

An Introduction to the Languages of the World. *Anatole V. Lyovin.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 492 pp.

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The volume under review is intended as a textbook for a linguistic course surveying human languages. Such courses are taught in many universities around the world, and the appearance of such a book is unquestionably welcome. I have been writing this review concomitantly with teaching the course "Languages of the World" during one semester and thus tested Lyovin's book as a reference source (though not exactly as a textbook for students). There is currently an emerging super-discipline in linguistics (promoted, in the first place, by Johanna Nichols) that combines traditional comparative linguistics, areal linguistics, and typology, and focuses on linguistic diversity in general. A survey of languages of the world is quite useful for that promising enterprise as well.

It should be mentioned from the outset that undertaking a project like this one requires exceptional boldness, since no single person can be expert in such a large number of areas and language families. My general impression of this book is that it lives up to its goals and that the author has combined his own expertise and that of other people in a very efficient way.

The book consists of eight chapters and an appendix with language maps. Chapter 1 is introductory and discusses the basics of various classifications of languages: genetic, typological, and sociolinguistic. Chapter 2 outlines types of writing systems. Chapters 3 through 7 are devoted to five language areas: Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania (including Australia and New Guinea), and the Americas. This particular division is not self-evident but in this kind of survey project not too much hinges on it. Chapter 8 describes contact languages (pidgins and creoles) and is a useful addition to the volume.

Chapters 3–7 constitute the core of the book, and most of my comments will be on these chapters. The space Lyovin gives to different language areas is uneven. That is understandable, since very different levels of documentation and comparative work exist for different regions. But still it is somewhat disappointing that several dozen European languages are discussed on 64 pages while Papuan languages constituting up to one-sixth of the world's languages are given only six pages. Or consider languages of Australia and North America north of Mexico: in each of those areas about two-hundred languages were probably spoken in the precontact time, but the former are described on less than two pages while the latter are given 18 pages. In general, Australian languages are particularly underrepresented in the book, and unlike other areas no attempt is made to provide a comprehensive list of language names.

Each of the chapters 3 through 7 is organized as a successive consideration of language families or other conventional groupings (such as "Languages of the Caucasus," or "Paleosiberian languages") belonging to the area in question. Of course, many language families belong to more than one area (e.g., Uralic and Indo-European are both European and Asian families, Afro-Asiatic is both African and Asian, etc.). In all such cases the detailed account is given within the area to which the "center of gravity" of the family belongs, and in the chapter on the other area a reference is given; however, in some cases individual "migrant" languages are considered in some detail inside their "host" areas (see next paragraph on the African chapter).

To each family (or conventional grouping) within the given area a section is devoted. For example, chapter 5 on Africa contains the following sections: I. Afro-Asiatic family, II. Nilo-Saharan family, III. Niger-Congo family, IV. Khoisan family, V. Austronesian (this is a short section about Malagasy of Madagascar, while Austronesian languages in general are described in chapter 6), and VI. Indo-European (this is a short section on Afrikaans of South Africa, while Indo-European languages in general are treated in chapter 3). This principle of data presentation immediately and clearly reveals different genetic density of different language areas, that is, the ratio of the number of genetic units to the size of the area. Chapter 4 on Asia contains 17 sections (one of which, namely Paleosiberian, is not, though, a genetic unit), while chapter 7 on the Americas (almost equal in area to Asia) contains 189 sections altogether.

Each section within a chapter normally contains the following types of information:

- genetic status of the grouping, its potential external connections;
- its internal classification (e.g., Sino-Tibetan into Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman, the latter having two further levels of divisions);
- a list of languages belonging to a family or group (in case of groups numbering many dozens or hundreds of languages, only the main representatives are listed);
- the location and the number of speakers, indicated for each listed language;
- a brief structural characterization of the given language family in terms of phonological and morphological peculiarities, prevalent word order, and, optionally, other features (such characterization is present for some families, and missing for others, and it is not always clear why).

In most areas of the world the genetic status of language groups is a subject of hot scholarly debate, and in a book like this one it is objectively very difficult to provide a balanced judgment on many issues where no consensus has been reached. This job has been done by Lyovin quite successfully: in most cases he mentions all major hypotheses on genetic connections but lists only generally recognized genetic units as established. Sometimes he is even overly cautious, e.g., in listing Nakh and Northeast Caucasian as separate families within the areal grouping "languages of the Caucasus." (These two groups are generally recognized as one established family.)

After the overview of language families, each core chapter includes sketches of two languages of the area, exercises, notes, and selected bibliography. Each of these constituents of a chapter calls for a separate note.

Including sketches of languages exemplifying the given area is a very good idea, because otherwise this book would be too dry and devoid of live linguistic data. The sketches, 10 to 30 pages long, are well written and give a fairly complete picture of the language being described (with the exception, perhaps, of the sketch of Yup'ik Eskimo). In particular, at the end of each sketch a sample text in the given language is provided, with a morpheme-by-morpheme translation; this is a very precious component of the book. The author is apparently familiar himself with some of the selected languages, while other sketches are a reinterpretation of published descriptions. The pairs of languages are as representative of their respective areas as they could be in the cases of Europe (Russian and Finnish), Africa (Arabic and Swahili), and Oceania (Hawaiian and Dyirbal). However, in the case of Asia, two languages of the same family (Mandarin Chinese and Classical Tibetan) have been chosen for some reason while there are more than a dozen endemic language families in Asia. For America, two languages that are very atypical for that area have been chosen: Yup'ik Eskimo (the Eskimo-Aleut family is the most peripheral for America by any account) and Ayacucho Quechua (Quechua languages are typologically closer to the "Altaic" type of Northern Asia than to most American Indian languages).

Exercises in languages of the particular language family, intended for students, are fruitful ideas. Many exercises are very well-written (e.g., that on Hixkaryana on pp. 393–395). Some others are not sufficiently thought out. For example, the exercise for Michoacan Aztec on pp. 395–396 does not contain any assignment, the exercise on a Khoisan language on p. 239 seems too elementary, and the exercise in comparative morphology on pp. 102–103 does not seem to have any specific unequivocal solution.

The bibliographies (both chapter-specific and the general one at the end of the book) are very useful; it is particularly good that they include not only items from North American and Western European publications, but books published in other countries and in various languages as well.

The subject/name index is not entirely consistent. For example, Zaborski on p. 186 and Williamson on p. 192 are mentioned in identical contexts, but the former is included in the index while the latter is not.

Now, I will present a few comments pertaining to specific points of the book. There are factual errors and inaccuracies in the book, which are, however, virtually inevitable for a project of such breadth being accomplished by one writer. I am rather surprised that there are not as many errors (in the areas on which I can judge) as there could be, provided that the process of interpreting published sources is far from straightforward and trivial.

Quite a few cited numbers of language speakers, as well as language locations, are doubtful. This concerns many languages of the former USSR; the author was apparently using out-of-date sources not taking into account the 1989 census. For example, much of the data given for Turkic languages on p. 110 are too low: already in 1989 it was 280,000 rather than 189,000 for Kumyk (also, this language is spoken not in southern but in northern Dagestan republic); 230,000 rather than 191,000 for Karachay-Balkar (also, this language is spoken not only in Karachay-Cherkessia, but in Kabarda-Balkaria as well); 17 million rather than 15 million for Uzbek, etc. The figure of 220,000 Yiddish speakers in the former Soviet Union (p. 47) is definitely

a gross exaggeration (the figure from the 1989 census is 153,000, probably an exaggeration, too, and it has significantly decreased since then). From the numbers of Hebrew speakers on p. 187 it follows that there are over 1 million speakers outside of Israel and the United States (this may be a mere typo). The number of speakers of Fula dialects, according to the Barbara Grimes' *Ethnologue*, is 13 million, which is much higher than the figure given on p. 193. The Siouan language Quapaw is claimed to be extinct (p. 315), while *Ethnologue* lists the remaining 34 speakers of it. The Iroquoian language Huron was not "originally spoken in the Great Lakes area of Canada and in northeastern Oklahoma" (p. 317); a part of the same tribe, usually called Wyandot, resettled to Oklahoma in the eighteenth century.

Much of the geographical and political information related to the former Soviet republics is out of date. Names of regions and republics used in the book belong mostly to the Soviet era. Maps III and IV on p. 442 contain political terminology that was dropped six years before the publication of this volume. Even the Chechen-Ingush republic is on the map, although in 1991 it broke into two parts, one of which subsequently was in a state of war with Russia for several years. In general, the maps call for significant improvement. For example, the wide geographical distribution of millions of Fula speakers (Atlantic family) across Africa is not reflected in map XIII on p. 450, while the dispersion of 10,000 speakers of Evenki across Siberia (map XII on p. 449) is represented in great detail. The Icelandic language is missing from the map of Europe (p. 440), and Tsezic languages are missing from the map of the Caucasus (p. 442).

In some respects accounts of different languages and language families are not exactly consistent. For example, only for some families is the total number of speakers provided. For some families of moderate size, the languages belonging to them are listed exhaustively, while for other families of comparable size only small samples are given (as, e.g., for Athabaskan on p. 312). Normally alternative genetic classifications are discussed in great detail (see above), but in several cases problematic classifications are given without any comment. For instance, the important West African languages Yoruba and Igbo are listed in the Benue-Congo group, while they have been more frequently attributed to the Kwa group. In the sketch of Hawaiian no explicit indication of alignment (accusative vs. ergative, etc.) is given, while that is among the basic typological characteristics.

There are other local flaws in different places. For example, the claim that "all Slavic languages are mutually intelligible to a very high degree" (p. 50) is definitely an overstatement. From the fairly detailed classification of the Siouan family of North America (pp. 315–316), an important member is missing: Catawba, the most peripheral Siouan language. The Kiowa-Tanoan language of New Mexico mentioned as *Tolowa* on p. 322 is probably Tewa; *Tolowa* is the name of an Athabaskan language spoken on the coast of Northern California and Southern Oregon and very close to Tututni (there is a typo in the name of this latter language on p. 312, as well as in the name Bear Lake).

Of course, all of such "nit-picks" can be fished out exhaustively only by specialists in respective areas and language families. I believe that Oxford University Press should request corrections from experts in particular areas and consider publishing

**a revised edition thereafter. A product of really superior quality
would result from such a procedure. ❖**