

Basic Linguistic Theory 2

Basic Linguistic Theory

R. M. W. Dixon

The three volumes of *Basic Linguistic Theory* provide a new and fundamental characterization of the nature of human languages and a comprehensive guide to their description and analysis. The first volume addresses the methodology for recording, analysing, and comparing languages. Volume 3 (which will be published in 2011) examine and explain every underlying principle of grammatical organization and consider how and why grammars vary.

Volume 1

Methodology

Volume 2

Grammatical Topics

Volume 3

Further Grammatical Topics (*in preparation*)

A complete list of R. M. W. Dixon's books may be found on pp. 488–9

Basic Linguistic Theory

Volume 2 Grammatical Topics

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- Noun categorization devices
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- Negation
- Reflexives and reciprocals
- Passives, antipassives, and general intransitivizing derivations
- Causatives
- Applicatives
- Serial verb constructions
- Pivots, and switch-reference
- Comparative constructions
- Noun incorporation
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How to read this book

This book is, of course, designed to be read from first to last page. But other strategies are possible.

Chapter 1 outlines the approach followed throughout, and should be consulted first. The lengthy Chapter 3 provides an overview of grammatical structures and systems found across the languages of the world. Many of these topics are dealt with in more detail in the chapters of Volume 2 and of the projected Volume 3. Ideally, Chapter 3 should be studied at an early stage, although experienced linguists may choose to skim it.

The remaining chapters of Volume 1, and those of Volume 2, could be read in any order. However, recurrent themes are developed across chapters and maximal benefit will be obtained by reading the chapters in the order in which they were written.

Preface

For more than four decades I have been doing linguistics in the true sense of the word—undertaking immersion fieldwork, writing grammars, compiling lexicons. I've studied, in fair detail, more than two hundred published grammars, and consulted several hundred more. I have worked—by inductive generalization—on a number of topics in typological theory, and have read everything I could lay my hands on that is relevant to this endeavour. However, despite having been learning, learning all along the way, I feel that I know only a fraction of what I would like to know.

This book is a distillation of what I have learned thus far—the most satisfactory and profitable way to work, and what pitfalls to avoid. In short, how best to obtain reliable and satisfactory results which have scientific validity. Volume 1 sets the scene, with chapters on aspects of methodology. Volumes 2 and 3 then deal in fair detail with each of a number of grammatical topics.

The reader will find opinions expressed straightforwardly, without demur. Some of the things that are said may go against certain of the current 'fashions'. I do not expect others to agree with everything I say. But all the points made here have validity, and are worthy of serious consideration.

The languages I know best are those that I have worked on myself and published on—the Australian languages Dyirbal (1972), Yidiñ (1977a, 1977b, 1991b), and Warrgamay (1981), plus Boumaa Fijian (1988a), Jarawara from Brazil (2004a), and English (1991a, 2005). If some point can be illustrated from one of these languages then I do so, rather than using data from another language which I know less well. This applies especially to the general discussions in Volume 1. For points which do not occur in these languages, and for further exemplification of points that do, information from many other grammars is used.

Sources are sometimes included in the text but more usually in notes at the end of a chapter. It has not been thought necessary to quote sources for well-described languages such as Latin, French, German, Estonian, Turkish, Hebrew, Mandarin Chinese, Quechua, Swahili, Thai, and the like. Specific references are sometimes not given for the languages I have worked on. If, say, an example is taken from Jarawara, the interested reader can easily consult my comprehensive grammar of that language (Dixon 2004a) to see how the matter under discussion fits into the overall linguistic system of the language. Sources are provided for information from other languages. There is a glossary of technical terms, included at the end of each volume.

There is today a fashion in linguistics—and no doubt in other disciplines as well—of what can be called ‘quotationitis’. That is, attempting to cite every single thing published on or around a topic, irrespective of its quality or direct relevance. Not unusually, quotations are provided from several sources which are contradictory in assumptions and import, without attention being drawn to this. I have used citations sparingly; these only reflect a small proportion of the grammars and general works which I have studied. The present work is conceived of as being like a well-organized garden; I have tried to avoid it degenerating into an impenetrable jungle.

At several places I mention the number of languages currently spoken across the world. The habit has arisen of quoting a figure of well over six thousand, which is the number of ‘language names’ listed in *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005). This is put out by a missionary body with the main purpose of indicating where there is considered to be need for translation of the Christian Bible. The volume is uneven in scope and reliability, particularly as regards what is a language and what is a dialect (decisions on these questions frequently relate to policies concerning translation teams, and decisions may change as policies change). More than two hundred languages are listed for Australia (many labelled ‘nearly extinct’ or even ‘extinct’), but sixty would be an optimistic estimate for the number which are still actually spoken (or else well remembered). The actual number of distinct languages currently in use across the world is no more than four thousand, quite likely a fair number fewer.

This book has been envisaged, planned, and written in close collaboration with my colleague Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald. We have discussed every topic, often many times. I have benefited from her grammars of Warekena (1998), Tariana (2003), and Manambu (2008a), and from her typological studies (particularly 2000, 2004b). I am the one who has written the book (and Aikhenvald would not necessarily agree with every single word in it) but the ideas, analyses, and generalizations are in very many instances our joint work.

Nick Enfield carefully read every chapter and provided the most useful comments, corrections, and suggestions. And I owe a considerable debt to the several score students and colleagues whose grammatical descriptions I have assisted with over the years, having learnt from each of them.

These volumes have been brought to fruition through the help and encouragement of John Davey, linguistics editor *sans pareil*. Of the several publishers I have worked with over almost five decades, Oxford University Press is, in every department, the most efficient and caring. John Davey exudes an enthusiasm which makes one feel valued and wanted, and works in a friendly and unobtrusive way to assist each author in realizing their potential.

And so, I cast my pebble upon the beach.

Abbreviations and conventions, for Volumes 1 and 2

Some abbreviations are used through the book (for example, A, S, and O), others only in chapters where a particular topic is being discussed (for example, RC for relative clause).

There are abbreviations employed in interlinear glossing of examples, such as *ERG* for ergative and *CLASS* 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. My aim, through the volumes, has been to try to be as reader-friendly as circumstances permit.

-	affix boundary
=	clitic boundary
'	stress (or accent)
1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person
A	transitive subject
ABS	absolutive
ACC	accusative
AN	animate
ART	article
AUX	auxiliary
CA	common argument (shared by main and relative clauses in a relative clause construction)
CC	copula complement
CL, CLASS	classifier
CoCl	complement clause
COMP	complement clause marker
COMPL	completive

CONTIN	continuous
COP	copula
CS	copula subject
CTV	complement-taking verb (Chapter 18)
D	possessed (Chapter 16)
D	specific description in copula construction (§14.4)
DEC	declarative
DEM	demonstrative
DIM	diminutive
du, DU	dual
E	extension to core
ERG	ergative
exc	exclusive
F	focal clause (§3.11)
FEM, F, f, fem	feminine
FIN	finite
FUT	future
G	general description in copula construction (§14.4)
GEN	genitive
IMM	immediate
IMPERV	imperfective
inc	inclusive
INTERROG	interrogative
INTR	intransitive
LOC	locative
MASC, M, m, masc	masculine
MC	main clause
Mf	marker attached to focal clause (§3.11)
min	minimal
Ms	marker attached to supporting clause (§3.11)
NEG	negation
NOM	nominative
NON.FIN	non-finite

NP	noun phrase
nsg	non-singular
O	transitive object
∅	zero
PART	particle
PERF	perfect
PERFV	perfective
pl, PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRED	predicate marker
PREP	preposition
PRES	present
R	possessor (Chapter 16)
R	specific referent in copula construction (§14.4)
REDUP	reduplicated
REL	relative clause (marker)
REP	reported
S	intransitive subject
S	supporting clause (§3.11)
Sa	'active' S, marked like A
sg	singular
So	'stative' S, marked like O
SUBORD	subordinate
SVC	serial verb construction
TAM	tense, aspect, and modality
TR	transitive
VCC	verbless clause complement
VCS	verbless clause subject
VP	verb phrase