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Windows on Bilingualism

Eugene H. Casad

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To

Hans Wolff

who first realized the full import of the role of sociolinguistic
factors in determining nonreciprocal intelligibility and
severed its link to measures of dialect distance

and to

John Crawford

who, on the basis of ample field experience, and with much insight,
recognized the validity of Wolff's conclusions and adapted
intelligibility tests as the core of a multifaceted sociolinguistic
index of dialect extendability

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Foreword

A picture of the world as a finite number of speech communities, each speaking its own language, is an appealing picture of the world's language situation. For the linguistic theorist and language typologist there would be a finite—though presumably large—number of languages whose characteristics could be checked against hypothesized general principles or parametric settings. For the proponent of vernacular literacy as an empowering mechanism for human communities, one could simply check whether each community had an acceptable writing system for its language, and, if not, proceed to language description, orthography creation, and literacy training. But of course we all know that this picture is wrong in many respects.

Many communities are multilingual: they use several dialects of the same language or several different languages in their everyday communication. Also, we know that vernacular literacy is often resisted or, even if tentatively accepted, fails to take hold. Furthermore, linguists have no adequate professional consensus as to what constitutes “a language” as opposed to dialect variation and no satisfactory measure of just how different any two languages are. And the fundamental linguistic questions remain unanswered of how individual competence relates to community conventionalization and how this relationship changes over time. Finally, speakers' attitudes toward language and toward particular variant forms of language varieties are widely acknowledged to be involved in questions of mutual intelligibility, dialect variation, and language change. Nonetheless no one is yet clear on just how language attitudes affect language structure, language use, and language change, and even the best methods of collecting valid data on language attitudes are not yet understood.

Fortunately, linguists of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) not only recognize all these theoretical and practical problems in understanding the nature of human language and the difficulty of predicting language change, but they are also steadily accumulating experience in dealing head-on with these issues. General linguists must be grateful for the commitment of SIL to make Scriptures available to everyone in his or her own language, for this means the SIL linguists must constantly search for answers to such basic questions as these: how different must two languages be in structure, use, and attitudes before there is a need for translation into both instead of just one? What information must be collected in order to reach a reasonable decision? How can a language survey be carried out effectively with a minimum of time, effort, and funds? What measures are most useful in testing for mutual intelligibility of two dialects? How does one determine the incidence of competence in different codes throughout a community and the relevant attitudes of members of the community toward them?

The papers in this volume report on SIL experience with measures of linguistic distance, mutual intelligibility, and language attitudes as well as the necessary information about principles of statistics to deal with such measures. The language situations and the research efforts reported on are quite varied. Ethnographic methods of participant observation are discussed along with analysis of responses from self-report language-competence questionnaires. For linguists unfamiliar with field testing of this kind, it is impressive to see comparisons of cognate counting, sentence repetition testing, intelligibility testing, and the SLOPE approach to proficiency testing. Reports deal with the problems of differentiating between “inherent intelligibility” and the intelligibility that comes from exposure to another language (i.e., partial bilingualism).

Most of the papers included were presented several years ago at an SIL conference on the Pacific area, so they refer more often to language situations in the Pacific than elsewhere, but all of them have implications for cases of societal multilingualism anywhere in the world. In this sense, the papers do indeed offer “windows on bilingualism” and though many of them seem overly concerned with the practical techniques of measurement and with speculations about how to predict the success of vernacular literacy in various language situations, they all serve to remind those interested in linguistic structure of the complexities of human language and the enormous difficulties for predicting changes in patterns of language structure, language use, and language attitudes.

Charles A. Ferguson
Stanford University

Acknowledgments

The present volume of papers is the offspring of a conference in Baguio City, Philippines, sponsored by colleagues of the Asia Area Group of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) who have been engaged in various language assessment tasks for the last dozen years or more. Much of this work has been carried out under the leadership of Calvin R. Rensch, who brought to this enterprise a solid academic background with a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania and the publication of a landmark volume in Amerindian comparative linguistics titled *Comparative Otomanguean Phonology*. His field experience includes completion of the translation of the Lalana Chinantec New Testament. Thus, Cal is in a special position both to train personnel for language survey related endeavors and for evaluating the propriety of various test instruments.

Several other people were also crucial in seeing this project off the ground and bringing it to a close. Eugene Loos has been a consistent source of encouragement ever since he and Cal asked me to edit the Baguio papers in order to pass on the benefits of the survey conference to the entire SIL field membership. Most importantly, there could be no volume if there were no authors to write the papers. I extend my warmest thanks to each one of them: Barbara F. Grimes, Joseph E. Grimes, John Stephen Quakenbush, Calvin R. Rensch, Randy Kamp, and Dale Savage. They have been both cooperative and prompt and this editor appreciates very much all their contributions.

For various reasons, not all of the papers given at the Baguio Conference are reprinted here. In addition, several papers not presented at the Conference are included because they reinforce ideas presented at the conference and treat issues that must be handled by our organization. They also help keep the content of this volume current. I am very grateful

to Eugene Loos and Joseph E. Grimes for permission to reprint the article *Correlations between Vocabulary Similarity and Intelligibility* from *Notes on Linguistics* No. 41. The author, Joe Grimes, has been in the middle of the development of methods for doing language surveys for twenty years, looking for and testing computer applications to field data. Joe has also been actively involved in analyzing and processing such data throughout that entire period.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Ray Harlow, editor of the *Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress on Austronesian Linguistics, January 1988*, and to the Linguistic Society of New Zealand for their permission to reprint *Surveying Language Proficiency* by Steve Quakenbush.

Finally, this volume has changed form somewhat, partly due to the delays I encountered in editing it. For one, Cal Rensch wrote a report for the 1990 Biennial Conference of SIL, which he has graciously permitted me to incorporate into this collection of papers (See Part V). At about the same time, Joe Grimes showed me his paper on *Calibrating the Sentence Repetition Test* and also agreed to have it published here. And, at my invitation, Dale Savage wrote the two papers included in Part IV. The delays in readying this volume, therefore, occurred in part because of the addition of these articles to keep the collection of papers as current as possible. Be that as it may, I accept full responsibility for the shortcomings of this volume and hope that, in spite of them, it will be a useful one.