
A grammar of the Hoava language, Western Solomons provides a descriptive grammar of Hoava, an Austronesian language with approximately 1,000 speakers in New Georgia, Solomon Islands. Austronesian is probably the most widely dispersed language family in the world, consisting of approximately 1,200 languages stretching from Madagascar in the west through the Pacific to Easter Island in the east and from Taiwan in the north to New Zealand in the south. Hoava belongs to the Oceanic branch, a fairly well-studied branch of Austronesian which consists of approximately 500 languages.

The book is divided into nine chapters. Ch. 1 provides an overview of the grammar and information about previous studies of the language. Ch. 2 explains the linguistic situation of Hoava, which might also be called Hoava-Kusaghe on the basis of the names of its two dialects. Ch. 3 describes the phonetics and phonology of the language (whose inventory consists of sixteen consonants and five vowels). Chs. 4 and 5 cover the noun phrase and the verb phrase, respectively, and make up roughly half of the book. Ch. 4 covers various facets of the noun phrase: the head of a noun phrase, articles, quantifiers, modifiers, restrictive particles, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, possessive noun phrases, and coordination. Ch. 5 covers the verb phrase. The topics covered include verbal affixes, aspect, tense, mood, modifiers, serial verb constructions, and object incorporation. Following the distinction between clause core and periphery of role and reference grammar, Ch. 6 looks at the clause core while Ch. 7 focuses on the clause periphery. Ch. 6 covers what might also be called argument structure: predicate types, valency-changing derivations (applicative and passive), and the nature of oblique arguments. Ch. 7 covers spatial location, temporal location, negation, and various types of clause modification (particles and adverbs). Ch. 8 examines multi-clause sentences. Finally, Ch. 9 looks at topic and focus and the devices available for their marking (particles, interrogatives, and constituent displacement).

The grammar could be improved in a few ways. First, it does not include any Hoava texts, although the author has published separately a collection of customary stories. Second, it lacks an index, which means that the only way of finding specific topics is through the table of contents, which can be inconvenient.

Island Melanesia is one of the most linguistically diverse parts of the world, and grammatical description of the nearly 1,000 languages spoken in the region is badly needed. This grammar is an important step in that direction. [STUART ROBINSON, Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.]


The book is sure one of the linguistic concepts most familiar to nonlinguists. Indeed, I suspect that one illustration commonly invoked by linguists when explaining the notion of a linguistic universal to a nonspecialist is that ‘all languages have words.’ Readers of this journal, of course, know that the matter isn’t quite so simple, and the eleven papers brought together here by R. M. W. Dixon and Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald serve as a rich source illustrating the nuances to be considered in identifying words and defining wordhood.

The introductory chapter (‘Word: A typological framework’, 1–41) by Dixon and Aikhenvald, surveys several key issues. The discussion covers both ends of the spectrum, namely the analytical morphology of Chinese and the polysynthetic morphology of North American languages. The chapter includes separate sections on the criteria for phonological and grammatical words.

ALEXANDRA Y. AIKHENVALD (‘Typological parameters for the study of clitics, with special reference to Tariana’, 42–78) gives a thorough review of the properties associated with clitics before illustrating several of them in her discussion of Tariana.

ANTHONY C. WOODBURY expands on his formidable collection of work on varieties of Yup’ik (‘The word in Cup’ik’, 79–99) with a discussion of aspects of inflection as criteria for the word. Following a theme from the introduction, Woodbury introduces
phonological criteria and then presents two interesting mismatches between the grammatical and phonological factors.

Johanne Nordh uses a similar format in ‘The word in Easter/Central Arrernte’ (100–124). He introduces a less familiar kind of evidence, namely a language game known as Rabbit Talk. This game involves various operations which Nordh suggests are relevant to identifying phonological and morphological domains.

The phonological and grammatical word in Jaru- wara are relatively unproblematic (‘The eclectic morphology of Jaruwarra, and the status of word’, by R. M. W. Dixon, 125–53). Dixon presents details of the morphology of the language and highlights four areas with disparity between the criteria for word: compounds, reduplication, and two cases involving specific morphemes.

Ulrike Zeshan contributes an interesting discussion of the word in sign languages (‘Towards a notion of “word” in sign languages’, 153–79). The article begins by contrasting the notions of ‘sign’ and ‘word’ and surveying the linguistic terminology used in several sign languages. After a discussion of iconicity and some differences between linguistic modalities, Zeshan concludes that the notions of phonological and grammatical words are relevant for sign languages as well, making any claim of universality more robust.

Several Siouan languages are surveyed with the conclusion that stress is the only criterion allowing definition of the word (‘Synchronic and diachronic perspective on “word” in Siouan’, by Robert Kan- kin, John Boyle, Randolph Graczyk, and John Koontz, 180–204). Tone is brought into the discussion in Knut J. Oláwsky’s chapter ‘What is a word in Dagbani?’ (205–26). Although many tonal processes apply across word boundaries, the author notes two ways in which word and tone interact.

Alice C. Harris gives a brief survey of Georgian, following the now-familiar formula for the chapters, and also includes a few brief comments on the phonology (‘The word in Georgian’, 227–42). The rich inventory of clitics in Greek receives careful consideration in ‘The word in Modern Greek’ (243–65) by Brian D. Joseph, as do several phonological processes. Joseph also raises some interesting points about wordhood and language contact.

The volume is wrapped up with a review by P. H. Mathews, ‘What can we conclude?’ (266–81), in which the core issues from the various chapters are drawn out and the unique properties highlighted. The volume also includes indices of authors, languages and language families, and subjects. This is a well-edited volume, rich in content, and easily recommended for students and researchers alike. [Curt Rice, University of Tromsø.]