

EMPIRICAL  
APPROACHES TO  
LINGUISTIC  
THEORY

Language  
at Large  
*Essays on Syntax  
and Semantics*

Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald  
and  
R.M.W. Dixon

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# Language at Large

# Empirical Approaches to Linguistic Theory

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# Language at Large

Essays on Syntax and Semantics

*By*

Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and R. M. W. Dixon

The Cairns Institute  
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## PREFACE

Over the past couple of decades, Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and R. M. W. Dixon have been major players on the world linguistic scene, contributing in a number of areas. The present volume brings together some of the essays they have written—either individually or together—on various themes. Five chapters are published here for the first time. Earlier versions of the remainder have appeared in print but all have been revised for this volume, some very significantly modified and extended. Each essay is self-contained, and can either be read on its own or as part of a themed sequence (for instance, Chapters 8 and 9, and Chapters 2, 3 and 4). There is a little repetition between chapters; this has been retained so that each chapter may be read on its own.

A major field of endeavour has been linguistic typology. Vide Aikhenvald's three volumes: *Classifiers: A typology of noun categorization devices* (2000b), *Evidentiality* (2004) and *Imperatives and commands* (2010a). Plus Dixon's *Ergativity* (1994) and the first two volumes of his *Basic linguistic theory* (2010a, b). The seven chapters in Part A investigate further typological issues.

Chapter 1, 'Versatile cases', explores what happens when cases expand beyond their canonical role of marking the syntactic functions of noun phrases. In many languages, some cases may also be attached to verbs, and may then either take on an aspectual or modal meaning, or mark a type of clause linkage. Chapter 2 presents 'A typology of argument-determined constructions', distinguishing between constructions which transfer an argument (passive, antipassive, causative, applicative), those which focus on an argument, those which manipulate an argument, and those which mark the referential status of an argument ('inverse systems'). A particular grammatical marker may have a central meaning and also secondary functions. Chapter 3 considers 'Causatives which don't cause'. That is, in addition to marking causation, a certain marker may indicate an applicative derivation, or intensity of action, or manipulative effect.

In terms of case marking or clause linking, S (intransitive subject) may be associated with either A (transitive subject) or O (transitive object), giving rise to a nominative-accusative or an absolutive-ergative system. But not all associations between S and A are indications of

an ‘accusative’ system, nor are all associations between S and O to be classified as ‘ergative’. Chapter 4 discusses ‘Non-ergative associations between S and O’. Then, chapter 5 investigates the ways in which languages show ‘Dependencies between grammatical systems’. For example, there may be more tense choices available in positive than in negative clauses, or more genders distinguished in singular than in plural.

In every language, a verb describes an action which relates to a number of participants. Chapter 6 sets out ‘The semantic basis for a typology’, showing that in some languages the meanings of verbs are oriented towards type of participant (for example, ‘eat meat’ or ‘eat vegetables’) whereas in others they relate to type of action (‘eat where a good deal of chewing is involved’, ‘eat by sucking’, etc.). For every language, a set of open word classes can be recognised on language-internal criteria (typically: noun, verb and adjective). Languages vary as to the number and types of ways they have for deriving a stem of one class on the basis of a form from another word class. Chapter 7 deals with ‘Word-class changing derivations in typological perspective’.

Chapter 8, ‘Speech reports: a cross-linguistic perspective’, discusses direct speech—as when we hear ‘The nurse said to me “Come and see me”’—and indirect speech—‘The nurse said to me that I should come and see her’. Monoclausal and multiclausal speech report constructions are discussed, together with their syntactic status and functions. We then venture into a seldom-explored area, constructions which fall between straight direct and straight indirect reports, as when we hear ‘The nurse said to me “Come and see her”.’ Chapter 9 examines ‘Semi-direct speech in typological perspective’.

Aikhenvald and Dixon have also been active in providing theoretically-informed documentation of previously undescribed (or scarcely described) languages. Aikhenvald has published on three Arawak languages from north-west Brazil. She worked with the last speaker of Bare (1995), then produced grammars of Warekena (1998) and Tariana (2003). These were followed by her magisterial *The Manambu language from East Sepik, Papua New Guinea* (2008a). Between 1972 and 1991 Dixon published grammars of five Australian languages—Dyirbal, Yidiñ, Warrgamay, Nyawaygi and Mbabaram—plus a full account of the Boumaa dialect of Fijian. From 1991 he undertook immersion fieldwork in Brazil, resulting in his award-winning monograph *The Jarawara language of southern Amazonia* (2004b). The four chapters in Part B are offshoots from this descriptive work.

Speakers of out-of-the-way languages, who ‘adopt’ a linguist, are typically of high intelligence, but do not have available appropriate terminology which would enable them to explain some tricky point of grammar. Chapter 10, ‘Naive linguistic explanation’, shows the sorts of ‘lateral thinking’ which speakers invoke in order to get their point across. The dauntingly complex structure of Tariana involves noun phrases showing double marking for syntactic function—that within a lower clause (or an embedded noun phrase) and that within a higher clause (or an embedding noun phrases). This is explained in Chapter 11, ‘Multiple marking of syntactic function and polysynthetic nouns in Tariana’.

Chapter 12, ‘Palikur and the typology of classifiers’, examines another Arawak language, which is spoken in north-west Brazil and over the border into French Guiana. It has three genders—whose use is motivated by an array of semantic parameters—plus numeral classifiers, two varieties of verbal classifiers, locative classifiers, and possessive classifiers. To round out part B we have Chapter 13, ‘Zero and nothing in Jarawara’, dealing with a language from the small Arawá family (no connection with Arawak). ‘Zero’ is a recognised artefact of linguistic analysis (for example to mark singular number in English as opposed to the explicit plural marker, orthographic *-s*). This chapter follows the great Indian grammarian Pāṇini in showing that ‘zero’ is not at all the same thing as nothing.

It is natural that a linguist, in between spells of fieldwork in exotic locations, should spend some time analysing their own language. Dixon’s *A new approach to English grammar, on semantic principles* (1991) went through half-a-dozen reprints before being expanded (with three chapters added) and revised as *A semantic approach to English grammar* (2005). The first four chapters of Part C extend this work.

Chapter 14, ‘Pronouns with transferred reference’, begins with the well-known McCawley/Lakoff sentence *I dreamed that I was Brigitte Bardot and that I kissed me*, exploring which pronouns can have their reference transferred and under what circumstances. Following this, Chapter 15 ‘Comparative constructions in English’ works in terms of the general parameters for comparative constructions—as set out in Dixon (2008a)—investigating in some detail how they apply to English. The essential nature of articles, and the grammatical status of *the same*, are dealt with in Chapter 16, ‘Features of the noun phase in English’, and then Chapter 17 examines the circumstances under



which *twice* can or must be used in place of *two times*, and what can be inferred from this concerning constituency.

Dixon has combined interest in the indigenous languages of Australia with that in English, by co-authoring *Australian Aboriginal Words in English: Their origin and meaning*, published as Dixon et al. (1990) with an expanded second edition in 2006. Chapter 18, 'Australian Aboriginal words in dictionaries: A history', sketches the background to this lexicographic endeavour.

#### SOURCES

Chapters 3, 4, 7, 8 and 14 are here published for the first time. We are grateful to the publishers of earlier versions of the remaining chapters to use material from them here.

- 1, 'Versatile Cases', is a revised and enlarged version of a paper from the *Journal of Linguistics* 44: 565–603, 2008; © Cambridge University Press, used with permission.
- 2, 'A typology of Argument-Determined Constructions', is a revised version of a paper published as pp. 71–113 of *Essays on language function and language type*, edited by Joan Bybee, John Haiman and Sandra Thompson, 1997. Used with kind permission of John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia ([www.benjamins.com](http://www.benjamins.com)).
- 5, 'Dependencies between Grammatical Systems', is a revised version of a paper from *Language* 74: 56–80, 1998.
- 6, 'The Semantic Basis for a Typology', is a truncated and revised version of 'Semantic roles and syntactic functions: the semantic basis for a typology', from the *Proceedings of the 35th Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, Part 2: Papers from the Panels*, 323–41, 1999. Parts of this chapter, in very similar form, are in Dixon (2004a: 550–7).
- 9, 'Semi-Direct Speech in Typological Perspective', is a revised version of 'Semi-direct speech: Manambu and beyond', *Language Sciences* 30: 383–422, 2008.
- 10, 'Naive Linguistic Explanation', is a shortened and revised version of a paper from *Language in Society* 21: 83–91, 1992; © Cambridge University Press, used with permission.

- 11, 'Multiple Marking of Syntactic Function and Polysynthetic Nouns in Tariana', is a corrected version of a paper from the *Proceedings of the 35th Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*. Part 2: *The Panels*. 235–48, 1999.
- 12, 'Palikur and the Typology of Classifiers', is a revised version of a paper from *Anthropological Linguistics*, 40: 429–480, 1998. It is used with permission of the University of Nebraska Press.
- 13, 'Zero and Nothing in Jarawara', is a corrected version of a paper published as pp. 125–37 of *Form and function in language research: Papers in honour of Christian Lehmann*, edited by Johannes Helmbrecht, Yoko Nishina, Yong Min Shin, Stavros Skopeteas and Elisabeth Verhoeven, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 2009.
- 15, 'Comparative Constructions in English', appeared in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 41: 5–27, 2005.
- 16, 'Features of the Noun Phrase in English', is the amalgamation of two papers, 'The articles in English' and 'The grammatical status of *the same*', from *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 42: 31–36, 2006 and 45: 3–11, 2009.
- 17, 'Twice and Constituency', appeared in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 44: 193–202, 2008.
- 18, 'Australian Aboriginal words in Dictionaries—a history', is a revised version of a paper published in the *International Journal of Lexicology* 21: 129–52, 2008.





## ABBREVIATIONS

These are abbreviations employed in interlinear glossing of examples; or instance, *ERG* for ergative and *CL* for classifier. However, where an example is short, with plenty of room on the line, a full label *ERGATIVE* or *CLASSIFIER* is written out. It would be pedantic (and otiose) to insist on always employing *ERG* and *CL* when there is no spatial limitation which requires abbreviation. Our aim, through the volume, has been to try to be as reader-friendly as circumstances permit.

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
A	transitive subject
ABL	ablative
ABS	absolutive
ACC	accusative
ACT.FOC	action focus
AD	location 'ad' (in the vicinity of)
ADDR	addressee
ADESS	adessive
ADJ	adjective, adjectivizer
ADVZ	adverbializer
AG	agentive
AGT	agent
ALL	allative
ANIM	animate
AO	actor orientation
AP	animate plural
APPL	applicative
ART	article
ATT	attributive
AUG	augmentative
AUX	auxiliary
BAS	basic person marking
BAS.NP	basic non-past cross-referencing
BE	bound element

BIV	bivalent
BR	bound root
CAUS	causative
CERT	certain
CL	classifier
CNTR	contrast
COLL	collective
COMIT	comitative
COMPL	completive non-main clause
COMPLZR	complementizer
COND	conditional
CONF	confirmation marker
CONJ	conjugation marker
CONS	consequential
CONT	continuative
CONT.LOC	localization continuative
COP	copula
CS	current speaker
CUST	customary
D	durative marker
DAT	dative
DECL	declarative
DEF	definite
DEM	demonstrative
DENOM	denominal
DEP	dependent
DES	desiderative
DIM	diminutive
DIR	directional
DIR.SP.REP	direct speech report
DIST	distal
DR	bivalent direct
DS	different subject
du	dual
e	eyewitness
E	extended argument of a ditransitive verb
ERG	ergative
excl	exclusive
F, f, fem	feminine

FN	function marker
FOC	focus
FP	far past
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
HAB	habitual
IMM	immediate
IMPF	imperfective
IMPV	imperative
INCH	inchoative
INCL, incl	inclusive
IND.SP.REP	indirect speech report
INDEF	indefinite person
INDIC	indicative
INF	infinitive
INSTR	instrumental
INT	intention
intr	intransitive
IO	indirect object
IP	immediate past
ITER	iterative
ITN	intentional
LK	linker
LOC	locative
LOGOPHOR, log	logophoric
LV	linking vowel
M, m, masc	masculine
MANIP	manipulative
N	noun
n	non-eyewitness
NARR	narrative
NEG	negative
NEUT, n	neuter
nf	non-feminine
NMZR	nominalizer
NOM	nominalization
NOMIN	nominative
NONVIS	non-visual
NP	noun phrase

nsg	non-singular
NT	non-topic
O	transitive object
OBJ	object
obl	oblique
OBLIG	obligative
OPT	optative
OS	Original Speaker
p	person
P	past
PART	participle
PASS	passive
pauc	paucal
PEJ	pejorative
PERF	perfect
PERFV	perfective
PERI	peripheral
PERM	permissive
PL, pl	plural
pl.a	plural absential
POS	positive
POSS	possessive
POSSN	possession
POT	potential
PRES	present
PRET	preterite
PRIV	privative
PRO	free pronoun
PROC	process
PROG	progressive
PROH	prohibitive
PROP	propriative case
PROPR	propriative
PROX	proximate
PT	past tense
PURP	purposive
Q	question
QUOT	quotative
REC	reciprocal