

Greenlandic Inuit, the word for ‘six’ literally means “one on the other hand.” The dominance of decimal bases in number systems arises from the ten fingers, with occasional vigesimal bases from counting the toes as well: of the number systems in 196 diverse languages surveyed by Bernard Comrie (2013), 125 are decimal, 22 are “hybrid decimal/vigesimal,” and 20 are vigesimal (reported by Everett, p. 72). The primacy of the fingers leads Everett to the provocative conclusion that “ten is the roundest of numbers” (p. 251). He suggests that it appears to have “spiritual import,” citing the ten commandments of Moses, “the ten avatars of Vishnu, the ten human gurus in Sikhism, the ten attributes in Kabbalah, and so on” (p. 251). “This may seem a bit of a stretch, ascribing spiritual significance to numbers,” he confesses (p. 247), but it is an entertaining stretch, and not the only one in the book.

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Comrie, Bernard. 2013. Numeral bases. In *The world atlas of language structures online*, ed. Matthew Dryer and Martin Haspelmath. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <<http://wals.info/chapter/131>>

Jason Kandybowicz and Harold Torrence (eds.). 2017. *Africa’s endangered languages: Documentary and theoretical approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. x + 520. US \$99 (hardcover).

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Africa’s endangered languages: Documentary and theoretical approaches is an edited collection of articles stemming from a workshop held at the University of Kansas in April 2014. This volume aims to explore the interdependence of linguistic theory and language documentation as practiced by specialists working on endangered languages in Africa. The contributions highlight the fact that the researcher’s documentary work informs theoretical generalizations, and vice versa. Two chapters (chapters 7 and 8) mainly advocate community-based approaches on the grounds of their successes in high-quality documentation and revitalization. As is common for proceedings-type volumes, the heterogeneity of the contents and languages under scrutiny makes for a series of superficial treatments of diverse issues. Regardless, the approaches, anecdotes and insights are presented so as to make them broadly applicable and, importantly, not exclusively relevant to linguists working in Africa.

In chapter 1, “Africa’s endangered languages: An overview”, Kandybowicz and Torrence introduce certain circumstances that distinguish language endangerment in Africa from other areas, for example, shift to other subnational languages, migration

patterns, etc. Additionally, they enumerate various hardships generally faced by linguists in hard-to-reach communities with minimal education and access to resources.

In chapter 2, “The challenge of documenting Africa’s least-known languages”, Sands demonstrates how to assess the urgency of the need for documentation of languages in Africa. The author’s detailed unpacking of authoritative vitality classification systems (Ethnologue and UNESCO) is highly relevant to any (rightly) skeptical linguist. He pays particular attention to labelling ambiguities, such as *threatened* vs. *shifting* (or *shifted*), and *dead* or *extinct* vs. *dormant* (pp. 13–14), while also stressing the need for up-to-date demographic statistics, intergenerational transmission data, and the like. He illustrates these points with various case studies comparing the outdated data of the classifications with up-to-date statistics.

Chapter 3, “The Nata documentation project: An overview” introduces a research project housed at the University of British Columbia, which is centered around both a diverse group of specialists and a speaker-linguist. This chapter is minimally informative given that each of the three subsequent chapters, produced by members of this same project, provides a typological grounding as well as exhaustive appendices and references as to the vitality of Nata as necessary.

Gambarage and Pulleyblank’s description, “Tongue root harmony in Nata: An allomorphy-based account” (chapter 4) elaborates upon Archangeli and Pulleyblank (2012, 2015). They conceive of inputs as allomorph sets with defaults and lexical selectional properties (pp. 67–70) to account for certain disharmonies that traditional Optimality Theory fails to capture. By extension, Anghelescu et al. implement the same allomorph-set approach in order to establish a tone-driven typology of nominal stems in “Nominal and verbal tone in Nata: An allomorphy-based account” (chapter 5).

In chapter 6, “Nata deverbal nominalizations”, Déchaine et al. detail the morpho-syntactic behaviour of so-called type-flexible verbal roots in Nata. The authors analyze this subtle split along the lines of traditional proto-role theory (Dowty 1991), drawing a subdistinction between property- and entity-denoting derived nouns.

The following two chapters focus on the practical application of descriptive models. Childs advocates the Busy Intersections Model (chapter 7), as informed by Practice Engagement Theory. This speaker-centric approach has community members utilize technology and participate in group work to establish a functional degree of literacy in their language and an interest therein. Nash’s survey stresses the role of an engaged community in language maintenance (chapter 8). This anecdotal account focuses on orthographic faithfulness, lexicographical accuracy and the maintenance of solid relationships with collaborators.

In chapter 9, “The role of theory in documentation: Intervention effects and missing gaps in the Krachi documentary record”, Kandybowicz and Torrence use theory to highlight how the standing descriptive account of the interrogative system of Krachi is incomplete, given that the role of intervening elements in interrogative clauses has been entirely neglected. On these grounds, they provide an adequate analysis of intervention effects as observed in the language.

Jenks and Rose's study, "Documenting raising and control in Moro" (chapter 10), draws upon classical diagnostics from the theoretical literature to analyze raising- and control-type clauses in the language. In coupling theoretical prediction with a consideration of certain language-specific idiosyncrasies, they form a complete, theory-informed analysis in its own right.

In chapter 11, "The linker in the Khoisan languages", Collins performs a typologically-driven syntactic analysis of Khoisan's portmanteau connective element. Here, he combines several concepts in the theoretical literature (i.e., a functional LK-head as a case assigner, and SpecLK as a landing site for movement), while successfully describing the crosslinguistic variation observed across (part of) the Khoisan family.

In chapter 12, "Theory and description: Understanding the syntax of Eegimaa verb stem morphology", Bassene and Safir unpack the verbal suffix complex, going beyond a basic surface order-type description. Their exhaustive analysis considers various Minimalist assumptions (e.g., internal Merge), appropriate hierarchical relations and distributed morphology in order to expose the principles that govern the verbal system in the language.

McPherson's examination, "On (ir)realis in Seenku (Mande, Burkina Faso)" (chapter 13), considers the complementary distribution of verbal stems as a reality-driven dichotomy.

In chapter 14, "Contributions of micro-comparative research to language documentation: Two Bantu case studies", Marlo stresses the efficacy of applying family-centric typological generalizations to form the backdrop for descriptive work on a given language. A functional knowledge of the typological profile of related languages in a particular domain of inquiry will generally foster comparative and theoretically sound data on typological grounds. Although this might be the case in his Bantu case studies regarding tonal and specific morphological patterns, strictly following family-centered literature can form misleading assumptions.

In "Sebirwa in contact with Setswana: A natural experiment in learning an unnatural alternation" (chapter 15), Zsiga and Tlale Boyer compare the phonetic naturalness of obstruent voicing processes in two related Bantu languages. The authors use experimental techniques to measure durations of closure, voicing during closure, burst and voice onset time (p. 358) in the field so as to confirm their intuition that speakers do in fact learn unnatural alternations with an adequate degree of frequency of exposure, particularly in the case of lexical borrowings.

Stirtz's study, "Three analyses of underlying plosives in Caning, a Nilo-Saharan language of Sudan" (chapter 16), moves away from the descriptive phonetic inventory of the language to form an account of its underlying plosive segments. The three analyses that the author considers arise naturally from the theoretical literature, that is, (i) full contrast, (ii) initial contrast, (iii) no contrast. His justification for (ii) being the best fit given the current state of description is convincing and useful to researchers working in related domains.

In chapter 17, "Exceptions to hiatus resolution in Mushunguli (Somali Chizigula)", Hout provides a straightforward theory-driven account for certain exceptional stems. The author's method addresses certain shortcomings of classic

Optimality Theory by proposing a post-lexical homorganic glide deletion rule, strategically ordered before more regular processes such as glide formation and lengthening (p. 423).

In chapter 18, “Acoustic and aerodynamic data on Somali Chizigula stops”, Temkin Martinez and Rosenbaum employ experimental approaches in the field that were developed for articulatory studies. The authors’ aim is essentially to isolate the phonemic mechanisms responsible for contrasts in nasality and direction of plosivity in stops for comparative purposes. Clearly this method provides an accurate phonemic description with useful theoretical implications.

Gambarage’s extensive survey, “Unmasking the Bantu orthographic vowels: The challenge for language documentation and description” (chapter 19), contrasts the vowel series of various Bantu writing systems and their respective degrees of phonemic accuracy. The author introduces and unpacks the “masking” effects that arises in orthographic conventions – whether due to poor development or the implementation of the orthographic conventions of another language as a base model.

This volume is of high interest to any linguist aiming to do field research. Linguists doing field work should be constantly striving to balance the theoretical and descriptive value of their work. The methodologies, anecdotes and insights in this work are directly relevant to attaining this balance. This work is also practical to the researcher performing morphosyntactic, phonetic, phonological and/or sociolinguistic research. As such, however, this work does not contribute a great deal to any one of the subfields in particular. This is particularly true given the lack of space and depth typically attributed to the individual contributions in such proceedings-type volumes. Additionally, certain chapters are of relatively little theoretical interest (e.g., chapters 3, 7, 8). Perhaps these contributions would be better suited to a volume pertaining specifically to revitalization, which merits consideration in its own right. Nonetheless, this book represents an important contribution to the literature of our field. As a theory-conscious descriptive linguist, I hope to see more works that highlight and explore the interplay of theory and description in the near future.

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