
Introduction

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Proceedings of Conference on
Language Documentation & Linguistic Theory

Edited by Peter K. Austin, Oliver Bond & David Nathan

7-8 December 2007 School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

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ISBN: 978-0-7286-0382-0

This paper can be cited as:

Peter K. Austin, Oliver Bond & David Nathan. 2007. Introduction. In Peter K. Austin, Oliver Bond & David Nathan (eds) *Proceedings of Conference on Language Documentation and Linguistic Theory*. London: SOAS. pp. 1-2.

or:

Peter K. Austin, Oliver Bond & David Nathan. 2007. Introduction. In Peter K. Austin, Oliver Bond & David Nathan (eds) *Proceedings of Conference on Language Documentation and Linguistic Theory*. London: SOAS. www.hrelp.org/eprints/ldlt_01.pdf

Table of Contents

Peter K. Austin, Oliver Bond & David Nathan	<i>Introduction</i>	1-2
<i>Plenaries</i>		
Richard Hudson	<i>Towards a useful theory of language</i>	3-11
Phillip E. Cash	<i>Documenting language, visualizing culture: shooting digital video in two endangered language communities</i>	13-19
<i>Papers</i>		
Abhishek Avtans	<i>Humane face of language documentation: a Great Andamanese experience</i>	21-28
Howard Beck, Sue Legg, Elizabeth Lowe & M. J. Hardman	<i>Aymara on the internet: a step toward interoperability and user access</i>	29-38
Oliver Bond	<i>Towards a canon for negation</i>	39-49
Peter Budd & Mary Raymond	<i>Community-oriented outcomes of language documentation in Melanesia</i>	51-57
Lise M. Dobrin, Peter K. Austin & David Nathan	<i>Dying to be counted: the commodification of endangered languages in documentary linguistics</i>	59-68
Leila Dodykhudoeva	<i>Revitalization of minority languages: comparative dictionary of key cultural terms in the languages and dialects of the Shugni-Rushani group</i>	69-79
Margaret Florey	<i>Expanding opportunities for documenting endangered languages in Indonesia</i>	81-81
Edward Garrett & Leah Bateman	<i>Symbiosis between documentary linguistics and linguistic pragmatics</i>	83-93
Gale Goodwin Gómez	<i>Responsive research and community involvement among the Brazilian Yanomami</i>	95-102
Ekaterina Gruzdeva	<i>Challenging theory: spatial deixis in Nivkh</i>	103-113
Chryso Hadjidemetriou	<i>Kormakiti Maronite Arabic: prospect of documentation and community response</i>	115-122
Sam Hellmuth, Frank Kügler & Ruth Singer	<i>Quantitative investigation of intonation in an endangered language</i>	123-132
Kristine A. Hildebrandt	<i>Phonology and fieldwork in Nepal: problems and potentials</i>	133-144

Trevor Johnston & Adam Schembri	<i>Testing language description through language documentation, archiving and corpus creation: the case of indicating verbs in the Auslan Archive Corpus</i>	145-154
Friederike Lüpke	<i>Under construction: theories of argument structure and empirical data from language description and documentation</i>	155-156
Stephen A. Marlett	<i>Bringing it home: the implications of documentation for a vibrant endangered language</i>	157-163
Lutz Marten	<i>Agreement, word order and information structure: some Bantu examples</i>	165-176
Stuart McGill	<i>Documenting grammatical tone using Toolbox: an evaluation of Buseman's interlinearisation technique</i>	177-186
Mary Pearce	<i>Description and theory in the voicing/tone interaction of Kera</i>	187-196
Julia Sallabank	<i>Endangered language maintenance and social networks</i>	197-208
Bonny Sands	<i>The contribution of language documentation to historical phonology</i>	209-219
Galini Sapountzaki, Eleni Efthimiou & Stavroula-Evita Fotinea	<i>Greek Sign Language documentation: theoretical implications and practical considerations</i>	221-221
Eva Schultze-Berndt	<i>On manners and paths of refining Talmy's typology of motion expressions via language documentation</i>	223-233
Eugénie Stapert	<i>Linguistic theory and fieldwork in interaction: the case of Pirahã</i>	235-242
Yuko Sugita	<i>Language revitalization or language fossilization? Some suggestions for language documentation from the viewpoint of interactional linguistics</i>	243-250
Hein van der Voort	<i>Theoretical and social implications of language documentation and description on the eve of destruction in Rondônia</i>	251-259
Robert S. Williams & Jade Comfort	<i>Language documentation and description among refugee populations</i>	261-268
Ulrike Zeshan	<i>The ethics of documenting sign languages in village communities</i>	269-279
Appendix	<i>List of contributors</i>	281

Introduction

PETER K. AUSTIN, OLIVER BOND, DAVID NATHAN
School of Oriental and African Studies

The Linguistics Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies was the first linguistics department established in Britain and was founded in 1932 as a centre for research and study in Oriental and African languages. Today, the Department belongs to the Faculty of Languages and Cultures and includes the Endangered Languages Academic Programme and the Endangered Languages Archive which are part of the *Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project*, funded by Arcadia (formerly The Lisbet Rausing Charitable Fund). In addition to its core members of staff, the Department is home to an active community of post-doctoral researchers, visiting scholars, research associates and postgraduate students. The interests of staff, students and visitors cover a wide range of theoretical and applied aspects of linguistics, broadly conceived, including syntax, phonology, semantics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, language typology, language documentation, language archiving, lexicography, multimedia, language pedagogy, translation studies and research on individual languages and language families. We work on languages spoken on every continent of the world, particularly endangered and under-described languages. The Department is a vibrant research environment with seminars, workshops, and training courses held from time to time, in addition to a regular series of Departmental Seminars and a fortnightly Research Seminar. We publish two journals annually: *SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics* and *Language Documentation and Description*.

The Department provides teaching programmes at all levels: BA, MA and PhD. For the MA we offer a range of options, including an MA in Linguistics and the world's only MA in Language Documentation and Description (which has two pathways, 'Field Linguistics' and 'Language Documentation and Support'). The structure of our programmes is driven by our belief that it is essential that classes at all levels convey a sense of what the discipline is currently trying to explain, and the importance and excitement of such debates. Teaching is by means of lectures, seminars, discussion groups, small group tutorials, and practical classes. For PhD students, there is a full training programme in research techniques, with additional courses in methods of linguistic analysis and fieldwork. PhD students are currently carrying out fieldwork in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

In 2007 the Department of Linguistics at SOAS celebrates its 75th anniversary. This conference marks the 75 year tradition of linguistics within the School and the 5th anniversary of the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project, comprising the Endangered Languages Academic Programme (ELAP), the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR), and the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP).

The conference aims to bring together researchers working on linguistic theory and language documentation and description, with a particular focus on innovative work on under-described or endangered languages, both spoken and signed, especially those of Asia and Africa. Our goal is to provide a forum to

discuss the ways that linguists and others, particularly community members, can respond to the current challenges to linguistic diversity and build on experiences of the past.

This volume contains most of the papers given at the conference. Presenters were asked to produce a 'short version' of their paper (about 5-10 pages in length) before the conference and this resulting volume is included in the conference materials distributed to attendees. The papers have been lightly edited for consistency of style and format.

Bloomsbury, London
26th November 2007

Acknowledgements

The conference organising committee of Peter K. Austin, Oliver Bond, Monik Charette, Alison Kelly and David Nathan express their appreciation to the following:

- Plenary speakers Phillip Cash Cash and Richard Hudson
- Graham Furniss, host of the celebratory lunch
- The Endangered Languages Academic Programme and the Faculty of Languages and Cultures for financial support
- SOAS Marketing Office for conference pack materials
- Publisher exhibitors who donated books: Brill, Cambridge University Press, Edinburgh University Press, John Benjamins, and Oxford University Press
- Jacqui Freeman for help with conference preparation and organisation
- Tui Pritchard and Tom Castle for design of logos, posters, proceedings cover, and signage
- Louise Ashmore for formatting the conference proceedings

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