

*The Salish Language Family: Reconstructing Syntax*. Paul D. Kroeber. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. 461 pp.

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A colleague of mine once commented that he would refuse to give any kind of talk that makes a typological generalization if he knew there was an Americanist, especially a Salishanist, in the room. For people outside the small but growing number of specialists in this family, Salishan languages do seem to have gained a reputation for an extreme, perhaps even perverse, degree of difficulty, an attitude which has no doubt been created in part by a lack of comprehensive, accessible, and typologically-oriented reference works. *The Salish Language Family*, an expansion of Kroebers' doctoral dissertation (University of Chicago, 1991), goes a long way to correcting this lack by offering a detailed account of the synchronic form and diachronic development of subordinate clauses in this unusual and diverse linguistic family. The result is a first-rate scholarly work, an achievement made all the more remarkable by the often sketchy, inaccessible, or obscure nature of the materials that constitute the only data available on so many of these unusual and under-documented languages.

The first chapter of the book, a survey of the (by Kroeber's count) twenty-two Salishan languages, begins with a discussion of their location and genetic subgroupings, then moves on to outline Salishan historical phonology, presenting

current consensus on the Proto-Salishan sound system and enumerating the major sound changes that mark off divisions within the family. Kroeber then sketches out the morphosyntax of the simple clause and the noun phrase (referred to throughout as a “participant expression” or DP). On the whole, this chapter is one of the best and most accessible surveys of Salishan grammatical features available. While not as comprehensive or detailed as the overviews found in L.C. Thompson’s 1979 article “Salishan and the Northwest” (*The Languages of Native America*, University of Texas) or E. Czaykowska-Higgins and M. Dale Kinkade’s contribution to *Salishan Languages and Linguistics* (Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), Kroeber’s treatment outdoes both of these by presenting numerous clear examples of the grammatical phenomena in question as they are manifested in a representative sample of the languages that have them.

What is even more laudable about Kroeber’s presentation in this chapter and in the book as a whole is that he largely eschews the specialized, idiosyncratic terminology that plagues much work by Americanists--who have a tendency to develop language- and/or family-specific jargon intelligible only to other specialists--in favour of more familiar, theory and specialty non-specific terminology. By choosing universally understood (albeit not universally accepted) terms such as “subject”, “object”, and “passive”, Kroeber not only guarantees the wider accessibility of his work, but also ensures that it will stand the test of time by not tying it too tightly to any one position in the eternally shifting sands of syntactic theory. Although Kroeber does make some reference

to the major theoretical bugbears of Salishan syntax such as the Pronominal Argument Hypothesis and the noun-verb distinction, for the most part he steers clear of the controversies and opts for a descriptively-oriented presentation that remains accessible and useful to theoreticians on either side of these issues.

In much the same spirit, the next two chapters outline the forms and functions of complement and adverbial clauses. Kroeber begins by discussing the two form classes of subordinate clause attested in most of the languages of the family--the conjunctive (which makes use of a special series of person-clitics) and propositional nominalization (which involves a nominalizing prefix and, in some languages, the expression of the subject by possessive affixation). After detailing how each of these subordinate clause types is realized in each of the languages that has them (Chapter 2), Kroeber compares the syntactic functions that these clause-types fill in particular languages (Chapter 3), relating them to a carefully elaborated semantic taxonomy developed at the beginning of the chapter. The third chapter ends with a discussion of the possible diachronic development of the major familial patterns.

Chapters 4 through 6 deal with relative clauses. Chapter 4 sets out a terminological framework, which is then applied in Chapter 5 to the discussion of the relativization of direct participants (subject and direct object) and in Chapter 6 to the relativization of oblique participants (instruments, indirect objects, locative phrases, and the like). Chapter 7--a brief look at predicate nominals, clefts, and topic-fronting constructions across the family--is by far the

weakest chapter. Kroeber makes a valiant attempt to come up with a useful functional taxonomy of “fronting” constructions to parallel his taxonomy of adverbial and complement clauses from Chapter 3; unfortunately, he is hampered by a wholesale lack of the data on the characteristics of information or communicative structure in Salishan languages that might have allowed him to make the distinctions necessary to an adequate taxonomy of this type. While some of this might have been gleaned from texts (as Kroeber frequently tries to do) or, in a few sporadic cases, from the secondary literature (P. Davis and R. Saunders, for example, discuss Topic–Comment structure in their article “Bella Coola Syntax” in the anthology *Linguistic Studies of Native Canada* [University of British Columbia, 1978]), this kind of investigation really requires access to fluent native speakers, few of which remain for the majority of these languages.

The final chapter of the book addresses the broader areal diffusion of grammatical features between Salishan languages and members of adjacent language families. The Pacific Northwest is well-known as a linguistic area or *Sprachbund* wherein languages that have been in long-term contact with each other have come to share a large number of linguistic features. Kroeber offers some speculation on diffusional sources of divergence from Pan- or Proto-Salishan patterns in various Salishan sub-groups, where these bring them in line with members of neighbouring language families. This is a welcome addition to the current boom in discussions of grammatical borrowing, both within the Pacific Northwest (see, for example, the article by L.C. Thompson and M. Dale

Kinkade in the *Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 7: Northwest Coast* [Smithsonian, 1990] and my own recent article on the topic in *Anthropological Linguistics* [2000, 42(2)] and in the world at large (e.g. J. Nichol's *Linguistic Diversity in Space and Time* [University of Chicago, 1992] and S. Thomason and T. Kaufman's *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics* [University of California, 1988]).

On the whole, this is an outstanding work of scholarship and the only thing one can fault Kroeber for is not being superhuman. Inevitably, there are a number of places in the presentation where Kroeber is forced to admit, quite candidly, that he does not entirely understand the structure under discussion or that he is not entirely sure of the analysis he is making. In a few cases, these doubts could have been cleared up by a more specialized knowledge of the literature--as, for instance, in the discussion of the two patterns of negation used in Lushootseed (pp. 157 - 159). Kroeber glosses over the important semantic distinctions between the two although these are set out in clear descriptive terms in the first volume of T.M. Hess's *Lushootseed Reader* (University of Montana Occasional Papers in Linguistics, 1995) and given theoretical treatment in my Master's thesis (University of Victoria, 1995) and an article in the anthology *Recent Trends in Meaning-Text Theory* (John Benjamins, 1997). It is, however, unfair to expect any one author to be conversant with all of the secondary literature on each and every language in this large and diverse family, particularly given the recent boom in research on Salishan languages. *The Salish*

*Language Family* represents an important part of this boom, and a lasting contribution to Salishan and Americanist linguistics.