

# Language Documentation and Description

ISSN 1740-6234

---

This article appears in: *Language Documentation and Description, vol 10: Special Issue on Humanities of the lesser-known: New directions in the description, documentation and typology of endangered languages and musics*.  
Editors: Niclas Burenhult, Arthur Holmer, Anastasia Karlsson, Håkan Lundström & Jan-Olof Svantesson

## **Editors' Introduction and List of Contributors (LDD 10)**

NICLAS BURENHULT, ARTHUR HOLMER, ANASTASIA  
KARLSSON, HÅKAN LUNDSTRÖM, JAN-OLOF SVANTESSON

Cite this article: Niclas Burenhult, Arthur Holmer, Anastasia Karlsson, Håkan Lundström, Jan-Olof Svantesson (2012). Editors' Introduction and List of Contributors (LDD 10). In Niclas Burenhult, Arthur Holmer, Anastasia Karlsson, Håkan Lundström & Jan-Olof Svantesson (eds) *Language Documentation and Description, vol 10: Special Issue on Humanities of the lesser-known: New directions in the description, documentation and typology of endangered languages and musics*. London: SOAS. pp. 5-14

Link to this article: <http://www.elpublishing.org/PID/111>

This electronic version first published: July 2014

---



This article is published under a Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC (Attribution-NonCommercial). The licence permits users to use, reproduce, disseminate or display the article provided that the author is attributed as the original creator and that the reuse is restricted to non-commercial purposes i.e. research or educational use. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

---

## **EL Publishing**

For more EL Publishing articles and services:

Website:	<a href="http://www.elpublishing.org">http://www.elpublishing.org</a>
Terms of use:	<a href="http://www.elpublishing.org/terms">http://www.elpublishing.org/terms</a>
Submissions:	<a href="http://www.elpublishing.org/submissions">http://www.elpublishing.org/submissions</a>

## Editors' introduction

### Humanities of the lesser-known: an overview

Niclas Burenhult, Arthur Holmer, Anastasia Karlsson, Håkan Lundström & Jan-Olof Svantesson

#### 1. Background<sup>1</sup>

This volume of *Language Documentation and Description* contains selected papers originally presented at the conference *Humanities of the lesser-known: new directions in the description, documentation and typology of endangered languages and musics*, which took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> September 2010 at the Centre for Languages and Literature at Lund University, Sweden, with funding from the Birgit Rausing Language Programme. The conference brought together leading international experts in the fields of language description and documentation, linguistic typology, and musicology, with the aim of providing a platform to discuss interdisciplinary approaches connecting these fields of research. In particular, the conference sought to draw attention to areas of humanities research which have so far typically played a secondary role in the description and documentation of lesser-known speech communities, but which emerge as particularly promising domains of attention in the context of the steadily growing multimedia environments of endangered languages materials. Three such areas – music, prosody, and semantics – were singled out as key conference themes, alongside more mainstream grammatical work. Contributions covered a wide array of topics within these areas, frequently with novel analytical bridging of two or more areas. Indeed, one of the intuitions behind our decision to organise the conference was the appreciation that different modalities of the human expression of social meaning, such as language and music, are interrelated,

---

<sup>1</sup> We would like to express our gratitude to The Birgit Rausing Language Programme for generous funding of the conference *Humanities of the lesser-known*; to Felix Ahlner, Frida Mårtensson, and Wanda Jakobsen for their help with practical matters during the conference; and to Peter K. Austin for inviting us to guest edit this issue of *Language Documentation and Description*. We also thank Peter K. Austin, Samantha Goodchild and Tom Castle, for stylistic and formal corrections of the manuscripts and for page layout, design and formatting. We dedicate this collection to the late Damrong Tayanin, native speaker of Kammu and long-term consultant and colleague who spent forty years of his life tirelessly documenting Kammu language, music and culture. The authors' names are in alphabetical order.

and that some properties of these domains can be better understood by examining the details of the interactions between them. Thus, the conference was all about rendering more permeable the boundaries between disciplines. This volume presents thirteen representative papers from the conference. All papers were reviewed anonymously. Audio files referred to in the papers by Morey and Schöpf, Tuttle, Lovick & Tuttle, Nagano-Madsen and van den Berg are available on the accompanying CD.

## **2. Music and language**

For several decades, research in ethnomusicology has focused on studies of musical expressions and their uses and functions in the contexts of the communities where they exist. This has resulted in increased knowledge and a large quantity of material in the form of collections and local studies. There is also a history of cross-fertilisation between musicology and linguistics (see Barwick 2005); thus, in many cases the search for meta-theories has led researchers to apply linguistic theories to the material. A number of papers in this collection are examples of approaches where various linguistic methods are applied to the study of music.

Many languages lack a meta-term for vocal expressions and instead use different names for more or less distinctly different forms of vocal expressions. This is the case in English, as well as in Suyá (Macro-Ge, Amazon; Seeger 1987) and Kammu (Austroasiatic, Laos; Lundström 2010). Different vocal expressions represent a scale from 'speech' to 'song' and include intermediate levels, seen as levels of 'speech' or levels of 'song'. In some cultures, like the ethnic minority groups in Southeast Asia, the existence of such levels is closely related to the re-creation, extemporisation or improvisation of vocal expressions. This is realised in performance by the combination of traditional sets of words or newly created utterances with pre-existing melodic and poetic templates. A traditional women's song style among several Aboriginal communities in Central Australia, explored by Turpin, is of this kind. It is also a multi-modal public ceremonial genre known over a vast area of Central Australia. In this case the author finds that there are three basic principles: no single syllable can be set to more than one rhythmic attack, the number of words it contains determines the length of a line of song, and boundaries of poetic units are signalled by a long note. She also notes that the songs seem now to be learnt by rote rather than through knowledge of the interrelations between language and music.

Languages with speech tones display additional kinds of interplay between language and music, which can take different forms. The paper by Morey and Schöpf explores the relationship between speech tone and singing in three

language groups in Upper Assam, India, on the basis of collaborative work by linguists, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists. Methodology of transcription is discussed and examined with software, while the principles of speech/singing relation are analysed through field experiments by comparing spoken and sung texts and by testing manipulated performances. While correlations are definitely found, there are also cases where the melodic template overrules the pitch of a spoken syllable.

In cultures where vocal expressions are so closely intertwined with language, language loss is intimately linked to the loss of vocal expressions. But is endangerment of musical/poetical traditions, or indeed any form of intangible cultural heritage, always to be likened to or equated with the endangerment of the languages they are expressed in? The paper by Coulter, which is concerned with both change in language and change in music, provides indications to the contrary in cases where change in music is brought about by the introduction of 'Western' musical styles. Focusing on Alamlak (Sepik, Papua New Guinea), he adapted language survey tools to be used for assessing music shift, which resulted in his Graded Music Shift Scale (GMSS). The status of various music styles in different age groups was surveyed, and the results show that language and music endangerment follow different trajectories. It also suggests that reversing shift cannot happen without strong local advocates who are brave enough to step out of the cultural trends and work toward a very different objective.

Another example of language-music interplay comes from Tanana (Athabaskan, Alaska), where Tuttle finds that as far as the relationship of text to tune and rhythm is concerned, different types of songs require different treatment of language. In dance songs, rhythm and melody dominate and words may have a form very different from their spoken form. While there are correlations between a high-rising negative morpheme tone to the high point in a melody, the music does not blindly match an intonational pattern. Composition is nowadays particularly done before the occasion of performance. As to questions of sustainability, Tuttle holds that we have to ask at the deepest level what we desire to sustain. We can hope to help sustain an environment where minority languages and linguistic art are valued as they change.

### **3. Prosody: broadening description and documentation**

There has been emphasis in recent years on the need for more attention to prosodic analysis in language documentation (see especially Ladefoged 2003, Himmelmann 2006, Himmelmann & Ladd 2008). Typically, prosody plays a pre-defined and limited role in the documentation endeavours of most linguists. This is in spite of the fact that it is frequently crucial to unlocking a

variety of other phenomena, as shown with precision by Rood in his analysis of the Wichita (Caddoan, Oklahoma) pitch phoneme. Prosody is quite an elusive aspect of language in that its components (duration, pitch, voice quality and intensity) are multifunctional, and can apply from the lexical level up to the discourse level. Also, prosodic components interact with each other, as well as with morphosyntax and information structure. Thus, naturally, the prosodic ingredients of grammatical description tend to be limited to those prosodic functions which are distinctive. Lexical stress, phonological use of segment duration, grammatical function (if any), lexical tones, and contrasting intonation of declarative and interrogative sentences are the prosodic features usually found in grammars of lesser-known languages.

In descriptions of fully tonal languages, such as those of some parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, prosody has unsurprisingly received more attention, though typically mostly on the lexical level. For example, the autosegmental approach to describing tones in African languages was instrumental in the development of today's Autosegmental Metrical theory, a phonological theoretical frame for describing prosody in both tonal and non-tonal languages (Gussenhoven 2004).

But again, what often remains outside the scope of traditional descriptions are prosodic functions not based on distinctivity, e.g. phrasing, marking pragmatic prominence and attitudes, and communicative aspects such as feedback signals, turn taking, and degree of speakers' involvement in dialogue. Promisingly, however, the constantly growing multimedia corpora of lesser-known languages, and their emphasis on instances of spontaneous communication, provide new analytical environments and opportunities for prosodic theory to explore such non-distinctive prosodic features in their 'real-world' communicative context. Lovick and Tuttle's paper in this collection provides a showcase example, exploring the relationship between syntactic and prosodic characteristics of turn-taking in spontaneous dialogue in Upper Tanana Athabascan.

Another aspect is what role documentation of lesser-known languages can play in the development of rhythmic and prosodic typology (Kohler 2009, Jun 2005). These typologies operate with implications beyond prosody itself and systematise the relationship between, for example, prosodic type and information structure, or between lexical stress system and syntax (see e.g. Féry 2010, Donegan & Stampe 2004). The paper by Morey and Schöpf innovatively contributes to our understanding of the typological implications of another pairing: singing and speech tones in tonal languages. Furthermore, the significance of data from understudied language varieties to prosodic typology becomes apparent in Nagano-Madsen's contribution, which is a study of intonation in Ryukyuan (Japanese, Ryukyu Islands), a sister language

of Japanese. Until recently, our knowledge of Japanese prosody was based on descriptions of the Tokyo and Osaka dialects, and this paper presents evidence for unexpected prosodic variation among language varieties belonging to the same prosodic type. Nagano-Madsen enriches her prosodic analysis of Ryukyuan by referring to modality, syntax and focus.

#### **4. Grammar and meaning in context**

The general principle that different modalities or domains of human communication can be better understood by examining the details of the interaction between them holds even within specific sub-disciplines: rather than treating each language as a hermetically sealed synchronic unit, we stand to gain more from taking as a starting-point that language is constantly changing and adapting, and our understanding of a construction or a grammatical feature in a language is best served by also understanding how it can change and develop, and, indeed, how it has developed.

This is reflected in the papers which deal specifically with grammar in this collection: regardless of which phenomenon is dealt with, and in which language group, one common theme is that of the development of the constructions involved. One common strategy invoked is comparison with closely related languages.

Thus, van den Berg explains the varying behaviour of the article *a/o* in Celebic languages (Austronesian, Sulawesi) by making the languages instantiate distinct windows on subsequent stages of the chronological development of the construction. An element which in one conservative language, Balantak, is shown to be an article, can be traced through to Tolaki, where it is apparently nothing but a syllabic element used to ensure trisyllabicity.

Three papers focus on individual languages, but again, comparisons with other languages allow a clearer picture of the system as a whole. Westerlund examines the tense-aspect-mood system in Ngarla (Pama-Nyungan, Western Australia) and its behaviour with the various verb classes in the language, contrasting this with other closely related languages in the area. Wilhelmsen, by comparing the complex tense-aspect system found in Mbugwe (Bantu, Tanzania) with that found in other Bantu languages, especially Swahili (the dominant language in the area), illustrates what are presumably the beginnings of a metric tense system developing from a tense-aspect system. Another Bantu language also under severe pressure from Swahili is Ndengeleko. Here, as Ström shows, a simpler system of animacy concord is replacing the more traditional Bantu class concord system. This is occurring areally across a wide

swathe of languages in coastal East Africa, another instance of parallel development across related languages.

These analyses go beyond synchronic static images of single languages, rather they make use of various strategies of examining given construction types or morphosyntactic features in their own right, across language boundaries or across time, or, indeed, across speaker variation. This strategy represents what may well be a sea change in the study of covariation of linguistic structures: rather than appealing to universal properties of human cognition, or indeed to Universal Grammar, to account for cross-linguistic patterns, we can view covariation as an instance of what could be called structural Darwinism. In parlance adapted from biology, the locus of natural selection in language is not the language as a whole, but rather the construction, and the language is an ecological niche to which a construction must adapt, or disappear (cf. Evans & Levinson 2009). In closely related languages and in different diachronic stages of a given language we find varying niches to which constructions are constantly adapting. The papers by van den Berg, Westerlund, Wilhelmsen and Ström in this collection illustrate this tendency in various ways.

Just as language can no longer be viewed as a hermetically sealed synchronic unit or module, it also cannot be considered entirely arbitrary. Rather, there are many examples of iconically motivated structures of various kinds to be found, once we know where to look for them. Hansen's paper shows how word order variation, which might be argued to be arbitrary par excellence, is actually clearly motivated by prototypical transitivity: in language after language a reduction in transitivity, in the sense of Hopper & Thompson (1980), is often expressed by a change of word order from the prototypical basic word order of the language. Exactly which feature is affected varies cross-linguistically, but the basic principle seems to be the same.

Adding to a rapidly growing body of research on the linguistics of perception (see e.g. Viberg 1984, Majid & Levinson 2011), the paper by Thanassoula investigates the formal and semantic characteristics of perception verbs in Lussese (Bantu, Uganda). Specifically, her analysis targets the semantic extensions and scope of individual perception verbs and provides an in-depth picture of how metaphor and polysemy operate inside and outside the domain itself. The semantics of perception are further discussed in light of ethnographic observations, and with frequent reference to closely related languages. Thus, as in many of the contributions in this collection, the research topic is thoroughly contextualised in relation to its linguistic and cultural ecology.

## References

- Barwick, Linda. 2005. A musicologist's wishlist: some issues, practices and practicalities in musical aspects of language documentation. In Peter K. Austin (ed.), *Language Documentation and Description, Volume 3*, 53–62. London: SOAS.
- Donegan, Patricia & David Stampe. 2004. Rhythm and the synthetic drift of Munda. In R. Singh (ed.), *The yearbook of South Asian languages and linguistics*, 3–36. New Delhi: Thousand Oaks.
- Evans, Nick & Stephen C. Levinson. 2009. The myth of language universals: language diversity and its importance for cognitive science. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 32, 429–492.
- Féry, Caroline. 2010. The intonation of Indian languages: an areal phenomenon. In Imtiaz Hasnain & Shreesh Chaudhury (eds.), *Problematising language studies (Festschrift for Ramakant Agnihotri)*, 288–312. New Delhi: Aakar Books.
- Gussenhoven, Carlos. 2004. *The phonology of tone and intonation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Himmelman, Nikolaus P. 2006. Prosody in language documentation. In Jost Gippert, Nikolaus P. Himmelman & Ulrike Mosel (eds.), *Essentials of language documentation*, 163–181. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Himmelman, Nikolaus P. & Robert D. Ladd. 2008. Prosodic description: an introduction for fieldworkers. *Language Documentation and Conservation* 2(2), 244–274.
- Hopper, Paul J. & Sandra A. Thompson. 1980. Transitivity in grammar and discourse. *Language* 56(2), 251–299.
- Jun, Sun-Ah. 2005. Prosodic typology. In Sun-Ah Jun (ed.), *Prosodic typology: the phonology of intonation and phrasing*, 430–458. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kohler, Klaus. 2009. Rhythm in speech and language: a new research paradigm. *Phonetica* 66, 29–45.
- Ladefoged, Peter. 2003. *Phonetic data analysis: an introduction to fieldwork and instrumental techniques*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Lundström, Håkan. 2010. *I will send my song. Kammu vocal genres in the singing of Kam Raw*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press [with CD].
- Majid, Asifa & Stephen C. Levinson (eds.). 2011. The senses in language and culture [special issue]. *The Senses & Society* 6.
- Seeger, Anthony. 1987. *Why Suyá sing. A musical anthropology of an Amazonian people*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Viberg, Åke. 1984. The perception verbs: a typological study. In Brian Butterworth, Bernard Comrie & Osten Dahl (eds.), *Explanations for language universals*, 123–162. Berlin: Mouton.



## List of Contributors

Niclas Burenhult  
Centre for Languages and Literature  
Lund University  
Box 201, SE-22100 Lund, Sweden  
and  
Max Planck Institute for  
Psycholinguistics  
PO Box 310, 6500 AH Nijmegen,  
The Netherlands

[niclas.burenhult@ling.lu.se](mailto:niclas.burenhult@ling.lu.se)

Neil R. Coulter  
SIL International  
SIL Box 1 (151),  
Ukarumpa EHP 444,  
Papua New Guinea

[neil\\_coulter@sil.org](mailto:neil_coulter@sil.org)

Cynthia I. A. Hansen  
Department of Anthropology  
Grinnell College  
1118 Park Street,  
Grinnell, IA 50112-1670,  
USA

[hansency@grinnell.edu](mailto:hansency@grinnell.edu)

Arthur Holmer  
Centre for Languages and Literature  
Lund University  
Box 201, SE-22100 Lund,  
Sweden

[arthur.holmer@ling.lu.se](mailto:arthur.holmer@ling.lu.se)

Anastasia Karlsson  
Centre for Languages and Literature  
Lund University  
Box 201,  
SE-22100 Lund,  
Sweden

[anastasia.karlsson@ling.lu.se](mailto:anastasia.karlsson@ling.lu.se)

Olga Lovick  
Department of Interdisciplinary  
Programs  
First Nations University of Canada  
1 First Nations Way,  
Regina, SK S4S 7K2,  
Canada

[olga@lithophile.com](mailto:olga@lithophile.com)

Håkan Lundström  
Malmö Academy of Music  
Lund University  
Box 8203,  
SE-20041 Malmö,  
Sweden

[hakan.lundstrom@kanslik.lu.se](mailto:hakan.lundstrom@kanslik.lu.se)

Stephen Morey  
Research Centre for Linguistic Typology  
La Trobe University  
Victoria 3086, Melbourne,  
Australia

[s.morey@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:s.morey@latrobe.edu.au)

Yasuko Nagano-Madsen  
Department of Languages and  
Literatures  
University of Gothenburg  
PO Box 200, SE-40530 Göteborg,  
Sweden

and  
National Institute for Japanese  
Language and Linguistics  
10-2 Midori-cho, Tachikawa City,  
Tokyo 190-8561, Japan

[yasuko.madsen@japan.gu.se](mailto:yasuko.madsen@japan.gu.se)

David S. Rood  
Department of Linguistics  
University of Colorado  
295 UCB,  
Boulder, CO 80309-0295,  
USA

[david.rood@colorado.edu](mailto:david.rood@colorado.edu)

Jürgen Schöpf  
Phonogrammarchiv,  
Austrian Academy of Sciences,  
Liebiggasse 5,  
A-1010 Vienna,  
Austria

email: [juergen.schoepf@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:juergen.schoepf@oeaw.ac.at)

Eva-Marie Ström  
Department of Languages and  
Literatures  
University of Gothenburg  
PO Box 200, SE-40530 Göteborg,  
Sweden

[eva-marie.strom@african.gu.se](mailto:eva-marie.strom@african.gu.se)

Jan-Olof Svantesson  
Centre for Languages and Literature  
Lund University  
Box 201,  
SE-22100 Lund,  
Sweden

[jan-olof.svantesson@ling.lu.se](mailto:jan-olof.svantesson@ling.lu.se)

Marilena Thanassoula  
Institute for African Studies  
University of Cologne  
DE-50923  
Köln,  
Germany

[mthanass@uni-koeln.de](mailto:mthanass@uni-koeln.de)

Myfany Turpin  
School of Languages & Comparative  
Cultural Studies  
University of Queensland  
Brisbane QLD 4072,  
Australia

[myfturpin@uq.edu.au](mailto:myfturpin@uq.edu.au)

Siri G. Tuttle  
Alaska Native Language Center  
University of Alaska Fairbanks  
P.O. Box 757680, Fairbanks,  
AK 99775,  
USA

[sgtuttle@alaska.edu](mailto:sgtuttle@alaska.edu)

René van den Berg  
SIL International  
PO Box 1-226,  
Ukarumpa  
EHP 444,  
Papua New Guinea

[r.vandenberg@sil.org.pg](mailto:r.vandenberg@sil.org.pg)

Torbjörn Westerlund  
Department of Linguistics and  
Philology  
Uppsala University  
Box 635, SE-75126 Uppsala,  
Sweden

[torbjorn.westerlund@lingfil.uu.se](mailto:torbjorn.westerlund@lingfil.uu.se)

Vera Wilhelmsen  
Department of Linguistics and Philology  
Uppsala University  
Box 635,  
SE-75126 Uppsala,  
Sweden

[vera.wilhelmsen@lingfil.uu.se](mailto:vera.wilhelmsen@lingfil.uu.se)