

## HOW TO WRITE A GRAMMATICAL SKETCH: SOME USEFUL SUGGESTIONS

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### 1.4.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

One must begin by giving geographical location of the speech community and a map, topography of the place where it is spoken, population figures, and sociolinguistic data such as nature of bilingualism and the contact situation. One must also refer to any previous studies if undertaken on this language. Consult Grierson's work on individual languages (1911-1921. Reprinted in 11 volumes in 2005)<sup>1</sup>. The genealogical classification of the language under investigation should be given here. Consult the Ethnologue online for the language under investigation and mark it by the appropriate ISO code.

### 1.4.2. PHONOLOGY

Under this section, the data and its analysis should give you phonemic status of the following. Each of these should be given in a form of a table as well as should be described by articulatory functions. Any specific feature of the language such as murmur vowels, unrounded back vowels, tone contrast, ejectives, or unreleased stops as found in some Indian languages should be clearly explained. Make tables and charts to explain various phenomena. Include phonotactics so that one knows the positional occurrence of each type of sounds in the language.

1.1. Vowels

1.2. Consonants

1.3. Diphthongs

1.4. Suprasegmentals: Tones, Prosodic Phenomena, Autosegmentals, Accent, Intonation

Provide tables for each. Both phonetic and phonemic tables should be prepared.

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<sup>1</sup> Grierson George Abraham, [\*Linguistic Survey of India\*](#), 11 Vols. in 19 Parts Delhi, Low Price Publ. (2005) [ISBN 81-7536-361-4](#)

### 1.5. Syllable and Syllabic Structure. Consonant clusters in all positions.

One must try to identify the longest and the shortest possible syllable in the language.

### 1.4.3. MORPHOLOGY

This will constitute the major portion of the grammar. Various word formation processes such as derivation, compounding and reduplication should be discussed with ample examples. In addition, following topics will help you elicit data and then analyse it. Not every language encodes these information on words but a large number of them do. Hence, the list serves as a guide to the investigator. Various languages may represent these indices either by affixation or by attaching clitics or as a compound or in an agglutinative pattern where two or more elements are juxtaposed to each other. These may also be represented as infused in the basic lexical item in inflectional languages such as Indo-Aryan.

#### 1.4.3.1 *Nominal morphology*

1.4.3.1.1 Noun

1.4.3.1.2 Number (Singular, Dual, Plural)

1.4.3.1.3 Gender/Class/Classifier

1.4.3.1.4 Definiteness /Referentiality

1.4.3.1.5 Case (Agentive, Ergative, Accusative, Ablative, Dative, Genitive, Locative, Allative, Instrumental, Comitative).

*Case systems: Nominative-Accusative and Ergative-Absolutive.*

1.4.3.1.6 Postpositions/ Prepositions (Compound and Complex).

Pay special attention to 'Locatives' and 'Genitives' as they come in various forms in Indian languages.

1.4.3.1.7 Person (First, Second and Third with number and distance distinction]

1.4.3.1.8 Possession: Inalienable and Alienable

Inalienability is not decided by physical separation but by conceptual one in many Indian languages. Care has to be taken in defining what is considered 'alienable' and 'inalienable' in the language.

1.4.3.1.9      Numerals: Cardinals, Ordinals, Fractionals, Partitive, Aggregative, Multiplicative. [Test with classifier if any].

### **1.4.3.2      Pronouns**

Remember that pronouns can be marked for gender, number, case, distance, function such as ergativity, and social marker such as honorifics.

1.4.3.2.1      Personal pronouns

1.4.3.2.2      Demonstrative pronouns

1.4.3.2.3      Reflexive pronouns

1.4.3.2.4      Interrogative pronouns

1.4.3.2.5      Indefinite pronouns

1.4.3.2.6      Reciprocal pronouns

1.4.3.2.7      Anaphoric Pronouns

1.4.3.2.8      Relative-Correlative pronouns

1.4.3.2.9      Deixis

### **1.4.3.3 Adjectives**

Adjectives in Western Indo-Aryan languages can show agreement features. Hence, one must take utmost care while writing the grammar of these languages so that each type is recorded with its various encoding marker. One must check the position of adjectives in a sentence and its potentiality to move across the sentence.

1.4.3.3.1      Dimension

1.4.3.3.2      Colour

1.4.3.3.3      Age

1.4.3.3.4      Taste and other attributes of food

1.4.3.3.5      Quality/Value

- 1.4.3.3.6      Difficulty and various levels of it
- 1.4.3.3.7      Qualification (as in normal, unusual)
- 1.4.3.3.8      Human propensity
- 1.4.3.3.9      Equative, Comparative, and Superlative
- 1.4.3.3.10     Quantifiers (some, each, every, enumerative)

#### **1.4.3.4 Adverbs**

- 1.4.3.4.1      Primary
- 1.4.3.4.2      Derivative
- 1.4.3.4.3      Temporal
- 1.4.3.4.4      Spatial /Locational
- 1.4.3.4.5      Directional
- 1.4.3.4.6      Manner
- 1.4.3.4.7      Cause and Purpose

#### **1.4.3.5.      Particles and Emphatics**

Indian languages are interesting in marking emphatics on every grammatical category, thus the grammar should take care of these kinds of particles and emphatics for every category.

- 1.4.3.5.1      Contradictory
- 1.4.3.5.2      Non-contradictory
- 1.4.3.5.3      Focus
- 1.4.3.5.4      Inclusive and Exclusive Particle
- 1.4.3.5.5      Discourse particles, negative particles, interjections.

#### **1.4.3.6      Compounding and Blending**

- 1.4.3.6.1      *Endocentric, Exocentric and Oppositional*

1.4.3.6.1      *Nominal*

1.4.3.6.2      *Verbal*

1.4.3.6.3      *Adjectival*

1.4.3.6.4      *Adverbial*

1.4.3.6.5      *Temporal* [e.g. Tai Khamti *muu<sup>3</sup>-luŋ<sup>2</sup>-wən<sup>5</sup>- luŋ<sup>2</sup>* (time-one-day-one) ‘sometimes’]

### 1.4.3.7      **Reduplication and Expressive Morphology**

1.4.3.7.1      Morphological: Expressives (Manner of an action, feelings, psychological state)

1.4.3.7.2      Lexical: Total word reduplication, Partial, and Discontinuous

1.4.5.7.3      Echo Formations

### 1.4.3.8 *Verbs*

Elicitation for this portion of the grammar will feed both morphology and syntax.

1.4.3.8.1      Tense

Grammar should expose how tense is marked in the language. Some languages distinguish Present, Past and Future with gradations, viz., languages have known to distinguish between remote and immediate past and remote and immediate future. Similarly, there are some languages which have a two-way division as in past/non-past or future/non future. Yet there are languages which do not mark tense at all and temporal information is contained either on evidential markers or on mood markers.

1.4.3.8.2      Aspect

Prototypical aspect markers seen in most of the languages are: Perfect/Perfective, Imperfect, Habitual, Progressive, and Iterative. However, this is one category which may not be restricted to word morphology. For instance, in most of the Indian languages perfective and perfect are denoted by the V2 of the ECV formation which should not be ignored. Similarly, iterative aspect in most of the Indian languages are represented by reduplication of verbs. TB languages aspect prominent and not tense prominent languages

1.4.3.8.3      Voice (Active, Passive, Anti-passive, Capabilitative)

- 1.4.3.8.4 Mood (Indicative, Obligative, Imperative, Optative, Subjunctive, Conditional, Potential, Iterative, Evidential etc.)
- 1.4.3.8.5 Non-finite (Infinitive forms are used in Nominalization, Imperatives, and Purpose Clauses.)
- 1.4.3.8.6 Converbs or Conjunctive Particles
- 1.4.3.8.7 Causation: Morphological, Syntactic or Lexical

Although this is considered in detail in the ‘syntax’ section, one can identify the change in the morphological shape when a verb is used as a converb.

- 1.4.3.8.8 Negation

One can include both word and sentence negation, as well as negative particle. As some of the Indian languages of the Dravidian family offer negatives conjugated as a verb, it is recommended to give this in a tabulated form for easy reference.

- 1.4.3.8.9 Imperatives (Commands, Requests)
- 1.4.3.8.10 Verb Classes
- 1.4.3.8.11 Classifiers: Verbal, Nominal and Modificational

## **1.4.4 SYNTAX**

- 1.4.4.1 Sentence types (Copular, Verbal Clauses)
- 1.4.4.2 Simple sentence (Word Order: position of the main constituents inside the clause, position inside the main constituents; Topic and Focus; Grammatical relations)
- 1.4.4.3 Subject or Topic-prominent language
- 1.4.4.4 Complex sentences and Complex Predicates (Explicator Compound Verbs, Dative subject constructions, Converbs)
- 1.4.4.5 Coordination (Conjunction, Disjunction, Juxtaposition, Gapping)

- 1.4.4.6 Subordination (Relative, Adverbial (temporal, causal, final, purpose, conditional, concessive) Complement clauses, Nominalized complements). Verb to ‘say’ is used as a complementizer in many languages.
- 1.4.4.7 Adjectival Clauses (Participial constructions and Relative-Correlative constructions)
- 1.4.4.8 Negation (Negative copula, Scope of negation and deletion)
- 1.4.4.9. Discourse phenomena (Co-reference, controller and target of omission in adverbial, complement, relative clauses)
- 1.4.4.10 Agreement (pronominal, gender, number, subject, object or any other criteria can code agreement on verbs or adjacent categories). Thadou-Kuki language such as Thadou uses pronominal proclitics as well as enclitics added to the verb. Contrary to this, Sino-Tibetan languages in general do not mark subject and object on verbs.

#### **1.4.5 SOCIOLINGUISTICS**

##### *1.4.5.1 Kinship terms and Address terms*

##### *1.4.5.2 Politeness Strategy*

##### *1.4.5.3 Domain Analysis (Who speaks what with whom in what context?)*

##### *1.4.5.4 Language Shift and Retention*

##### *1.4.5.5 Language Death: Language endangerment*

Give phonetic, lexical and syntactic variations that exist across the speech community. Discuss sociological and political factors responsible for language attrition. Do give the speech form of the last speaker or terminal speakers of the language.

##### *1.4.5.6 Language Contact*

Discuss various areas of grammar affected by language contact. You may bring in discussion on prevailing bilingualism in the community and its effects on the structure of the language. If the language is converged, point out the areas of grammar where such convergence can be

witnessed. Also write about the age-group of the community which is most influenced by language contact.

#### **1.4.6. SAMPLE TEXTS**

As stated earlier, no grammar is complete without a sample text. Any kind of narrative, preferably a folktale should be transcribed with interlinear gloss. Running translation should be given at the end. The recorded narration can be converted into audio CD if possible. It is ideal to have a couple of narrations both from male and female consultants. Contextual notes about the narration, social or cultural significance of the narrative may also be given. Additionally, it is advisable to give the narration in the script of the language under investigation. This is possible only if the language is a written one.

It is generally asked why it is important to elicit narration. We advise that controlled data through questionnaire should always be supplemented by eliciting uncontrolled spontaneous speech as many unique features of the language can only be obtained when one analyses narration of various genres. When we were working on Great Andamanese language we realized that language uses a distinct past tense marker in narration which gets further grammaticalized as converb in the language.

#### **1.5 Question of Ethics**

Generally field linguists face heavy criticism by other linguists and other researchers because of some unintended mistakes committed by fieldworkers. Although many countries and the research agencies now spell out Norms of Ethics that have to be followed by fieldworkers and other scientists, (these can be obtained from their websites) we, in general highlight the relevant ones here.

The foremost is that fieldworker should never consider the consultant subservient to her/him. The lack of literacy should never be equated with lack of education. Our tribals and illiterate people living in villages know much more than us about their environment, civilization, history and indigenous knowledge about flora and fauna that we cannot even think of acquiring in a short time. These people have been able to sustain not only linguistic diversity but also oral tradition of thousands of years. Never consider them inferior to yourself. In fact, we should give our consultant the same respect as we give to our teachers.

Secondly, one must show an attitude of care and love towards the consultants as they spend hours and hours sitting with you and giving linguistic data. No ordinary citizen of the city can ever match the services of a consultant in the field. Thirdly, never harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the consultant and his/her family. India is culturally



very diverse and this diversity should be respected by all means without impinging upon their beliefs by your own beliefs. In short, be open-minded. Governmental help and information should be sought when in doubt.

We also advocate that fieldworker should not accept any gifts from the consultants. On the contrary, the need of the community in general and of the consultant in particular should be kept in mind and help should be given as when possible.

Last but not the least, give back something to the community before you leave the place. If the language was never written down before, you may start by making a 'Book of Letters'. Think of making primers in their native language so that children are motivated to go to school. Make your interactive dictionary in such a way that a native speaker can refer to it without any problem. You may consider writing a short grammar or a book of pictures. One can also think of collecting songs and making CDs for distribution in the local community. These are some of the ways that one can say 'thank you' to the society who exposed you to their world.