How to write a grammar: an introduction to grammaticography

FieldLing, Paris
10 September 2020

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How to write a grammar: an introduction to grammaticography
Outline

1. Challenges

2. “… to write a grammar”: the necessary stages

3. Ordering of the material

4. Formalism

5. Examples

6. Grammar as a PhD thesis

7. Conclusions
1. Challenges

• Why, after two and a half millennia of tradition in grammar writing, do we still need to reflect on the question of how to write a grammar?
1. Challenges

• Why, after two and a half millennia of tradition in grammar writing, do we still need to reflect on the question of **how to write a grammar**?

  • problems of traditional Latin-based grammar
  • new impulses from theory and typology
  • new interests: syntax, pragmatics and discourse, phonetics
  • grammaticography is not taught
  • it is a complex task
Challenges

“The writer of a grammatical description attempts to accomplish many goals in one complex document. Some of these goals seem to conflict with one another, thus causing tension, discouragement and paralysis for many descriptive linguists.”

(Payne 2014: 91)
Some tensions

- comprehensive vs. useful
- accurate vs. understandable
- universal vs. specific

(Payne 2014: 91)
Mian grammar

• A Papuan language of New Guinea

• Mianmin area: east of the border to Papua

• Ok family of languages (ok ‘river’)
Mian grammar

- Spoken in Telefomin District, Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea
- Two main dialect areas
  - eastern dialect with approx. 1,400 speakers
  - western dialect with approx. 350 speakers
2. “… to write a grammar”: the necessary stages
“... to write a grammar” is ambiguous

1. plan the scope, methods and timetable of the data-gathering process

2. think about the conceptual framework that will shape data-gathering and analysis

3. gather the data

4. organize and analyse the data

5. plan the structure of the written account

6. write the grammar.

(Pawley 2014: 8)
What kind of grammar?

• Reference grammar

  • comprehensive linguistic description of the phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics of a language as it is spoken

  • written mainly for linguists

• Other types of grammar: pedagogical, historical, sketch
Descriptive framework

• Description is not atheoretical

• Tools to describe a language properly
  • traditional grammar, minus the European bias
  • plus new concepts like ergativity, split intransitivity, head-internal relative clauses, evidentiality, clause chaining, etc.

(Dryer 2006)
Descriptive framework

- Basic Linguistic Theory (Dixon 2010, etc.)
Data I: spontaneous corpus

- Children’s stories
- Procedural texts/instructions
- Descriptions of objects, places, events, activities
- Vernacular definitions
- Traditional narratives
- Personal reminiscences
- Jokes and insults
- Proverbs
- Speeches
- (Picture/video prompts)

(Bowern 2006: 116-7)
Data II: elicitation

• Complementation of natural material to avoid incomplete description

• Low frequency phenomena (e.g. 2\textsuperscript{nd} person declarative forms, reciprocals)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yimas (Sepik, PNG)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nakatay ‘I see him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nantay ‘you see him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nantay ‘he sees him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impakatay ‘I see those two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impantay ‘you see those two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impantay ‘he sees those two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pukatay ‘I see them (more than two)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puntay ‘you see them’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puntay ‘he sees them’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naŋkratay ‘we two see him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naŋkrantay ‘you two see him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nampitay ‘those two see him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impaŋkratay ‘we two see those two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impaŋkrantay ‘you two see those two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imppampitay ‘those two see those (other) two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pũŋkratay ‘we two see them (more than two)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pũŋkrantay ‘you two see them’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pũmpitay ‘those two see them’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nakaycay ‘we (more than two) see him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nanantay ‘you (more than two) see him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>namputay ‘they (more than two) see him’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impakaycay ‘we (more than two) see those two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impanantay ‘you (more than two) see those two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impamputay ‘they (more than two) see those two’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punantay ‘you (more than two) see them (more than two)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punputay ‘they (more than two) see them (more than two)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Foley 1991)
Note on transcriptions

• Make transcriptions with your consultant, material you don’t transcribe in the field is useless unless you know the language very well

• Generally time-consuming, never calculate less than a 4:1 (probably 5:1 or 6:1) ratio between transcriptions and recordings (Sakel & Everett 2012: 207)
Data III: questionnaires

- Useful for an overview
- Danger of "straitjacketing" (van Driem 2002)
- Can yield structured data for different uses, e.g. my own use of Dahl's (1985) TMA questionnaire

Appendix

The TMA questionnaire

Context indications are given within square brackets. Words within parentheses are not to be translated.

Part A – sentences

(1) [Standing in front of a house] The house BE BIG
(2) [Talking about the house in which the speaker lives (the house is out of sight)] The house BE BIG
(3) [Talking about a house in which the speaker used to live but which has now been torn down] The house BE BIG
(4) [Talking about a house which the speaker saw for the first time yesterday and doesn't see now:] The house BE BIG
(5) [Q: What your brother DO right now? (=What activity is he engaged in?) A: He] A by someone who can see him] He WRITE letters
(6) [C=6] He WRITE a letter
(7) [A: I just talked to my brother on the phone. B: What he do right now? A answers:] He WRITE letters
(8) [C=7] He WRITE a letter
(9) [A: I went to see my brother yesterday. B: What he DO? (=What activity was he engaged in?)] He WRITE letters
(10) [C=10] He WRITE a letter
(11) [A: I talked to my brother on the phone yesterday. B: What he DO? (=What activity was he engaged in?)] He WRITE letters
(12) [C=11] He WRITE a letter
(13) [A: When you visited your brother yesterday, what he DO after you had dinner? ANSWER:] He WRITE letters
(14) [C=13] He WRITE a letter
(15) [Q: What your brother DO if you don't go to see him today, do you think? A:] He WRITE a letter (to me)
The process of writing a grammar

• “Jede Sprache ist ein System, dessen sämtliche Theile organisch zusammenhängen und zusammenwirken” (Gabelentz 1901)

• « [C]haque langue forme un système où tout se tient » (Meillet 1903)

• “The most important point is that language can only profitably be studied as whole. One must recognize and distinguish different levels of structural organization – phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, discourse and pragmatic – but each of these continuously interrelates with the others” (Dixon 1994: 229)

(emphasis mine)
The process

• Helical process 1
  • texts
  • dictionary
  • grammar

• Helical process 2
  • phonetics
  • phonology
  • morphology
  • syntax
  • semantics of categories
  • system of word classes, etc.
  each dependent on the others

(Evans 2014: 3-5)
The process

• Helical process 1
  • texts
  • dictionary
  • grammar

“This is the most intellectually demanding part of writing a grammar: the need to work on hundreds of different problems, in parallel mode, and keep track of your analytical decisions about each of them”

• Helical process 2
  • phonetics
  • phonology
  • morphology
  • syntax
  • semantics of categories
  • system of word classes, etc.
  each dependent on the others

(Evans 2014: 3-5)
‘Nodal’ and ‘isolated’ problems

• **Nodal problems** – those with dense interaction of many rules or phenomena creating complex interdependencies between analyses in different parts of the grammar
  
  • e.g. word classes, grammatical relations (esp. ‘subject’)

• **Isolated problems** – those that can be tackled one at a time, analysis has little ramifications for the rest of the grammar
  
  • e.g. phonotactics, gender assignment

(Evans 2014: 3-5)
‘Nodal’ and ‘isolated’ problems

• Need to develop a feeling which is which to be able to start work on the isolated problems

• Build up your grammar to get a better idea of how to tackle the nodal problems

(Evans 2014: 3-5)
“... to write a grammar”

• Be aware of the theoretical implications of your descriptive framework

• Complement your spontaneous corpus with elicitation

• In language everything hangs together, so be prepared to juggle a large number of analytical decisions
3. Ordering of the material
Front matter

- Acknowledgements
- Preface (including theoretical assumptions and purpose of the grammar)
- Table of contents
- List of abbreviations

(Payne 2014: 104)
Minimal Table of Contents

1. Introduction, the language and its speakers, with typological sketch
2. Phonetics and phonology
3. Word classes (inflection, …)
4. Word formation
5. The noun phrase
6. The verb phrase/complex
7. Basic clause structure
8. Complex sentences

(adapted from Pawley 2014: 15; see also Mosel 2006)
End matter

- Texts (segmented, interlinear glosses, translation)

- Word list with basic grammatical and lexical information: gender, word class, lexical tone, gloss, etc.

- References cited

- Subject index

(Payne 2014: 108)
End/online matter

- Sound material
  - minimal pairs
  - interesting phonetic or phonological phenomena
  - sample texts
Ordering of the material

• From small to large (from phonetic features to discourse)

• Use extensive cross-referencing

• Build in descriptive redundancy
Form-driven vs. function-driven approaches

• Form-driven (semasiological, analytic, cf. a dictionary)
  • What functions do the language-specific categories or constructions have?

• Function-driven (onomasiological, synthetic, cf. a thesaurus)
  • Which categories or constructions can be used to encode language-independent domains of experience?

(Mosel 2006; Cristofaro 2006)
Form-driven

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je chante</td>
<td>present time, habitual, future time, ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je chanterai</td>
<td>future time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je vais chanter</td>
<td>future time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```
C1 -> M1
C2 -> M2
C2 -> M3
```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>je chante</td>
<td>present time, habitual, future time, ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je chanterai</td>
<td>future time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>je vais chanter</td>
<td>future time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Diagram showing the relationship between form and function](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>present time</td>
<td>je chante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habitual</td>
<td>je chante, ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future time</td>
<td>je chanterai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je vais chanter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je chante</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Form-driven vs. function-driven approaches

• Function-driven approach throughout is rare: Leech & Svartvik (1975, *A communicative grammar of English*)

• Use a function-driven approach for clearly delimited domains like possession, negation, subclauses (Mosel 2006), also see Payne (2014: 102)

• Detailed subject index including constructions *and* functional domains (Cristofaro 2006)
Assertion vs. argumentation

- **Assertion and exemplification**: Complement clauses have structure X.
  - [Example 1]
  - [Example 2]
  - ...

- **Argumentation**: Complement clauses are clauses that function as noun-phrase arguments of a complement-taking predicate. In this language, complement clauses have the following structure…

- There are $n$ facts that confirm that these clauses function as arguments of a complement-taking predicate:
  - [Argument 1 with examples]
  - [Argument 2 with examples]
  - ...

  (Genetti 2014: 126-8)
Use assertion (and exemplification) for …

• Lower-level linguistic features (phonotactics, paradigms, etc.)
• Expected structures (demonstratives, simple clause structure, etc.)
• Usage patterns (uses of the present tense, gender assignment, etc.)

(Genetti 2014: 126-8)
Use argumentation for cases …

• … where more than one structural analysis is possible

• … where the language differs from expected patterns (typologically, areally, genetically)

• … that counter explicit claims in the literature (e.g. universals, hierarchies, etc.)

(Genetti 2014: 126-8)
Example 1: Two types of N-N structure (Mian)?

Type A

(wan) tolim  ‘eagle’
(wan) dekdék  ‘swallow’
(wan) wáu  ‘greater bird of paradise’

Type B

wan am  ‘bird blind’
tim am  ‘bachelors’ house’
al úk am  ‘toilet’
Example 2: Objects and adjuncts (Mian)?

(1) imen=e fu-n-o=a
taro=ART cook-SEQ-3SG.F.SBJ=DECL
‘she cooked taro and then …’

(2) imak=e te-n-o=ta
husband=ART come-SEQ-3SG.F.SBJ=FOC=and
‘she came to her husband and then …’
Standardization

• Use standards to the extent possible, but don’t be confined by what these systems offer
  
  • International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)
  
  • Leipzig Glossing Rules (LGR)
  
• Do not think of these as exhaustively covering the typological space

• This applies especially to *linguistic terminology*
Terminology

- We have no standardized set of terms for categories and constructions for all languages
- Use terminology found in other recent grammars and in typology
- Stay clear of idiosyncratic terminology
- Specify what the exact properties are of the categories designated by the label

(Cristofaro 2006, also see Genetti 2014)
Terminology

• Careful with frameworks and their terminologies that require considerable background knowledge

• These are often transient and using them in a grammar can seriously impede understanding after the model has phased out

  • e.g. Tagmemics
“The Identificative Adjective Declarative Clause Type has the following identificational-contrastive features: it is not a division-subclass of the Submissive passive Complement filler class in the Submissive Passive Clause Type 6; its minimum nuclear structure is composed of an obligatory, and an optional, nucleus tagmeme.”

Formal models

• Be careful with formalism, e.g.
  • formulas
  • phonological features ([+/- voiced] vs. [+/- strident])

• Precision and formalism are independent notions
Ordering of the material

• Proceed from small to large

• Use form-/function-driven approaches where it makes sense

• Always describe thoroughly the properties of language-specific categories
4. Contribution of formal linguistics
Contribution of formal linguistics

- Guide research questions
  - e.g. interrogatives ("wh-questions"), quantifiers, complementizers, increasing importance of syntax

- Provide illuminating means of representation of the descriptive facts
  - e.g. autosegmental representations, phrase structure trees, metrical trees

(Rice 2006)
Tone in New Guinea

Map. Tone languages in New Guinea (Donohue 2003: 330; conservative estimate)
## Tone in Mian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tonal melody</th>
<th>Phonemic</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>/Hmɛn/</td>
<td>‘child’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>/LHmɛn/</td>
<td>‘string bag’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>/l-am/</td>
<td>‘house’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>/H-an/</td>
<td>‘arrow’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>/LHaˁm/</td>
<td>‘pandanus sp.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHL</td>
<td>/LHLaˁm/</td>
<td>‘older sister’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>/l-afɛt/</td>
<td>‘different’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LH</td>
<td>/LHafɛt/</td>
<td>‘cleared of taboo’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>/l-walo/</td>
<td>‘buy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHL</td>
<td>/LHLwalo/</td>
<td>‘multiply’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HL</td>
<td>/HL-walo/</td>
<td>‘cut off’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A typology of tone (Donohue 1997)

- Types are based on the domain of contrast which is phonemically exploited, rather than the number and identity of tones in a system.

Syllable tone system:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
T & T & T & T & T & T \\
\sigma & \sigma & \sigma & \sigma & \sigma & \sigma \\
\end{array}
\]

E.g. Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Igbo, Chuave (Papuan, Chimbu Province)

Word tone system:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
T & T & T \\
\omega & \omega & \omega \\
\sigma & \sigma & \sigma \\
\end{array}
\]

E.g. Swedish, Mende, Shanghai, Mian, Kewa (Papuan, Enga Province, PNG)
Tone in Mian

• L (low), H (high), LH (rising), HL (falling), LHL (peaking)

• Only a few of the logically possible tonal melodies occur in mono- and polysyllabic words
  • L, e.g. /L-am/ ‘house’, /L-ibal/ ‘dust’; /L-fu/ ‘cook (v.)’
  • H, e.g. /H-an/ ‘arrow’, /H-ɛimawɛ/ ‘haze’
  • LH, e.g. /LH-aʔm/ ‘pandanus’, /LH-unɑŋ/ ‘woman’, /LH-kaŋwa/ ‘steel axe’
  • LHL, e.g. /LHL-əkla/ ‘properly’, /LHL-alukum/ ‘all’; /LHL-ub/ ‘give (v.)’
  • HL, e.g. /HL-bɔks/ ‘box’, /HL-usan ‘tail’; /HL-ha/ ‘break (v.)’
Tone association - monosyllables

/LHɑm/ ‘wild pandanus species’

LH         LH         LH
ɑm → ɑm → ɑm
Tone association - monosyllables

/\text{LH}\text{a}^{\text{c}}\text{m}/ ‘wild pandanus species’

\begin{align*}
\text{LH} & \quad \text{L H} & \quad \text{L H} \\
\text{a}^{\text{c}}\text{m} & \rightarrow & \text{a}^{\text{c}}\text{m} & \rightarrow & \text{a}^{\text{c}}\text{m}
\end{align*}

\textbf{Figure 1.} Waveform and f_0 for /\text{LH}\text{a}^{\text{c}}\text{m}/ ‘wild pandanus species’
Tone association - disyllables

/LHunaŋ/ ‘woman’

LH  →  LH  →  LH
unaŋ  →  unaŋ  →  unaŋ
Tone association - disyllables

/L^Hunan/~ 'woman'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LH</th>
<th>L H</th>
<th>L H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unan~</td>
<td>unan~</td>
<td>unan~</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Waveform and f_0 for /L^Hunan/~ ‘woman’
Tone association and pharyngealization

\[ /L^H \text{ka}^\text{\textipa{c}}\text{wa}/ \text{‘steel axe’} \]

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{L} & \text{H} & \text{L} \\
\text{ka}^\text{\textipa{c}}\text{wa} & \rightarrow & \text{ka}^\text{\textipa{c}}\text{wa} \\
* & \rightarrow & * \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{L} & \text{H} & \text{L} \\
\text{ka}^\text{\textipa{c}}\text{wa} & \rightarrow & \text{ka}^\text{\textipa{c}}\text{wa} \\
* & \rightarrow & * \\
\end{array}
\]
Tone association and pharyngealization

\[ /{\text{LH}}{\text{ka}}^{\text{c}}{\text{wa}}/ \ 'steel axe' \]

\[
\begin{array}{c c c}
\text{L} & \text{H} \\
\text{ka}^{\text{c}}{\text{wa}} & \rightarrow & \text{ka}^{\text{c}}{\text{wa}} & \rightarrow & \text{ka}^{\text{c}}{\text{wa}} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c c c}
\text{L} & \text{H} & \text{L} \\
\text{ka}^{\text{c}}{\text{wa}} & \text{ka}^{\text{c}}{\text{wa}} & \text{ka}^{\text{c}}{\text{wa}} \\
\end{array}
\]

* * *

\text{Figure 3. Waveform and f0 for } /{\text{LH}}{\text{ka}}^{\text{c}}{\text{wa}}/ \ 'steel axe' \]
Tone association and pharyngealization

/LH kaˤwa/ ‘steel axe’

Also in:
- ngáamein ‘yellow’ (ADJ)
- máamein ‘maternal uncle’ (N)

Figure 3. Waveform and f0 for /LH kaˤwa/ ‘steel axe’
Phonetics and phonology

• Good descriptions of phonetics and phonology are important

• Examples from Mian
  • tone (Fedden 2011: 46-83)
  • pharyngealization (Fedden 2011: 35-37)
Pharyngealization in Mian

- Phonemic distinction between a pharyngealized /aˤ/ and a plain /a/

- The contrast of a low, long, glottalized or pharyngealized vowel against another /a/ typical of Sepik languages; possibly a diffused feature (Bill Foley, p.c.)

**Minimal pairs:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/lal/</th>
<th>/l-aˤl/</th>
<th>/l-ayal/</th>
<th>/l-ayaˤl/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘faeces’</td>
<td>‘skin’</td>
<td>‘light’</td>
<td>‘tree sp.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Near-minimal pairs:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/lam/</th>
<th>/LHL-aˤm/</th>
<th>/l-mak/</th>
<th>/l-daˤk/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘house’</td>
<td>‘older sister’</td>
<td>‘other’</td>
<td>‘down’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pharyngealization in Mian

- Lower frequency of the third and a higher frequency of the first formant (Ladefoged & Maddieson 1996)

**Figure 4.** Spectrogramm of /lal/ ‘faeces’

**Figure 5.** Spectrogramm of /lal/ ‘skin’

- Lower frequency of the third and a higher frequency of the first formant (Ladefoged & Maddieson 1996)
Harmonic structure of /l-al/ ‘faeces’
Harmonic structure of /laɽl/ ‘skin’
Contribution of formal linguistics

• Judicious use of formalism can provide illuminating means of representation of the descriptive facts
5. Examples
Examples

• Examples are
  • evidence
  • what the user sees of the language
  • basis for future discoveries and new uses

• Examples must be
  • accurate
  • clear
  • appropriate

(Mithun 2014)
## Example structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>root</th>
<th>root</th>
<th>root</th>
<th>root-affix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gloss</td>
<td>gloss</td>
<td>gloss</td>
<td>gloss-GLOSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘translation’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Example (4)
- la: DEF.F.SG
- fam: woman(F)[SG]
- \(\varepsilon\): is
- kõtā-t: happy-F.SG

‘The woman is happy.’
Example structure

• A fourth line can be desirable, e.g. in Seneca (Iroquoian)

(5) deʔ.'shos.döʔ.'jo.õh
teʔ-s-ho-stõʔshr-o-h-õh
NEG-REP-3SG.M.PAT-hook-be.in.water-CAUS-STAT
‘He doesn’t have his hook back in the water yet.’

(Wallace Chafe, cited as p.c. in Zaefferer 2006: 127)
Example translation

• Free translation into idiomatic English and if necessary a literal translation in brackets

• E.g. Mian prenominal relative clause

(6) nē a-têm’-e-b-i naka=e
I 3SG.M.OBJ-look.at-IPFV-1SG.SBJ man=ART
‘the man I am looking at’ (lit. ‘I am looking at him the man’)
Examples (phonetics and phonology)

- Extract data from *praat*, e.g. Mian tone

*Figure 2. Waveform and $f_0$ for /LHunanjan/ ‘woman’*
Examples (paradigms)

- Use **structured** tables which clearly reflect your analysis

---

**Table 1. Oksapmin pronouns (Loughnane 2009: 90)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SG</th>
<th>DU</th>
<th>PL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>nox</td>
<td>nuxut</td>
<td>nuxul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>dit</td>
<td>dil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>gut</td>
<td>gul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ox</td>
<td>ixit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ux</td>
<td>ixil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples - important points

- Avoid walls of examples
- Integrate examples and prose
- Each example must be referred to in the text
- Use highlighting (boldface, underlining) sparingly
Examples

• Examples are your evidence and must be
  
  • accurate
  
  • clear
  
  • appropriate
6. Grammar as a PhD thesis
Grammar as a PhD thesis

• Don’t do too much! (issue of comprehensiveness)

• Size: Pawley (2014: 12) advised 300-350 pages in his time, but admits that theses have grown larger in recent years (> 500 pages)

• Start writing early

• You are in the driver’s seat

• Index not required
Grammar as a PhD thesis

- Typological embedding of phenomena at the beginning of chapter or section (typologically informed description)
- Read and reference previously published material on the language
- When writing imagine the reader intelligent but with a short attention span
- Check your text collection to make sure that everything is accounted for
Author

- Be multilingual, this includes the language you are describing
- Read good grammars (suggestions in the appendix)
- Read typological treatments of particular topics
- Be as fully rounded as possible as a linguist
The grammar writer must …

“[…] put careful thought into how they will complete a project that has no logical end to it, how they will organize the grammar, and how they will relate the pieces of different parts of the grammar to one another.”

(Nakayama & Rice 2014: 3, emphasis mine)
7. Conclusions
7. Conclusions

- Be aware of the theoretical implications of your descriptive framework
- Complement your spontaneous corpus with elicitation
- In language everything hangs together, so be prepared to juggle a large number of analytical decisions
- Proceed from small to large
- Use form-/function-driven approaches where it makes sense
- Always describe thoroughly the properties of language-specific categories
- Judicious use of formalism can provide illuminating means of representation of the descriptive facts
- Examples are your evidence, must be accurate, clear and appropriate
- “Grammar-reading and grammar-study builds the basis for grammar-writing!” (Evans 2014)
Selected readings

**General:** Evans & Dench (2006); Dryer (2006); Mosel (2006)

**Content and structure:** Pawley (2014); Payne (2014); Noonan (2007); Aikhenvald (2015)

**Theory and typology in description:** Genetti (2014); Rice (2006); Cristofaro (2006)

**Use of examples:** Mithun (2014); Weber (2007)

**Use of corpora:** Mosel (2014)
Useful resources

• International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)  
  (https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/)

• Leipzig Glossing Rules (LGR)  
  (https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php)

• ELAN  (https://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/download/)

• praat  (http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/)
Favourite grammars for inspiration

Favourite grammars for inspiration


merci beaucoup - klayâm sūm - thank you
Bibliography


Bibliography


(http://llacan.vjf.cnrs.fr/fichiers/cours/Evans/grammar_undescribed_language.pdf)


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