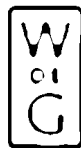


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Marianne Mithun, *The Languages of Native North America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, XXI + 773 pages, ISBN 0-521-23228-7, US\$ 90 (hardback); ISBN 0-521-29875-X, US\$ 32 (paperback).

Reviewed by ANDREJ A. KIBRIK, Rossijskaja Akademija Nauk

This volume is a most welcome continuation of a most useful series. It is a great pleasure to review Marianne Mithun's *The Languages of Native North America* in the Cambridge Linguistic Area Surveys, since one can only express admiration for the tremendous amount of labor behind this book. There are very few people in modern Native North American linguistics, if any, who could do an equally beautiful job as Mithun. As was aptly remarked in an early short review, "M[ithun] dares to play the role of a modern Kroeber or Sapir, and she pulls it off" (Victor Golla, *SSILA Newsletter* 18-4 [January 2000], pp. 11–12).

It is important to note at the outset that, in accordance with American ethnolinguistic tradition, "North America" is understood in the book as essentially the modern territory of the USA and Canada, with some minor outliers in Mexico.

Mithun's book consists of a 12-page introduction and two major parts. Part I, "The nature of the languages" (pp. 13–294), is organized by topic and provides an account of the main types of phenomena, such as sounds and sound patterns, words, grammatical categories, and sentences. There is also a chapter on special language. Part II, "Catalogue of languages" (pp. 295–616), contains an account of the genetic and areal diversity on the North American continent, and a catalogue per se, in the form of an alphabetical list of over 50 language families and isolates currently identified in North America and structural sketches of each of them. The book also contains a preface, a transcription key, a list of abbreviations, twelve maps, an incredibly rich list of references of 139 pages, and an index of names, terms, and languages.

Written in a clear and simple style, the book introduces linguistic notions gradually, and is therefore accessible not only to specialized Americanists or typologists but also to a wider audience with an interest in American Indian languages and human languages in general.

The introduction outlines the history of the study of North American languages. Some fascinating facts are recounted, such as Thomas Jefferson's encouragement of language documentation, being urged by the Russian empress Catherine the Great (pp. 5-6). Mithun also mentions the unfortunate role of generative linguistics, which at the peak of its influence diverted the attention of many American linguists in different directions as many of the endangered native languages were still spoken and could have been documented far better than now (p. 10).

Chapter 1 of Part I, "Sounds and sound patterns", describes the typical phonemic inventories, syllable structures, tone, and harmony systems, and includes an interesting section on sound symbolism. The description of writing systems could have been complemented with some illustrations.

Chapter 2, "Words", addresses the typically polysynthetic nature of American languages. Although in fact not all of them are highly synthetic, no purely analytic languages are found in North America. In an intriguing passage Mithun suggests that polysynthesis may not be just a random formal technique but rather a way to background certain information, as opposed to foregrounding it by rendering it in separate words (pp. 39, 51-53). Other issues covered in the chapter include morpheme types and morpheme order, incorporation, and parts of speech. The latter (see pp. 56-67) represent an unresolved issue in American Indian linguistics, and it is unclear whether there can be languages without a basic emphasis on the noun vs. verb opposition.

Chapter 3, "Grammatical categories", contains a survey of the gamut of semantic categories, some of which are obvious, such as person, number, gender, manner, space, time, and modality, while some others are not quite expected in grammatical systems, including shape and consistency (often underlying noun classification) and control (meanings such as 'on purpose' vs. 'accidentally'). What I found particularly interesting is the discussion of a family of verbal categories related to number, such as distributive, collective, and associative (pp. 88-94; since polysynthetic languages are verbo-centric, number tends to code the multiplicity of events rather than of referents), and means/manner meanings, such as 'with a hand/with a stick/with words', etc. (pp. 118-126), which are very typical for North American languages. Very unusual is the modality system in Caddo with its two series of pronouns, one for realis and the other for irrealis (p. 178).

Chapter 4, "Sentences", treats syntactic phenomena, such as predicate-argument structure, word order, role alignment types and various mixtures thereof, obliques and applicatives, possession, and clause combining. A central prob-

lem here is that of so-called pronominal arguments (pp. 189–192) – referential morphemes inside verb forms that, according to some (including Mithun), in certain languages may represent verb-internal clause arguments rather than mere agreement markers. Pronominal arguments constitute one of the important features of polysynthesis, so typical for North America. Mithun makes a distinction between those languages that have only 1st/2nd person pronouns (Athabaskan, Siouan) and those that also have non-zero 3rd person pronouns on the verb (Iroquoian). The latter tend to have fully pragmatic word order while the former typically have constrained word order (e.g., Siouan SOV). In the discussion of alignment, I would prefer to have a clearer distinction between the pairs of notions “nominative/accusative” and “subject/object” that sometimes seem to be used interchangeably, and I would not equate the role alignment patterns with the patterns of grammatical relations. An insightful account of Navajo postpositions is given in the section on obliques (p. 248). Very interesting is the discussion of various possession systems (which, however, looks somewhat out of place in the “Sentences” chapter), especially of that in Yuchi (pp. 254–255) where five different sets of possessive affixes are used, depending on the degree of alienability. In the section on clause combining, there is a particularly important discussion of switch-reference systems that are often sensitive more to the closeness of event linkage than to the coreferentiality of subjects as such.

Chapter 5, “Special language”, surveys unusual types of speech such as baby talk, gender-specific varieties, ceremonial language, speech play, or sign language. Quite unique is the information on animal talk in a number of languages (p. 273) and on abnormal speech as attributed to unusual kinds of people, such as the left-handed, greedy, etc. (p. 274). Plains Sign Talk, very salient among various Indian tribes of the Great Plains until quite recently, is discussed in detail (pp. 292–294).

What one gets in Part I is the result of a unique combination of Mithun’s own expertise in a wide range of language families, including Iroquoian, Pomoan, Chumashan, and Eskimo-Aleut, and of unusually broad and insightful reanalyses of data from other authors. Especially for polysynthesis, word order, switch-reference, modality, and number Mithun is drawing on her own earlier publications, already widely known. She generally provides simple and at the same time profound explanations of complex semantic issues, such as modality (p. 170).

Part II, “Catalogue of languages”, consists of two chapters. Chapter 6, “Relations among languages”, starts with a discussion of the notions of dialect, language, and family, and defines family as the largest set of demonstrably related languages. Particularly instructive is the discussion of the special use of the term “dialect” in early Americanist studies (p. 299). In the historical survey of genealogical classifications of American languages, the generally rather con-

servative approach towards bold hypotheses about distant relationships remains the same as in an earlier important publication co-edited by Mithun (Campbell & Mithun (eds.) 1979), but I feel that the present book inclines a bit more towards some of the lumping proposals. Well-known remote relationship hypotheses, such as Hokan and Penutian, are discussed at length. A number of aspects of language contact are featured. Borrowing is quite active in some languages and much less so in others, either for structural or for cultural reasons. The four clearest linguistic areas are identified, along with the features diffused in those areas: the Northwest Coast, California, the Southwest, and the Southeast. Types of contact languages found in the continent are discussed, such as *lingua francas*, pidgins, and mixed languages.

The 290-pages-long chapter 7, "Catalogue", consists of two sections: a survey of "normal" language families and isolates (Section 7.1) and a listing of contact languages found on the continent (such as Chinook Jargon, Michif, and others; Section 7.2). Section 7.1 gives 57 individual family descriptions, alphabetically arranged from Adai to Zuni, each from half a page to a couple of dozen pages long. In line with Mithun's general policy, only well-established groupings are considered as families. There are no such hyper-units as, for example, Hokan here: there are about a dozen separate families instead that in conjunction form the questionable Hokan. On the other hand, such groupings as Utian (= Miwok-Costanoan) are included, which presumably means that this previously controversial grouping is currently viewed as scientifically established. Each of the family-specific descriptions contains a list of languages, a brief history of research, information on individual languages (sociolinguistic status, geographical location, main publications), and an account of the most salient and typologically most interesting structural features. In many cases, linguistic examples and even texts are provided in a clear and flexible system of presentation: examples are sometimes given in a three-lines format (original/glossing/translation), sometimes integrated in the body of the text. To judge by the languages that I am personally familiar with (Athabaskan), Mithun's descriptions are remarkably accurate, even though she had not had an immediate personal experience with Athabaskan at the time the book was written.

My critical comments are a bit like complaints about Mozart not having composed better music still.

Perhaps, reversing the two main parts of the book would have been more natural. Essentially, Part I generalizes over the particulars in Part II. While reading Part I, I found myself frequently referring to the more detailed accounts of individual languages in Part II.

One relevant topic, though much discussed in recent literature, is given only a passing reference: the chronology of the peopling of America and the emergence of the enormous present-day genealogical diversity among the American languages.

A more detailed table of contents would have been desirable – especially as concerns the catalogue (Section 7.1) which is 250 pages long, but is without internal structuring in the table of contents.

The font is somewhat too small for comfortable reading. Evidently the publisher wanted to limit the volume of the book, which is huge anyway, but given that the margins, especially at the bottom, are very wide (only about 53% of the page is covered by text), it seems that the space of the page could have been used more efficiently.

The language maps provided in the book are not ideal. In fact, most of them are reprints from different volumes of the *Handbook of North American Indians*. Several maps were specially prepared for the present book by the cartographer Roberta Bloom, and they are better, but not flawless either. For example, Map 1b on p. xx treats California and Oregon Athabaskan (analogous groupings containing about three languages each) differently: all Californian languages are clustered together while only one of the Oregon languages (Tolowa) is mentioned. Some tribal territories are not identified. Makah and Quileute, entirely different languages, are attributed to the same tribal territory. Comparing this map with the more local Map 10 (appearing on p. 615, although page numbers are not given in this part of the book) it is sometimes hard to establish correlations between them. Map 10 has the territory “Southern Coast Salish”, and in order to see what languages correspond to it on Map 1b some research is necessary. The Chemakum language shown on Map 10 is missing from Map 1b. Different maps are based on different principles. Some emphasize geographical coordinates as landmarks, others use state and province borders.

For a book of this volume, errors and typos are few. For instance, the Spokane example (21) on p. 52 separates seven morphemes, but glosses eight, and the morpheme *-cin* is differently glossed as ‘food’ and ‘mouth’ in different lines. Some cited authors are missing from the bibliography (e.g., Slobodin 1981, cited on p. 324). The index is not always complete; for example Section 4.6, “Possession”, occupies pages 249 through 259 while only page 249 is listed in the index (p. 766). On p. 194, “O”, standing for “object”, is apparently missing from the tenth line.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that this book is a great asset for typologists. If one needs to know which languages are ergative in North America, which do and which do not have a tense system, or what is “distributive”, one does not need to rummage in dozens of grammars anymore: for many practical purposes, Mithun’s book will suffice. (And it will point those to the right grammars who are curious to know more.) In addition, this book can almost serve as an introduction to linguistic typology in its own right, since it explains many basic grammatical concepts in a simple and clear fashion, illustrating it from a linguistically (still) diverse continent.

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Ewa Czaykowska-Higgins & M. Dale Kinkade (eds.), *Salish Languages and Linguistics: Theoretical and Descriptive Perspectives*. (Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 107.) Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998, x + 575 pages, ISBN 3-11-015492-7, US\$ 138.

Reviewed by DAVID BECK, University of Alberta

One of the biggest problems facing typologists interested in uncovering new and “exotic” structures in the world’s languages is finding ways to become familiar with some of the less well-described language families. Unfortunately, much of the material available on many of these is often located in hard to find places or published in obscure venues known only to a select group of language specialists. Up until recently, this was the case with materials on languages of the Salishan family, a group of twenty-three languages spoken in the Pacific Northwest of North America. While the past ten years have seen the publication of a few works on individual languages by mainstream academic publishers (e.g., Galloway 1993; van Eijk 1997; Kroeber 1999), the family as a whole remains relatively obscure outside of Americanist circles, in spite of the many typologically interesting and theoretically challenging features of these languages. A wide-ranging collection of uniformly high-quality articles, *Salish Languages and Linguistics* goes a long way towards correcting this situation, providing an introduction to the major features of the language family and a series of in-depth examinations of many of the most noteworthy topics in Salishan studies. The linguistic works are complemented by a 66-page bibliography comprising as complete a list as possible of the literature on Salishan languages produced prior to the book’s date of publication.

Perhaps the strongest point of this book from the viewpoint of the typologist is the introductory survey, “Salish languages and linguistics,” by the editors themselves. Nearly 70 pages in length, this article is the most comprehensive overview to date, superceding the oft-cited but long out-of-date articles by Lawrence C. Thompson (1973, 1979). This chapter gives a bird’s-eye view of the salient phonological, morphological, and syntactic traits of the family, as well