Book Reviews

Gunter Senft, ed. 2010. *Endangered Austronesian and Australian Aboriginal Languages: Essays on language documentation, archiving and revitalization.* Canberra: Pacific Linguistics 618, vi + 221 pp. ISBN 978-085-88-3623-5. $Aust. 66.00 (Australia), $Aust. 60.00 (elsewhere), paper.

Most of the papers in this volume represent the output of a session on endangered languages and cultures held at the 6th Conference of the European Society for Oceanists in 2005. Senft's introduction to the book begins with a quote that reads as a call to arms: "When a people no longer dares to defend its language, it is ripe for slavery." The papers in the volume, however, are not particularly political in their orientation, but rather span almost every major topic relating to language endangerment and documentation: the language-culture interface, archiving, technological advances, and field reports on particular projects and regions, as well as curriculum development. The one thread that holds the papers together is that they relate to the Austronesian and Australian languages of the Pacific. The only area that is most clearly lacking in the collection is issues of linguistic description and language change. Thus, for those expecting linguistic data, this volume will not offer as much as it will for those interested in any of the fields mentioned above. In the following, I give a brief summary of each chapter with special attention paid to parts I and II. The book is divided into three parts with a total of 13 chapters (including Gunter Senft's introductory chapter).

Part I, "The documentation of endangered languages," contains four chapters. Darrell Tryon's brief chapter, "The endangered languages of Vanuatu," is a very valuable reference as it gives a list of all the known languages of Vanuatu with speaker number estimates and a short summary of the endangerment situation. Vanuatu has emerged as one of the areas in most urgent need of descriptive fieldwork, as it contains the highest language density anywhere on earth but suffers from large scale language attrition. Hopefully, this reference will succeed in leading students and others to help document the many undescribed languages of this country.

Gabriele Cablitz's paper, "A field report on a language documentation project on the Marquesas in French Polynesia," is a report on her DOBES-funded documentation project on the Marquesan language. She offers a good background on the language situation and its historical roots, including several surprising facts. For instance, we learn that the Marquesan education system is still completely French-medium and that until recently children who were caught speaking their maternal language during school hours were punished severely, as is unfortunately still the case in so many other parts of the world. Furthermore, the system of higher education follows the French model so closely that college students have exactly the same curriculum as their counterparts in France, having to read Baudelaire, Hugo, and Molière in the original. Both here and in other work, Cablitz reports that the home language of Marquesan families is increasingly becoming French,

even in rural areas. This no doubt is due to language policy and the fact that Marquesans are unable to advance economically in their society without being able to speak French.

An interesting thread that runs through both Cablitz's and Hoëm's papers on Polynesia (see below for a discussion of the latter) is inter-island rivalry and its effect on language policies and attitudes. In the case of the Marquesas, there has developed a strong resentment towards the dominating position of Tahitian vis-à-vis the local language. The language movement came about not as a direct reaction to French hegemony but rather as an answer to the imposition of the Tahitian language. The creation of "language academies" and the adoption of French prescriptive attitudes towards the role of such academies appears to have exacerbated linguistic, cultural, and social rifts. This is only touched upon briefly in this volume, but it is an interesting topic that deserves more investigation.

Ingjerd Hoëm's paper, "Language endangerment: Situations of loss and gain," discusses the somewhat similar case of Tokelauan, which had until recently been confined to the shadows of Samoan. Unlike the case of the Marquesas, where children were made to speak the colonial language, French, in school, Hoëm explains that Tokelauan children were forced to speak Samoan and similarly punished for using their home language (56). The paper opens with an important paradoxical observation (53): "As the issue of language endangerment and language death has hit linguistics with some urgency, the recognition of a need for documentation of vanishing cultures has receded into the background within mainstream social anthropology." It is indicative of how far apart the two disciplines have drifted from each other that there are few authors who can even broach the subject for lack of familiarity with modern developments in both fields. It seems the main reason that descriptive efforts at capturing vanishing cultures have receded is the post-modern "realization" that objectivity is impossible. The observation made by Hoëm, however, is not an indictment of modern anthropology, but almost the opposite, a call to linguists to abandon what the author deems to be misguided attempts at capturing "pristine" precontact varieties. Instead, Hoëm proposes "that we concentrate our efforts on the documentation of the factual array of contemporary speech genres ... instead of focussing singularly on the rescue of what we consider to be authentic, indigenous or old in our documentation" (54).

In this, she seems to be at odds with Senft (see below), who makes a strong case in his contribution for the need to document disappearing genres for their unique cultural value. In any case, it should be clear that attempting to institute one particular approach or another to the world at large is futile. Large scale documentation projects necessarily follow a path negotiated by all involved parties: the linguist(s), the community of speakers, and the funders. It is commonly accepted practice to aim for as many naturalistic genres as possible, and so Hoëm's position is certainly not controversial in that regard. But if community collaborators desire documentation of a particular moribund genre, then what linguist in their right mind would ignore it simply on the basis of being old and moribund? What Hoëm is really advocating, it seems, is embracing innovative genres with the same gusto that is typically reserved for old conservative ones. In support of this idea, she offers several short Tokelauan texts of innovative genres. As the context for the *kakai* genre of stories disappears (nighttime village gatherings,) innovative genres are emerging from the use of Tokelauan as a written language and its use in new surroundings in New

Zealand migrant communities. Crucially, innovative genres do not always simply parrot genres from the dominant contact culture and are thus of special interest, as Hoëm notes (65). Nonetheless, we can surely appreciate innovation without embracing the more deleterious aspects of post-modernism, which appear to have led mainstream cultural anthropology down a pernicious path of pure interpretation and excessive navel-gazing.

Senft's paper, "Culture change – language change: Missionaries and moribund varieties of Kilivila," tackles the language situation of the Trobriand islands, where he has conducted research since the early 1980s. According to Senft, Kilivila on the whole is not endangered, but there are several endangered genres of speech associated with a religious system that is fading under outside pressure. He focuses on *biga megwa* 'the language of magic' and *biga baloma* 'the language of the spirits of the dead'. The past is of particularly high salience to the Trobriand islanders during the *milamala* festival period, as the spirits of the ancestors are thought to visit the villages during this time and enforce adherence to the traditional ways. Until the 1960s, ritualized speech is said to have been used to communicate news to the ancestors on a more regular basis. With this background, Senft emphasizes the importance of these conservative genres in understanding the Trobriand worldview: "I would also like to point out that only the anthropological-linguistic reconstruction of the knowledge codified and narrated in a very specific register opens up the Trobriand Islanders' collective religious knowledge and their weltanschauung for any outside observer [...] the insider with a true interest in and knowledge of the register constituting the genre *wosi milamala* will learn much more about the mythic and timeless connections that constitute the Trobriand meaning of life than someone who may have heard as a child about the existence of the baloma and their life in the Tuma underworld but otherwise may be indifferent with respect to these eschatological matters" (78–79).

This provides an interesting contrast to Hoëm's stance, as Senft clearly regards these genres as pivotal to Trobriand culture. He goes further than most, in fact, by explicitly claiming a direct link between language change and the slow dismantling of traditional Trobriand social mores and beliefs: "In general we can regard ritual language as the recognized culmination of the learning of knowledge which is basic and fundamental for the social construction of a society's reality. This reality, in turn, fosters its stability with the help of the relative stability of ritual language ... the changes that affect these language varieties are induced by cultural change. However, such language changes, once induced, have severe consequences for the organization and construction of the culture of the respective society in turn because it escalates the dynamic of change" (90).

As we know from more brutal cases of forced assimilation in the Americas, Australia, and elsewhere, cutting the younger generations off from the language through boarding schools and similar institutions was a strategic centerpiece in the larger goal of annihilating their identity and culture. In the far more ambiguous case of the Trobriand Islands, where there is no such violent coercion, it remains to be demonstrated that language loss actually precedes culture loss, or that waning interest in particular aspects of the culture due to outside infuence are responsible for loss of endangered speech genres.

There is a larger issue that is unfortunately not discussed by Senft, and that is how endangered genres should be prioritized as linguists scramble to document as much as possible before it disappears. Should endangered genres of moderately healthy languages count as

special cases of endangered languages? Should genres be prioritized differently from dialects? Do different types of genres deserve different prioritization (for example, conservative ritual genres versus recent hybrid genres)? Hopefully, these questions will be given more attention, as they have clear relevance to funding agencies and the field as a whole.

Part II is entitled "The archiving of the documented materials" and focuses on technological and archivinh matters. Nick Thieberger's paper, "Linguistic preservation and linguistic responsibility: Examples from the Pacific," reviews the major issues of digital archiving and introduces the PARADISEC archive, which he directs. Thieberger drives home several points in the documentation literature regarding standards of recording and archiving and takes several well-known figures to task for irresponsible claims. One of these is R. M. W. Dixon's somewhat curmudgeonly recommendation against employing technology in language documentation. It should be clear, however, that Dixon has never claimed to care about language documentation as it is commonly understood today. Dixon is, above all, a grammarian, and apparently has not modified his views of how to deal with primary data since the invention of the cassette recorder. Indeed, from a grammarian's perspective, Dixon is not mistaken when he states that modern tools are not required to write good grammars. While it is easy to lampoon Dixon's now archaic methodology, the language documentation program has yet to take seriously what appears to be a real problem: with all our technology, there is still too much new descriptive work that falls below standards of the 1800s. While the links between generalization and primary data are often obscure in the work of the early Austronesianists— van der Tuuk, Esser, Adriani, inter alia—the thoroughness and broad comparative vision found in their work is rarely matched today, despite a dramatic increase in knowledge over the years. To take another example, Wolff's 1972 two-volume Cebuano dictionary, originally made with piles of index cards, is perhaps the most comprehensive dictionary of any Austronesian language ever compiled, despite the wide availability of powerful lexicon-building software over the last two decades. Thus what we have gained in technology seems to have been lost elsewhere, and this is perhaps the frustration that brought Dixon to take his contrarian (if not irresponsible) position on technology.

Thieberger also takes players such as the Rosetta Stone project to task for their inflated claims of archiving 1,000 languages for posterity by engraving language data on titanium disks and distributing them strategically throughout the earth as a permanent record. Among other archival problems, there is no attempt to store audio or video through these disks.

At the same time, we can also apply a critical eye to some of the inflated promises that commonly crop up in the language documentation literature. Thieberger, for instance, paints the following rosy picture of what could soon be achieved: "For example, if we tag all utterances for type (exclamation, narrative, procedural, etc) and the speaker's name, and we have a table listing speakers and their characteristics, it should be possible to hear all exclamations made by a male speaker under thirty."

Unfortunately, we have yet to see one model that makes good on all the promises surrounding online databases of primary documentation data; either the data is locked up, or the search capabilities are a paltry shadow of what they could be. Never mind cross-searching utterance type and speaker age, how about a database that just allows searching

for a word across an entire project? Even this seemingly simple feature does not appear to be available" (107).

In the subsection entitled "implications for fieldwork", Thieberger (107) reasserts the oft-heard advice to record in the uncompressed WAV format with good microphones. Thankfully, it seems that the campaign against compression has been successful, as few field linguists are recording in compressed formats these days. As a personal gripe, I only wish the same emphasis would now be given to placing a microphone correctly, as too many well-seasoned field linguists seem to be in the dark about this.

In the following paper, "Digital archiving – a necessity in documentary linguistics," Peter Wittenburg and Paul Trilsbeek discuss the organization of the DOBES archive and directions for its further development. The paper is a good summary of how one of the largest archives of endangered language material works and is a good guide to the issues and challenges that large-scale archiving currently faces. One theme put forth here surrounds the "Live Archives Initiative", whose principles state that "...digital archives should make their content easily accessible. In addition, digital archives should allow authorized users to enrich the content, i.e., add resources and comments in a way that the original content is not affected" (http://www.mpi.nl/dam-lr/lra-fiyer/lra.html). Wittenburg and Trilsbeek focus more on the ultimate goal of allowing users to actively participate in the enrichment of archival materials by "adding extensions and commentaries". It would seem, though, that a prerequisite priority for archives is to better facilitate access to the materials: both helping potential users discover materials, and displaying them in a user-friendly manner. At present, the IMDI-browser of the DOBES archives cannot yet be said to allow easy discovery. For instance, users need to click all the way from the highest node in the entire archive to a singular item of interest, only to be told that the item is restricted. An orthogonal issue not discussed here is the fact that relatively few archived resources have been made public. This is obviously a decision that is in the hands of the depositor rather than the archive and it is not the primary function of an archive to publicize material, but nonetheless archives should be gently urging their depositors to restrict access only if necessary. Otherwise, the archived corpora risk losing relevance.

The recent strong focus on technology comes through in this paper as well, and Wittenburg and Trilsbeek are not immune from making the same type of claims already noted above. There is hopeful talk of such activities as calculating statistics over a corpus and collaborating online. On page 126, we are introduced to another type of search that will one day be possible: "give me all annotations from 4-year-old girls where pronouns are used and relate that with those from 6-year-old-girls." Again, such wishful thinking obscures the present state of affairs in which even elementary online searches are still largely unavailable.

The authors also discuss in passing the problem of a unified terminology and the GOLD ontology project that aims to make progress on this front. The problem is that the integrity of cross-corpora searching is severely compromised by the lack of universally accepted definitions for even such commonplace notions as "nominative case," "perfective aspect," and so on. Wittenburg and Trilsbeek state that "archives have to be aware of the increasing pressure on them to provide frameworks for the creation, manipulation and sharing of practical ontologies" (129).

It is nice to see that archivists like those in DOBES are taking note of the semantic interoperability problem, but the problem is so all-encompassing and fundamental to the discipline that it is hard to imagine a resolution in the near future. The GOLD ontology (http://linguistics-ontology.org), which has at least yielded a framework for tackling questions of terminology, has not yet resulted in any actual progress "on the ground," as far as I can tell. As I see it, the solution can only come through the acceptance of concrete *formal diagnostics* rather than informal definitions like the ones GOLD advocates. It remains unclear what role, if any, archives can play in making real progress on this front short of imposing demands on the terminological practices of depositors, a step that no archive has yet dared to take.

Missing from both the papers on archiving is the archive's role in promoting their collections to nonlinguists and nonacademics. While current trends seem to be pulling archives in the direction of social media, we are left asking what role archivists have at the other end of the spectrum. How can they provide improved accessibility of their deposits to the communities in which they were collected? How can they help repatriate older deposits that now lie hidden from the relevant speaker communities? Hopefully these concerns will be taken up with the same enthusiasm shown for the more technical aspects of the enterprise.

The third paper in the archiving portion of the book, "Empowering Pacific languages and cultures mapping with applied case studies in Taiwan and the Philippines" by David Blundell, Michael Buckland, and Jeanette Zerneke, with Yu-Hsiu Lu and Andrew Limond, is not directly related to archiving, but discusses a mapping project that involves the Batanic languages and Cebuano. The Cebuano component of the project sought to map all geographic points found in bibliographical entries in a collection of Cebuano literature. It is hard to imagine who could possibly benefit from such a map, and I say this even as an aficionado of Cebuano literature. The other project reported on, a cultural map of the Batanes islands, would have far more utility if only it contained the content it was meant to. Instead, the actual online resource more resembles a collection of vacation photos with little annotation. Some interesting videos are provided but there is no special value that the map interface adds to these. The authors conclude (150) that "ECAI projects demonstrate the feasibility of starting with a world map and then zooming into regions or specific language or cultural areas and providing georeferenced links with related online resources such as library catalog records, text corpora, online dictionaries, and related databases." On the contrary, we can see barely any output relating to the project's stated goals: "Mapping dialects; A survey of the archives, museums, and other cultural aspects related to societies of the Bashi Channel; Video and photographic documentation of archaeology, house construction, fishing, agriculture, art projects, and social life; Audio-visual recording of local narratives." The penultimate section of the paper describes "Local Taiwan children's website development," whose connection to the rest of the work is unclear. While the project sounds impressive, neither of the url addresses referred to lead to anything at present.

The third part of the book is concerned with the revitalization of endangered languages and opens with Margaret Florey and Michael C. Ewing's paper on revitalization in Maluku area of Indonesia ("Political acts and language revitalization: Community and

state in Maluku"). The authors discuss language, revitalization and ethnic politics in the wake of the of the massive communal killings that began in 1999. Florey and Ewing report that the region is now looking towards traditional custom (*adat*) to heal the deep divisions between the Muslim and Christian communities that resulted from the violence of that period. The Maluku area is particularly rich in linguistic and cultural diversity and could very well hold important keys to understanding the way in which the Austronesian languages spread from what is today eastern Indonesia into the Pacific. It is thus unfortunate that the area and its people have been subject to so much suffering. The authors discuss the dire situation of local languages whose speakers were displaced during the violence, as well as their efforts in bringing together speakers of different endangered languages belonging to both religious camps. While in some cases, the authors report that Christian groups are unwilling to work with Muslim ones and vice versa, there is also a new political engagement with local languages that had never been seen before.

The authors advocate for linguists to adopt Cameron et al.'s (1993) "empowerment model" in their work with local communities. This model conceives of research as *on, with*, and *for* the social subjects, and indeed Florey and Ewing report that progress is being made in facilitating the work of local language activists. It should be noted, though, that the three models presented at the outset of the paper, the ethical model (research *on* social subjects), the advocacy model (*on* and *for* social subjects) and the empowerment model (*on, for*, and *with* social subjects), are increasingly ambitious. The empowerment model, as stated, is presented as "regular" linguistic research *plus* outreach *plus* training. But it is, of course, not just a simple choice on the part of researchers whether they would like to continue working only for the academic community or additionally engage communities in training and outreach. Naturally, the more ambitious the goals, the slower they will be accomplished. In the case of the authors' Malukan project, where training and outreach has been prioritized, some of the more traditional outputs of documentation work—annotated recordings, text collections, dictionaries, and grammars—are not yet forthcoming. This is not a criticism of the model, but it should perhaps be made clearer that there is a give and take between the ethical model and the empowerment model.

Jakelin Troy and Michael Walsh's contribution, "A linguistic renaissance in the south east of Australia," is a six-page discussion of language revitalization in the southeast of Australia, where Aboriginal languages have fared the worst. They give a summary of progress made in several languages of the area, and note that success is dependent on giving community members leadership positions, as well as giving more academic credit to documentation and revitalization work.

The following two papers, by Sophie Nock and Diane Johnson, respectively, look at Māori. Nock's contribution, "Te reo Māori – Māori language revitalization," provides a good overview, beginning from the period of first contact with Europeans until the revitalization movement and the *kōhanga reo* language nests. The details of this history are important for a broad audience because Māori represents one of the most successful cases of language revitalization in the world, along with Hawaiian, Welsh, and Hebrew. Nonetheless, vigilance is required, and Nock stresses that Māori must still expand its domains of usage if it is to truly escape endangerment.

Johnson's paper, "Learning style preferences and New Zealand Māori students: Questioning folk wisdom," takes a critical look at assumptions regarding the education of Māori and Pacific populations in New Zealand. The paper is not strictly about the Māori language but about general difficulties that confront Māori students. Johnson reports that recent studies show that the "learning style" preferences of Māori students may not differ significantly from the non-Māori population, contrary to previous opinions. Johnson stresses that the need to reevaluate the problems of the educational system in relation to the indigenous population goes beyond being a Māori issue, as it effects the welfare of the entire nation.

The final paper in the book, "Classroom-based language revitalization: The interaction between curriculum planning and teacher development in the case of the Māori language" by Winifred Crombie, covers the development of a national curriculum for Māori. Some surprising facts are noted here. While Māori is experiencing a very successful revitalization in the classroom, there are still few homes in which it is the primary language. Most of the teachers at the early levels are furthermore said to lack proficiency in the language themselves. Most surprising, perhaps, is the fact that many who teach Māori at this level are not themselves Māori. An interesting challenge in the creation of a Māori curriculum is how to integrate cultural competence. Many of the concepts found in the French and German language curricula in New Zealand were, understandably, found to not translate easily to the Māori curriculum.

In sum, there are some valuable contributions in this book although the quality of the papers is uneven. While some have the feel of full papers, others more resemble reworked presentations. It does, however, have something for everyone (except perhaps those only interested in grammar), as the topics touched on range over an impressive spectrum of current issues. Hopefully, some of the more critical questions brought up in this review will receive more attention in future discourse on documentation and archiving.

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