

that those who are more experienced will not find anything of use. For example, most bilingual researchers would benefit from following more closely Deuchar and Quay's example of focusing on the subject's linguistic environment as a whole, thereby including all sources of input to a child rather than only those from the primary caregivers, as it reflects the true state of things for the developing child more accurately. In addition, both the arguments in support of the existence of a rudimentary syntax even at the two-word stage and those outlining the difficulties in determining the language(s) of any given utterance are quite convincing, giving many researchers reasonable cause to reevaluate data.

Although their goal of discerning whether one system or two was at work in the areas of phonology, lexical development, and syntax was not conclusively met, it is strangely encouraging that despite such careful methodology and extensive data as theirs, this issue still remains unresolved. It is quite possibly a question that will not be answered definitively for quite some time (if ever). Indeed, it may be of better use to step outside of the framework that the "one system versus two" issue has imposed on the field, as it may be greatly oversimplifying things. The proposition that "the alternative to two initial systems is not necessarily one initial system; it may be no initial system" (p. 111) is quite tantalizing indeed, and with a book such as *Bilingual Acquisition* in hand, the stage is set to continue along some of the paths for which Deuchar and Quay have laid foundations.

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Hannes Kniffka, editor: *Indigenous Grammar Across Cultures*. Frankfurt, etc.: Peter Lang, 2001. xiii + 623 pp. ISBN 3-631-38581-1, US-ISBN 0-8204-5437-0. Paperback DM 168.00 (US\$ ± 124.00).

This is a rum book. The editor's aim was to bring together as varied a collection as he could muster of writings about what he calls "indigenous grammar" (IG). By this he means any kind of reflection by native

speakers on the language of a particular group or culture from the viewpoint of that group or culture, or even on language in general. He explicitly wishes to eliminate any kind of value judgment on the reflection done: the highly refined and advanced analysis of Sanskrit by ancient Hindu scholars such as Paṇḍini are treated on a par with, for example, whatever can be elicited through anthropological fieldwork in the way of linguistic awareness among speakers of a West-Papuan language. In the Introduction the editor writes (p. 11),

The distinction between “linguistics” and “folk-linguistics” may even be somewhat pointless in a perspective “IG across cultures.” We deal with “folk-linguistics” of various denominations. Word formation in HPSG and in Paṇḍini’s grammar may be called “folk-linguistic” or “linguistic” depending on the perspective of the observer. Concepts known as “language ideology,” “language awareness,” belief systems of language, attitudes towards language are no doubt more difficult matters yet. I think that all have to be included in a perspective “IG across cultures.” In other words: A research perspective “IG across cultures” requires metaphorical and/or metonymic modifications of the notion “grammar.”

We shall revert to this aspect of the book below. First we must have a look at the book as a whole.

Besides the editor’s Introduction, the book consists of 27 papers roughly arranged according to geographical area. First come the Indian Subcontinent and Tibet (eight papers), then South East Asia and China (two papers), then the Pacific, Oceania, and Australia (two papers), followed by the Mediterranean and Arabia (six papers), Eurasia (three papers), Western Europe (four papers), and, finally, the Far North (two papers).

The papers vary greatly in scope and in quality. On the whole, I have counted thirteen papers that can justifiably be classified as being on IG in the editor’s liberal use of that term. Some of these papers stand out for clarity and informativeness. For example, Anthony Diller’s paper on Thai IG (which started in the nineteenth century and is a blend of Western and Indian influences) is an example of what writing on IG should be. Likewise for the refreshing and highly informative paper by Tang Lijun on the ancient and intellectually rich tradition that started in China in the fourth century BC. More than most other linguistic traditions, the Chinese tradition concentrated on questions that Westerners usually reckon to belong to the philosophy of language, such as the triangular relation of mind, language, and the world. It is fascinating to see how the ancient Chinese philosophers developed ideas that are highly reminiscent of the Western medieval school of the Modists, and other parallels are easily found.

Of the same high standard are the papers by Sanford Steever and by Ulrike Niklas on Tamil grammar and the paper by Rudolf Kaschewsky on Tibetan IG. Tej Bhatia's contribution on the Sanskrit grammatical tradition and its application to Tamil and Tibetan, as opposed to the Western tradition of Hindi grammar writing, is likewise clear and well-researched. By contrast, the contributions by Madhav Deshpande on the Vedic context of Pāṇini's grammar and by Peter Raster on the Hindu theory of "higher stages" of language strike one as less revealing, the former because it is addressed to a specialized audience of Indologists (most of the esoteric terminology is unexplained), the latter owing to its tendency to blend mysticism with academic research (see below). A contribution by Verpoorten is more about Hindu rituals than about the language used in them.

Some papers analyze an indigenous phenomenon to do with language in terms of Western science. Thus, Philip Rose's excellent article on Tibetan spelling chant describes and gives a phonological and an instrumental phonetic analysis of the typical ways in which syllables are spelled out in Tibetan. Other papers provide little more than a sociolinguistic survey of the language situation in a speech community. Examples are the papers by Ahmed Meziani on Moroccan Arabic, Amar Sellam on Berber, Alexander Borg on Maltese, Norbert Boretzky on the Roma Gypsies. Excellent and well-researched as most of these papers are, one wonders what their function is in a book on indigenous grammar. The papers by Volker Heeschen on West-Papuan and by Michael Walsh on Aboriginal Australia, even if they are interesting in their own right, give us no IG, simply because the speech communities concerned have no IG, not even of the most elementary kind. One paper, by Giulio Busi, deals with bible-based Jewish cabbalistic mysticism culled from the Hebrew alphabet and stands out particularly as an alien element in this already motley collection. Unfortunately, the book contains no contribution on the rich medieval tradition of Hebrew grammar writing, which flourished between ± 900 and ± 1250 and was largely derived from the Arabic grammatical tradition.

The paper by Mohamed Elmedlaoui deals exclusively with the twentieth-century Algerian-born literary author Mouloud Mammeri, who wrote a Kabyle Berber grammar, *Tajerrumt*, in Kabyle Berber. This grammar, however, is just a European-style traditional grammar for the general public, translated from the French into Kabyle Berber, with some original translations of grammatical terms. This very chauvinistic and adulatory paper seems a little out of proportion against the background of the really great grammarians in human history. The more so since the

following paper, by Amar Sellam (mentioned above) again devotes a fair number of pages to the same Mammeri and his *Tajerrumt*.

As in the case of Hebrew, one looks in vain for a survey of the great indigenous Arabic tradition in grammar writing exemplified by well-known figures such as the medievals Sibawayhi or Ibn Jinnī, to mention just two. The contribution by Lutz Edzard makes a few cursory references to that tradition but does not expand. The result is that the reader of this book will have to look elsewhere (e.g. Carter 1972, 1981; Versteegh 1987; Koerner and Asher 1995) for information on the Arabic tradition of grammar writing.

The influence of the Arabic grammatical tradition was felt in many surrounding areas. Thus, Karl Reichl's paper on the Turkic language Uzbek shows how Arabic grammatical analyses and terminology were applied to a non-Arabic language. One wonders, however, why no contribution was included on the Arabic influence in traditional Turkish grammar, Turkish being so much more prominent among the Turkic languages than Uzbek.

From here on, the papers move into the Western tradition. Jos Weitenberg's article on the combined influence of an indigenous (i.e. Dionysius Thrax!) tradition and the modern Western tradition of grammar writing in Armenian is well within the Western sphere of influence. Friedrich Gester compares European folk notions of language with modern professional linguistics. Thomas Kohnen gives a glimpse of early English grammars, and Raymond Hickey does the same for Irish. Dieter Cherubim writes on the seventeenth-century German grammarian Schottelius, and Ulrich Groenke on the *First Grammatical Treatise*, written in Iceland around 1150 by an anonymous scholar who adapted the Latin alphabet to the needs of Icelandic spelling.

What strikes one on reading through this book is the enormous difference between those cultures that do and those that do not have a native grammatical tradition. Besides the Western world, it is Ancient China and India, as well as the medieval Muslim world, that stand out for their sophisticated original linguistic traditions, which radiated to other cultures and territories. Besides these the world's history shows next to nothing. Equally striking is the distinction between those traditions, like those of China and Europe (and also the now extinct Sumerian-Babylonian tradition, which owed its existence largely to the practical need of a writing system for administrative purposes), that sprang from philosophical and/or practical needs and those that were shaped and fed by the concern to preserve the form and the pronunciation of sacred texts, such as the traditions from India and the Muslim and Jewish world (c.f. Seuren 1998: xii–xiii).

The editor's policy, mentioned at the outset, of putting all more or less "indigenous" research into or comments or ideas about language on the same footing has the advantage of showing up the stark contrast between the cultures that do have a linguistic tradition and those that do not, even if the reader will have to make his or her own evaluations. On the other hand, however, it invites forms of cultural relativism in the pursuit of knowledge that quickly turn paradoxical or confused. One paradox is manifest in the fact that all of the 27 papers have been written from the point of view of Western scholarship and that only six of the authors wrote on their own native language. From the editor's point of view this should create a Western bias, since non-Western indigenous scholarship might well come up with very different criteria and ways of description. I must add that the editor shows his awareness of this paradox by stating, in his Introduction, that the book would look entirely different if it had been edited or written by a Chinese or an Indic linguist.

More or less serious forms of cultural relativism with respect to the academic pursuit of knowledge are also found in some of the contributions. For example, in his paper on the Indian grammatical tradition Peter Raster, repeating widespread Indian mystic views, goes native (p. 56):

Yet, there is no reason why we should not admit the possibility that there are other means of gaining knowledge than those accepted in Western philosophy of science today. In fact, most of the systems of Indian philosophy ... accept verbal testimony of a competent person as a valid means of gaining knowledge besides other means such as sensory perception and logical reasoning. A person who is competent to the highest degree is an enlightened seer, a "knower of reality." Knowledge which is merely found, discovered or "received" by an enlightened seer, obviously has an existence of its own, prior to its cognition by the seer.

One shudders at the idea that modern linguistics should be guided by persons seen by their followers as being a cut above the rest of humanity, with some sort of privileged insight into the nature of human language. One instance readily comes to mind, and that is bad enough as it is.

An extreme example of such academic relativism is presented in the very last paper by Elke Nowak, who pleads for "indigenous grammar as a desideratum." While extolling the virtues of a "truly Indigenous Grammar" as something each speech community should develop (pp. 588, 599), this author fails to provide any characterization of that notion, other than that it should serve "the needs of the speech community" and should provide the basis of a grammar usable for teaching the native language in the schools (p. 590). One wonders what is "indigenous" about that: it sounds perfectly Western. Yet existing

(Western) linguistic descriptions are “bound by tradition” and “historically conditioned and fortuitous,” since “there is no such thing as ‘unbiased access’ to ‘independent data’” (p. 598). The author continues,

If linguistics were even close to such a neutral, independent science, then a linguist coming from an entirely different culture who speaks, say, a polysynthetic and ergative language like Inuktitut would be able to make use of the tools provided by our science in an uncomplicated way and write a serviceable elementary grammar, and in time a usable comprehensive grammar that teachers and students could make sense of without first having to take a course in Western grammatical tradition. ... Unfortunately, it is obvious that this is utterly unrealistic.

One wonders, again, what makes this author equate objectivity of scientific knowledge with the absence of technical complexity.

It might be useful to point out, in this connection, that, for all it is worth, the Western scientific tradition stands out among all other attempts at extending and improving naive human knowledge in that the applications of its often technically complex analyses and theories have provided maximally reliable predictions, with the result that the quality and safety of our lives have improved dramatically, a fact that is recognized the world over. To deny this may have a romantic “back to nature” lure, but it is a gross distortion of reality. This does not mean that other cultures have had nothing to contribute. On the contrary, Western science in general has greatly benefited from scientific contributions made by other cultures, in particular from the achievements of Arabic science (though, one has to admit, Western LINGUISTICS was not — or hardly — influenced by its Arabic counterpart). The denial of quality criteria, popular among certain critics of Western society, just won’t do in science. Nor, obviously, is there any relation between the degree of technical complexity of a theory and its being “historically conditioned and fortuitous.”

Apart, however, from such lapses, the book under review is instructive and entertaining, at times captivating, despite its rather unbalanced composition and despite the rather striking differences in quality among the various contributions. It certainly is unique in its kind, and it will show those linguists who take the time to read it something of the variety of linguistic thinking in the great cultural cycles of the world. What one would wish to see is a much larger work uniting competent and adequate writings on the dominant linguistic traditions of human history. The book under review contains elements of a good start, as does Koerner and Asher (1995), but much more is needed.

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