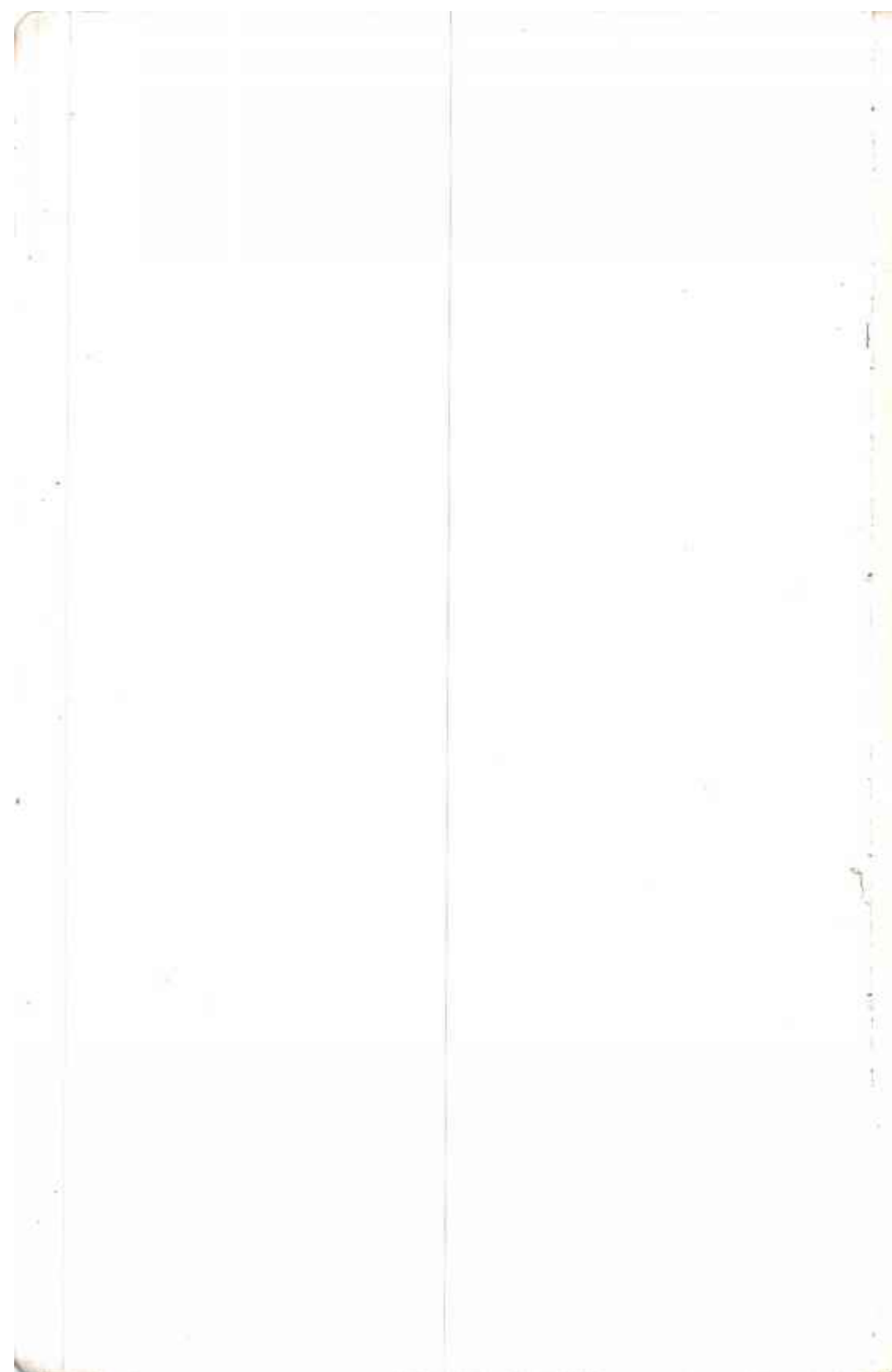


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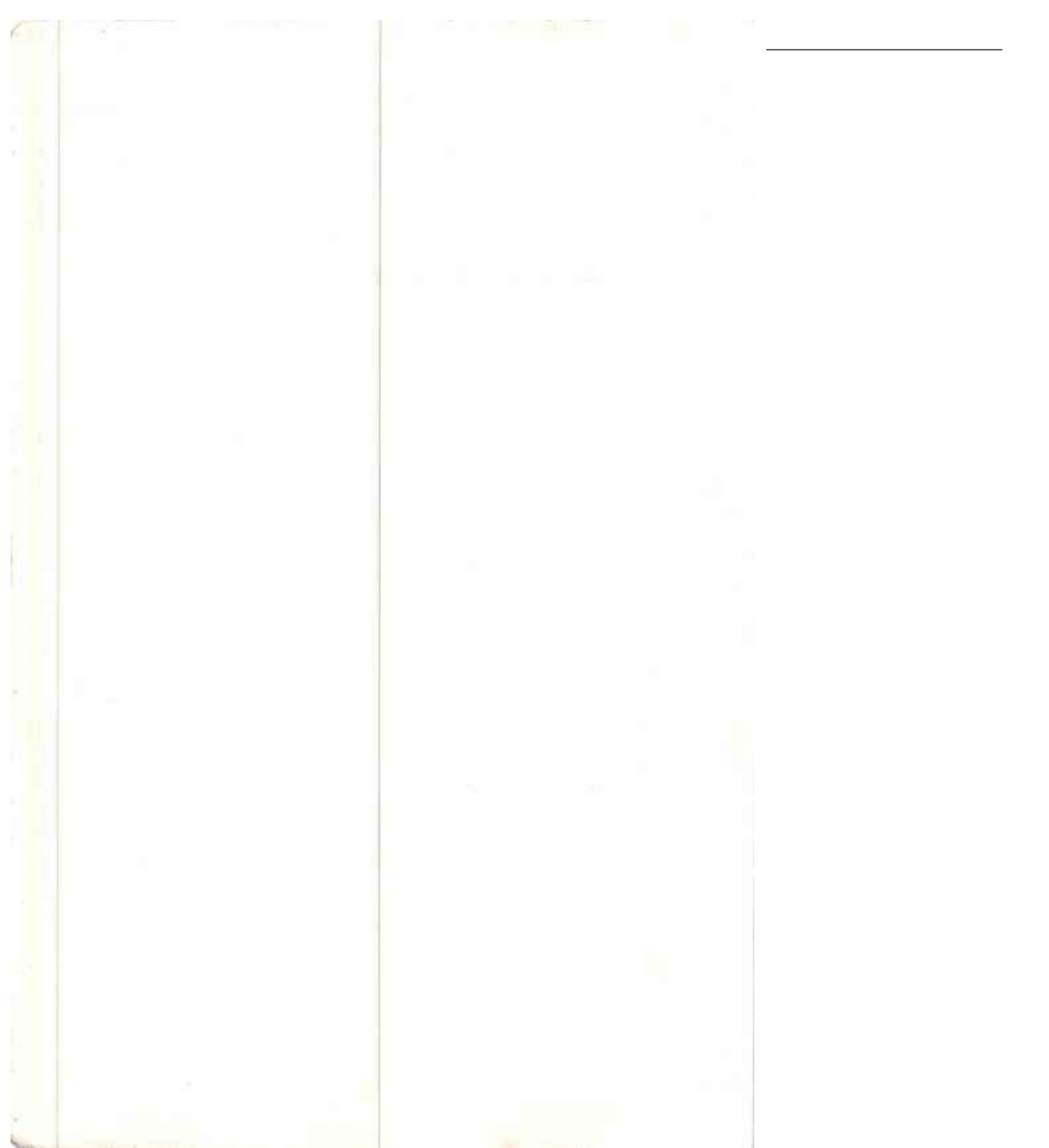
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A GUIDE FOR FIELD LINGUISTS



Current estimates are that around 3,000 of the 6,000 languages now spoken may become extinct during the next century. Some 4,000 of these existing languages have never been described, or described only inadequately. This book is a guide for linguistic fieldworkers who wish to write a description of the morphology and syntax of one of these many under-documented languages. It uses examples from many languages both well known and virtually unknown; it offers readers who work through it one possible outline for a grammatical description, with many questions designed to help them address the key topics. Appendices offer guidance on text and elicited data, and on sample reference grammars which readers might wish to consult. The product of fourteen years of teaching and research, this will be a valuable resource to anyone engaged in linguistic fieldwork.





Describing morphosyntax

A guide for field linguists

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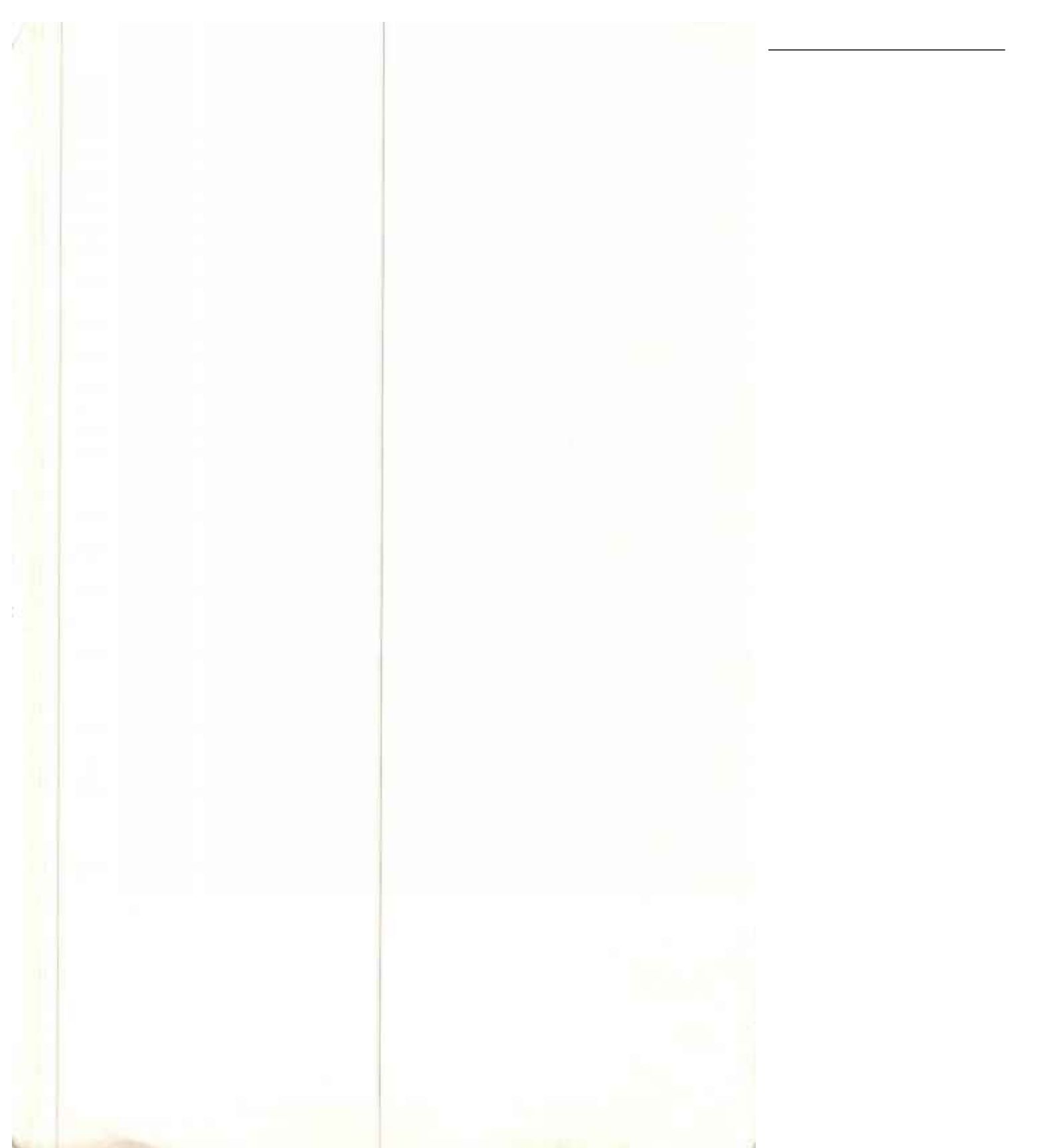
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To Stephanie, Claire, and Doris



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As I am sure is true for the linguists who have published the original research that this book is based upon, my first thanks go to the speakers who have contributed the language samples that are cited in the text. There are too many to acknowledge individually, and I am only acquainted with a few of them personally. Nevertheless, my highest hope is that this book will in some small measure serve the needs of these individuals and their communities.

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Abbreviations

The linguistic examples in this book come from a variety of sources, published, and unpublished, as well as original fieldwork. The transcription and annotation systems used vary considerably from one author to the next. I have kept abbreviations to a minimum by using glosses consistent with the following list. This has required regularization of the spellings of certain abbreviations, but not analyses. For example, the gloss "subject" is abbreviated in a number of different ways in the literature. I have reduced all of these to *SUB*, but I haven't called anything a "subject" that is not called a subject by the author of the source.

Occasionally two abbreviations appear for the same gloss, e.g., *INTRNS* and *INTR* for "intransitive." Conversely, sometimes one abbreviation represents two distinct concepts, e.g., *S* for "only argument of a single argument clause" and "sentence." I consider these abbreviations to be so common, and their meanings so distinct, that any potential ambiguity is negligible.

1	first person
1INC	first person inclusive
1PL	first person plural
1SG	first person singular
2	second person
2DL	second person dual
2PL	second person, plural
2SG, 2S	second person, singular
3	third person
3DL	third person, dual
3FSG	third person, feminine singular
3MSG	third person, masculine singular
3PL	third person, plural
3POS	third person, possessor
3SG, 3S	third person, singular
A	most agent-like argument of a multi-argument clause
ABS	absolutive case
AC	anticausative
ACC	accusative case
ACT	actor
ADJ	adjective

ADV	adverb
AGR	agreement
AN	animate
ANT	anterior
AP	antipassive
APL	applicative
ART	article
ASP	aspect
ASSOC	associative
ATR	advanced tongue root
AUG	augmentative
AUX	auxiliary
BEN	benefactive
CAUS	causative
CENT	centric
CL, CLS	classifier
CM	case marker
CN	connective ('and then . . .')
COMP	complementizer
COMPL	completive
COND	conditional
CONT	continuative

CONTR	contrast	LD	left-dislocation
COP	copula	LNK	linker
COR	coreference	LOC	locative
DAT, D	dative	MASC, M	masculine
DC	deictic center	MID	middle voice
DECL	declarative	MIR	mirative
DEF	definite	MKR	marker
DEM	demonstrative	MOD	modifier
DEP	dependent	MSG	masculine singular
DERIV	derivational	MVMT	movement
DET	determiner	N	noun
DETRANS	detransitive	NEG	negative
DIM	diminutive	NEU	neuter
DIR	directional	NF	non-finite
DISJUNCT	disjunction	NOM	nominative case, nominalizer
DIST	distributive	NONFUT	non-future tense
DO	direct object	NONPERF	non-perfective aspect
DR	downriver	NONSPEC:1	non-specific aspect, intransitive verb
DS	different subject	NP	noun phrase
DUR	durative	NP _{rel}	relativized noun phrase
E	epenthetic morph	NS	non-subject
ERG	ergative	OBJ	object
EVID	evidential	OBL	oblique
EXIST	existential	OBV	obviative
EXO	exocentric	OPT	optative mode
FEM, F	feminine	P	least agent-like argument of a multi-argument clause
FOC	focus	PART	participle
FRUST	frustrative	PASS	passive
FUT	future	PAST	past tense
GEN, G	genitive	PAST1	first past tense (immediate past)
GF	goal-focus	PAST3	third past tense (distant past)
GNO	gnomic	PAT	patient
HAB	habitual	PERF	perfective aspect
HSY	hearsay	PL	plural
IMPER, IMP	imperative	PN, PRN	pronoun
IMPERF	imperfective aspect	POSS	possessive
INAN	inanimate	POT	potential
INC	inclusive	PP	prepositional phrase
INCHO	inchoative	PFPERF	past-perfective aspect
INCOMPL	incomplete	PR	participant reference
INCORP	incorporation	PRED	predicate
IND	indicative	PREF	prefix
INDEF	indefinite	PRES	present tense
INDIC	indicative	PROG	progressive aspect
INF	infinitive	PROX	proximate
INFER	inferential mode	PURP	purpose
INFL	inflectional	QM	question marker
INST	instrumental	QP	question particle
INTER	interrogative	QUAL	quality
INTR,	intransitive	RECIP	reciprocal
INTRNS		REDUP	reduplication
INV	inverse	REF	referential
INVIS	invisible	REFL	reflexive
IRR	irrealis		
ITER	iterative		

xvi *List of abbreviations*

REL	relativizer	SW	soundword
REP	repetitive	TAM	tense, aspect, mode
S	only argument of a single- argument clause, Sentence	THM	theme
SEQ	sequence, sequential	TNS	tense
SG	singular	TOP	topic
SIM	simultaneous	TRANS,	
SM	subject marker	TRNS	transitive
SPEC	specifier	TVF	truth-value focus
SS	same subject	UNDOER	Undergoer
STAT	stative	UR	uriver
STD	standard	V	verb
SUB	subject	VBLZR	verbalizer
SUBJ	subjunctive mode	VER	veridical mode

An asterisk (*) before an example indicates that the example is not a grammatically acceptable expression in the language. A question mark (?) before an example indicates that the example is marginally acceptable.

Introduction

Deer says, "So how am I going to cross over?" He goes looking for a tree bridge. Finally he encounters Squirrel. "There you can cross on my tree bridge. Right over there is my tree bridge." From a good distance Squirrel leaps. "Yuun!" Squirrel does not leap from nearby. He says to him, "Just from there leap! Just from there I always leap." Deer doesn't have the courage to try it. Finally he goes way out. He is close to the end, when he jumps "cadaquin!" There inside the water boa he falls. Too bad. (from *The One-eyed Warriors, a Yagua Folktale*, by Laureano Mozombite [Powlison 1987])

0.1 The purpose of this book

This book is a guide and a bridge. I hope it will be a better guide than Squirrel, and a better bridge than the water boa. It is a guide for linguistic fieldworkers who desire to write a description of the morphology and syntax of one of the many under-documented languages of the world. It is a bridge designed to bring the extensive knowledge of linguistic structure that exists in the literature to bear on the complex and often confusing task of describing a language.

As this introduction is being written, there are reported to be about 6,000 languages spoken on Earth (Grimes 1992). About 2,000 of these have received close attention by linguistic researchers. The other 4,000 (roughly speaking) have only sporadically been described by linguists, and many have not even been recorded in written form for future generations. Krauss (1992) estimates that 3,000 of the 6,000 or so languages spoken today will become extinct in the next century. The human and intellectual tragedy of language extinction has been well articulated by Krauss, Hale (1992), and others. It is not surprising that the 3,000 languages facing extinction come overwhelmingly from the 4,000 or so that have not been consistently described.

Though descriptive linguistics alone will not solve the problems of language and culture extinction, it is an important part of the solution. The mere existence of a good dictionary and grammatical description confers a

certain status on a language that may have previously been despised as having "no grammar" or being "just a dialect," or even "primitive." Furthermore, the products of descriptive linguistic research constitute part of the reference material necessary to develop indigenous educational materials and written literature. Good linguistic research communicates to minority-language speakers and to surrounding communities that the language is viable and worthy of respect. Furthermore, when a language does become extinct, as is inevitable in many cases, the linguistic description and other materials remain as a central part of the cultural heritage of descendants of the language's speakers, as well as of all humanity. Without this documentation, the language, along with the cultural traditions and wisdom embodied in it, is lost forever.

For these reasons, hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals around the world are engaged in primary linguistic description. Not all of these individuals have been trained in the principles of descriptive linguistics, but all share a deep commitment to the vitality and intrinsic value of every human language and culture. An increasing number are native speakers of the under-described language themselves. These fieldworkers often find themselves at a loss as to how to approach the description of a language. This book was conceived with these fieldworkers in mind, and was developed under their guidance.

Experiencing a new language might be likened to arriving in an unfamiliar city with no guide or map to help you find your way around. Writing a grammatical description is like trying to draw your own map, based on your experiences hiking up and down the main roads and back alleys of the city. This book is intended to be a kind of "Michelin Guide to Cities" for the traveler who finds herself in this kind of situation. It is not a map of any particular "city," but it describes the principles and processes according to which cities are known to be designed, and suggests a systematic way of approaching the description of any city from the inside out.

The table of contents of this "Michelin Guide" itself suggests one possible outline for the grammatical description of a language.¹ Beginning with chapter 2, the section headings and subheadings propose one possible system for interpreting, categorizing, and describing grammatical structures (chapter 1 discusses important ethnolinguistic and other background information). Section headings that contain zeros, e.g., "section 4.1.01," are

not part of the suggested outline for a grammatical description. Rather, they are extended commentary related to the next-higher outline heading (e.g., section 4.1.01 is extended commentary on section 4.1). At the end of each major section there appear questions that are meant to stimulate thought on key topics in morphosyntactic description. The answers to these questions could constitute the substantive portions of a grammar sketch or full reference grammar. Occasionally a section consists entirely of questions (e.g., section 1.6.1). These are important sections that should not be omitted in a grammatical description, but the topic is judged to be sufficiently self-explanatory as to require no further explanation. In all such cases, references are provided to additional readings for those who may want to pursue the issue further.

Thus, the outline of this guide is like a helicopter ride above the complexities of the city below. The chapters are neighborhoods that can be explored one-by-one, and the subsections are streets likely to be found within particular neighborhoods. However, even as a map cannot be produced only from the vantage point of a helicopter, so a grammar cannot be produced simply on the basis of an outline. The fieldworker must walk the streets and get to know the particular buildings, landmarks, and idiosyncrasies of this individual city. Although there are similarities among cities, so there are also many differences. The same is true for languages. One outline will not fit every language exactly. It takes sensitivity, creativity, and experience to create a description that is consistent with the properties of the language itself, and not wholly dependent on a preconceived outline. A basic assumption of the book is that the best way to understand language, as well as any particular language, is intense interaction with data. For this reason, text and extensive examples are provided, showing how similar neighborhoods in other cities are arranged. However, it is possible that the language you are studying exhibits some new pattern, or some new complexity not illustrated in the text and examples. It is important, in such cases, to document the unusual pattern as explicitly as possible, and to describe it in relation to the known range of variation.

While the known range of variation should not be perceived as a straitjacket that every language must be forced into, it is a valuable tool for organizing one's thoughts about language and communicating those thoughts to others. After all, a great deal is already known about what

languages are like. In fact, there is so much literature available that one can not possibly be familiar with all of it. Furthermore, field linguists often work in isolated settings where access to library resources is limited. In this sense the book is intended to be a bridge as well as a guide. It is a bridge that will take you, the linguistic researcher, to the specific literature on the particular descriptive issue you are facing, and bring the valuable knowledge available in the literature to bear on the technical task of describing a particular language.

Insofar as possible, I have tried to suggest a system of organization that is consistent with general principles of late twentieth-century linguistic science. That is, the categories, terms, and concepts found in this book should be understandable to linguists from a variety of theoretical orientations, even if the linguists do not use the particular terminology themselves. I have noted alternate terminological usages whenever possible, but have undoubtedly not covered all possibilities. As you work through the grammar of a language using the outline of this book as a guide, questions will undoubtedly arise as to the appropriateness of particular definitions and interpretations to the language you are describing. This is good. It is only through honest interaction with data that linguists learn where our theoretical conceptions need to be revised. It might be said that one purpose of this book is to encourage field linguists to find holes in current theoretical understandings of linguistic structures. To the extent that it makes such understandings accessible, then it has accomplished its task.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce some of the central concepts, metaphors, and terminology that appear throughout this book.

0.2 Some terminology and recurring metaphors

0.2.1 Language is a symbolic system

It is very important for field linguists to have a healthy respect for the difference, and interdependence, between **meaning** and **form**. Some of the most strident controversies and misunderstandings in linguistics can be boiled down to an argument between someone who believes that linguistic form, or structure, derives directly from meaning, and someone else who believes that form is entirely autonomous of meaning, or language in use. At several points in the following pages, this distinction will be illustrated

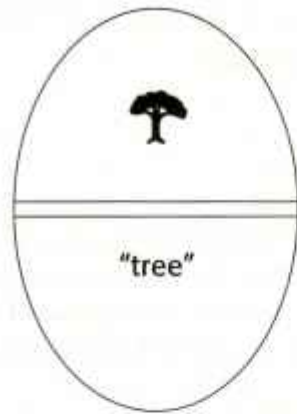


Figure 0.1 The form–function composite

and reiterated. As a preliminary characterization, meaning refers to what a language is used for, and form is the linguistic expressions themselves.

Linguists engaged in grammatical description commonly assume that language consists of elements of form that people employ to “mean,” “express,” “code,” “represent,” or “refer to” other things.² Although linguists (even good descriptive linguists) often imply that the linguistic forms themselves express concepts, this must be taken as a shorthand way of saying that speakers *use* linguistic forms (among other things) to accomplish acts of expressing, referring, representing, etc. (Brown and Yule 1983: 27ff.). For example, a word is a linguistic form. In and of itself it is just a noise emitted from someone’s vocal apparatus. What makes it a *word* rather than just a random noise is that it is uttered intentionally in order to express some idea, or concept. When used by a skilled speaker, words can combine with other elements of linguistic form, such as prefixes, suffixes, and larger structures, to express very complex ideas. While the linguistic forms may aid in the formulation of ideas, or may constrain the concepts that can be entertained, the language itself is logically distinct from the ideas that might be expressed.

Langacker (1987), building on Saussure (1915), describes linguistic units as consisting of form–meaning composites. This property can be diagrammed as in figure 0.1. The upper half of the diagram in figure 0.1 represents the meanings, concepts, or ideas expressed in language, while

the bottom half represents the linguistic units themselves. The double line across the center represents the relationship, or the **bond** between the two. Various terms can be and have been used to refer to the components of this composite. Terms associated with the top half include "signified," "meaning," "semantics," "pragmatics," "function," "conceptual domain," and "content." Terms associated with the bottom half include "signifier," "symbol," "structure," "form," "formal domain," and "grammar." Other terms are associated with the relationship between the two halves, B(ottom) and T(op). These include B "means" T, B "expresses" T, B "embodies" T, B "realizes" T, B "codes" T, B "represents" T, B "symbolizes" T, T "is a function of" B, etc.

As descriptive linguists we assume that the bond between symbol and signified item is **intentional**. That is, the language user intends to establish a representational link between form and meaning. From this it follows that the forms used to represent concepts will be structured so as to make the link obvious, within limits of cognition, memory, etc. This is not to deny the possibility that certain aspects of language may actually have no relation to the conceptual domain or may even serve to *conceal* concepts. However, we make it a working assumption that in general language users expect and want linguistic forms to represent concepts to be expressed.

In any symbolic system, form and meaning cannot be randomly related to one another. In other words a system is not a symbolic system at all if there is no consistency in the relationship between the symbols and categories or dimensions in the symbolized realm. Ideal symbolic systems (e.g., computer "languages") maximize this principle by establishing a direct, invariant coding relationship between every form and its meaning or meanings. However, real language is not an ideal symbolic system in this sense. It exists in an environment where variation and change are the rule rather than the exception. New functions for language appear every day in the form of new situations and concepts that speakers wish to discuss. Vocal and auditory limitations cause inexact articulations and incomplete perceptions of messages. These and many other factors lead to variation in the form of language, even in the speech of a single speaker. The bond between form and meaning in real language, then, is neither rigid nor random; it is direct enough to allow communication, but flexible enough to allow for creativity, variation, and change.

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