Book reviews

Young people's Dyirbal. An example of language death from Australia. Annette
Schmidt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. xviii + 252.

In 1972 R. M. W. Dixon published his *The Dyirbal language of North Queens-
land,* a volume remarkable both as a towering example of theoretically informed
language description and because of its contents. Dixon described a language
which is ergative not only in its case-marking system but also in its underlying
syntactic patterns. As such, Dyirbal is unique, and countless linguists have
plowed through Dixon to find data that suited their particular analysis of the
recalcitrant patterns of Dyirbal. Now we are presented with the detailed descrip-
tion of the decay and perhaps eventual death of this fascinating language. It is
sobering to think that, had Dixon not gotten around to studying Dyirbal in the
sixties, our view of the extent to which human languages can differ may have
been completely different.

Schmidt relies on Dixon's work as a point of contrast, and the main focus of
the book is on describing the linguistic dimensions of the process of language
death in detail. As such, it is a very different book from Susan Gal's (1979)
excellent sociolinguistic analysis of the shift from Hungarian to German in a
village in eastern Austria, a reference lacking in Schmidt's otherwise very com-
prehensive bibliography. The main focus then is on description, and this is
reflected in the division in chapters: *general aspects of language death* – Chap-
ters 1 ("Introduction," pp. 1–5) and 10 ("Language Death and General
Linguistic Issues," pp. 212–227); *methodology and sociolinguistic perspective*
– Chapters 2 ("Aim and Method," pp. 6–9) and 3 ("Sociolinguistic Per-
spective," pp. 10–43); *linguistic description* – Chapters 4 ("Structural
Change," pp. 44–126), 5 ("YD ("Young Dyirbal) in Natural Context," pp.
127–150), 6 ("A Topic in Semantics: Changes in Noun Classification," pp.
151–168), 7 ("Lexicon," pp. 169–190), 8 ("Phonology," pp. 191–198), and 9
("Jambun English," pp. 199–211). In addition to these chapters there is a brief
concluding chapter, an appendix with samples of text in different kinds of Young
Dyirbal, and an index. Something like 80% of the book, then, is devoted to the
linguistic findings.

In Chapter 2 the data collection techniques are (very) briefly described: the
translation of 200 English sentences into Dyirbal, recorded texts in story-telling
settings, recorded conversations, translation tasks for 500 English words, the
translation of ten traditional Dyirbal sentences into English, informal question-
naires about attitudes to and use of Dyirbal, ethnographic observations. The
sentence translation task was used by Dorian (1981) in her book on language
death of Gaelic in Scotland, and runs the risk of artificiality: Either the transla-
tion from a sociolinguistically dominant language leads to interference in the
translation itself, or it has the effect of producing overly traditional forms of the
minority language. In light of this, Schmidt's remark that data from translation

tasks "enables us to identify and observe linguistic change ceteris paribus (i.e. without complication of variation triggered by social variables such as setting, interlocutor, topic)" is somewhat naive. Nonetheless, the study gives a varied picture of language death phenomena, studied with a variety of complementary techniques.

Chapter 4 contrasts the results of a translation of a set of carefully constructed English sentences by speakers of YD with the traditional Dyirbal as described by Dixon. Schmidt finds that deviation from the traditional norms correlates roughly with age, and that it is not haphazard but follows an implicationally defined continuum: Traditional features present in the speech of young speakers are also present in that of their older siblings, but not vice-versa. It is not easy to make linguistic sense of what is retained and what is lost, and Schmidt suggests a functional explanation: "While the reasons for the pattern of morphological decay remain obscure, the resistance of derivational and certain inflectional morphemes to decay indicates that these forms still function as useful devices in the YD communication system" (p. 78). Schmidt does not elaborate on this, however, and this is perhaps my greatest qualm with the book: A wealth of description is coupled with little, if any, explanation. The same holds for the problem of ergativity alluded to before. About half the speakers of YD have given up *morphological* ergativity, but for *syntactic* ergativity the pattern is much more complex. In certain structures syntactic ergativity has been almost completely lost, while in others it is retained by all speakers. This highly intriguing result remains unexplained.

The conclusions of Schmidt's analysis accord with those of other recent studies of language death. Linguistically, it is shown to be a fairly regular, implicationally ordered process. The types of changes that occur are ordinary types of grammatical change. They only take place very quickly, and reductions in one part of the grammar are not compensated for by complications elsewhere, as in "healthy" linguistic change. Schmidt also concurs with Dorian when she says that the kind of "simplification" we find in language death does not correspond to that found in pidginization. For one thing, even YD has a complex morphological structure (which pidgins characteristically do not have). For another, a pidgin has functions very different from those of a "dying" language: The latter has a strong identificational, and a weak instrumental, function; for a pidgin, the reverse holds. While this conclusion is plausible, this reviewer would have liked a more extensive discussion of this issue. How exactly functional properties are related to structural properties in both types of systems is one of the crucial questions in this field: It is not addressed here. Similarly, a preliminary discussion of parallels and contrasts between language death and language acquisition is inconclusive because its brevity precludes detailed argumentation. Nonetheless, Schmidt's description does give us some grip on what processes of language death are *not* like: They do not lead to haphazard errors, they cannot be described as mostly adaptations to the dominant language (while undergoing extensive grammatical influence from that language), they do not necessarily lead to the "relaxation of internal grammatical monitoring," and dying languages are not only used for communication between the generations. The crucial question now becomes, of course, what are the general properties of language death and attrition, and which conclusions of Schmidt's are relevant only

to the Dyirbal case? It is very much to be hoped that Schmidt, or other scholars, will use the remarkable data gathered in this study to arrive at some later date at both more general and more explanatory statements about language death. Schmidt's book certainly serves the function of showing how relevant this kind of material is to our understanding of how languages are structured and function within human societies.

REFERENCES

Dorian, N. (1981). *Language death: The life cycle of a Scottish Gaelic dialect.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Gal, S. (1979). *Language shift. Social determinants of linguistic change in bilingual Austria.* New York: Academic Press.

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Language disorders in adults. Audrey Holland (Ed.). San Diego, CA: College-Hill, 1984. Pp. 335.

This book is written for an audience of clinicians who are responsible for evaluating and treating elderly persons with communicative and cognitive dysfunction, the speech-language pathologist, and perhaps the neuropsychologist. Psycholinguists will find that it provides them with material on the nature of dysfunctional language in adults with a variety of organic etiologies. It contains a great deal of important, innovative material on treatment of adult disorders. These treatment suggestions emanate from recent research in linguistics, psychology, neurology, and neuropsychology, thus synthesizing ideas from a variety of related fields. The content areas are most appropriate for an experienced practicing clinician. Although novices will be equally infused with knowledge, their ability to bridge the gap from theory to application will require some direction.

Many new and well-developed materials on head trauma and severity levels of aphasics are provided. Horner's chapter has included the dimension of a "qualitative" aspect in language analysis and given it a new status. Speech-language pathologists have been instructed that the outcome of a diagnostic measure was to quantify and objectify test responses. Thus, a group of tests, such as the PICA, have emerged which aim to give an objective numerical profile to aphasic responses. In discussing the aspects of psycholinguistic behavior which can aid in qualifying aphasic behavior, Horner has provided a fresh and long-needed model for treatment. She outlines the levels of language dissociation that occur in naming deficits, suggests a treatment hierarchy, and interweaves current research in supporting her model. When evaluating the relationships between deficits at the word level (lexical-semantic), sentence level (morphosyntactic), and sound level (phonologic-prosodic), it becomes clear that these responses must be analyzed qualitatively in treating adults. Although Horner writes about moderate impairment, this model is relevant for mild and moderately severe aphasics.

Linebaugh's chapter on mild aphasia makes an important point which relates to Horner's focus on assessment of qualitative output. His point is that aphasics can appear to be either more or less language impaired depending upon the