Writing a grammar in language documentation projects

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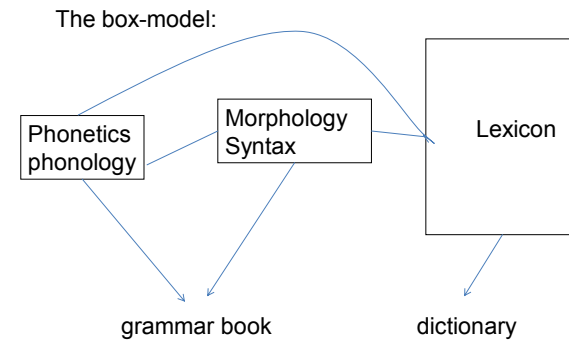2nd Trondheim Workshop on
Language Description and Documentation

Mosel, Ulrike & Even Hovdhaugen. 1992. *Samoan reference grammar.*
Mosel, Ulrike with Yvonne Thiesen. 2007. *Teop sketch grammar.*

1. What is the grammar of a language?

2. Content of grammars

3. Different kinds of grammars

4. Structure of grammars

5. Collecting words and sentences for a grammar

6. Collecting texts for a grammar

1. What is the grammar of a language?

The box-model:

Phonetics phonology

Morphology Syntax

Lexicon

grammar book   dictionary

Lexicon: arbitrary, idiosyntcratic form-meaning pairings

Grammar: form- meaning pairings that are governed by rules

lexicon-grammar interfaces	
lexicon	**grammar**
word classes	inflection, syntactic function
conversion derivational morphology compounding	

What goes into the dictionary?
What goes into the grammar-book?

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What goes into the grammar book and what into the dictionary?

grammar-book	dictionary
classification of words productive word formation rules inflectional rules and paradigms	words (lexemes) irregular inflectional forms
grammatical constructions on phrase, clause, sentence level and beyond	information on the usage of words in grammatical constructions (word classes and their subclasses)

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2. The content and size of grammars (grammar books)

depends on:

1. the **structure** of the language (Esperanto vs. Russian)
2. choice of **variety/varieties**
3. available primary and secondary **data**
4. the **writers' competence** of the language
5. the writers' training and **interests**
6. the prospective **users** and the intended **purpose**
7. money, staff and time

   >> different kinds of grammars

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3. Different kinds of grammars

Who is the grammar book written for?

native speakers / foreign langage learners
children / adults
students/ school teachers/ linguists

What is the grammar book written for?

teaching
reference for the general public
reference for linguists

In what kind of theoretical framework is it written?

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The reference grammar

is a scientific grammar that can be used as a basis for:

➢ further research on the language

➢ comparative typological or historical research

➢ the development of pedagogical grammars

➢ other educational materials

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4 The structure of reference grammars

4.1 Form & meaning - ´two approaches

4.2 The onomasiological approach

4.3 The sequence of chapters in a semasiological grammar

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4.1 Form & meaning – two approaches

| **grammar**: predictable, regular **form-meaning** pairings |

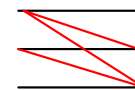But there is no 1:1 relationship between

FORM and MEANING

FORM		MEANING
I		A
II		B
III		C
IV		D
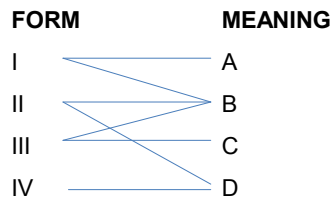
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MORPHOSYNTACTIC FORM   **MEANING**

I.   SVO (declarative) clause   A. statement

II. AUX SVO (interrogative) cl.   B. question

III. VO (imperative) clause   C. command

I.   X closed the door.

II. Did X close the door?

III. Close the door!

| *X closed the door?* |
| *You close the door.* |
| *You will close the door.* |
| *Would you close the door?* |

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Two perspectives in describing grammar:

    1. FORM > MEANING (semasiological)

        the hearer's perspective

    2. MEANING > FORM (onomasiological)

        the speaker's perspective

   1. What does FORM X express?

    What does a <u>SVO-clause</u> express?

                - <u>statement</u>, question, command

  2. How is the MEANING X expressed?

    How is a <u>command</u> expressed?

            declarative, interrogative, <u>imperative</u>

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Terminology

Strictly distinguish between

- terms for formal categories (noun, subject)

   - terms for word classes (e.g. noun, verb, adjective ...)

   - terms for syntactic functions (e.g. adjunct, attribute)

- terms for extra-linguistic concepts (e.g. 'human being')

Never say anything like:

*"here the **noun** functions as an **adjective**"

* "if the **argument** is a **human being**, ..."

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Workflow

(1) **FORM > MEANING** (semasiological approach)

Identify and describe:

1. wordforms (inflection and derivations) and

   the grammatical categories and meanings they express

2. constructions (phrases; clauses) and

   their syntactic functions in larger linguistic units

3. the meaning of constructions

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(2) **MEANING > FORM**:

1. select a particular meaning (semantic category),

2. describe the various means of expression for this meaning

3.   try to find rules and principles

   that govern the selection of expressions

> Example:
>   negation in English:
>   determiner: *no*
>   pronouns: *nobody, nothing, none*
>   particle *not*
>   prefixes: *un-, in-*

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4.2 The onomasiological approach

Example: Negation

		English	Oceanic languages
determiner	+	*no*	-
pronoun	+	*nobody*	-
particle	+	*not*	+
interjection	+	*no*	+
prefix	+	*un-, in-*	-
suffix	+	*-less*	-
existential verb	-	('there is not')	+
possessive verb	+	*lack*	+
verb of command	-	('don't')	+

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Negation verbs in Samoan

(1) **E   leai   se   tupe**.
    TAM not.exist   any   money
    'There is no money.'

(2) **E   leai   sa'u tupe**.
    TAM not.exist   my   money
    'I don't have any money.'

(3) **'Aua   le   tagi!**
    don't   ART   cry
    Don't cry!

Mosel, Ulrike & Even Hovdhaugen (eds) 1997.
Negation in Oceanic languages.
München: Lincom,

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4.3 The sequence of chapters

1. Introduction
2. Phonology and orthography
3. Word classes and their morphology
4. Types of phrases and their structure
5. Types of clauses and their structure
6. Complex sentences
7. Discourse

FORM > MEANING

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5 Collecting words and sentences for a grammar: elicitation

1. Wordlists
    method of active eliciting
2. Clauses
    the 'word-to-text technique' (Samarin 1967)

3. Non-translational supplementary elicitation
    substitution
    paraphrasing
    sentence completion

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6 Text collection – corpus building

6.1 Recorded speech vs. written edited texts

6.2 Grammatical variation across genres

      1. Legends

      2. Encyclopedic descriptions

      3. Procedural texts

6.3 Different themes – different grammatical phenomena

6 Collecting texts for a grammar

The corpus consists of

1. Recordings + metadata
2. Annotations:
   transcriptions
   glossings
   free translations
   comments

Mosel, Ulrike. forthcoming. Corpus linguistic and documentary
    approaches in writing a grammar of a previously undescribed
    language.

6.1 Recorded speech vs. edited texts

1. original recordings with annotations
2. edited versions of the recordings

The parallel corpus

• gives a fuller picture of the <u>expressive potential</u>

  of the language;

• shows <u>alternative ways of expressing</u> the same content

• provides a <u>new type of data</u> for research on

  what speakers actually do

  when they put an oral text into writing

6.2 Grammatical variation across genres
(Teop corpus)

Genres	Themes	Production
legends	Fights Origin of things	spoken, edited some written
Personal narratives	Autobiographies 2nd World War	spoken, edited, two only written
Encyclopedic descriptions	Plants, animals, artefacts House & canoe building Fishing, butchering, cooking	descriptions of things only written; procedural texts spoken, edited, written
Interviews	customs	spoken & edited

6.2.1 Legends

- may contain archaic expressions
- are recited from memory

-are situated in imaginary worlds

where animals talk and

things can change into living beings

> interesting for noun classification

- contain direct speech

interjections, swearing ....

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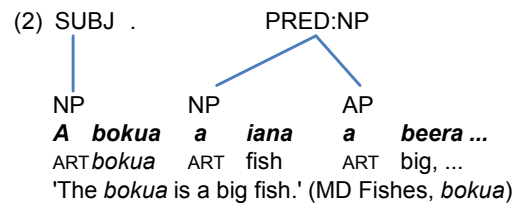**6.2.2. Encyclopedic descriptions**

non-verbal clauses in definitions

(1) **SUBJ.NP**	**PRED.NP**	**QUALIFICATIVE ATTRIBUTIVE AP**
The bokua	*(is) a fish*	*a big (one)*
(2) **SUBJ.NP**	**PRED.NP**	**POSSESSIVE AP**
The booboo	*(is) a fish*	*(with) a strong skin*
(3) **SUBJ.NP**	**PRED.NP**	**RELATIVE CLAUSE**
The shelf	*(is) a thing*	*that we put things (on).*

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Non-verbal clauses (1)

2) **SUBJ.NP PRED.NP   QUALIFICATIVE ATTRIBUTIVE AP**
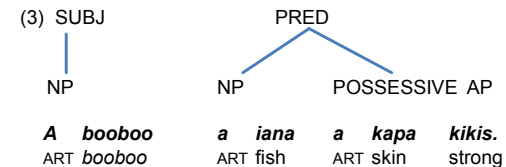
The bokua (is) a fish   a big (one)

(2) SUBJ .   PRED:NP

NP   NP   AP
A bokua   a   iana   a   beera ...
ART *bokua*   ART fish   ART big, ...
'The *bokua* is a big fish.' (MD Fishes, *bokua*)

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Non-verbal clauses (2)

(3) **SUBJ.NP PRED.NP   POSSESSIVE AP**

The booboo   (is) a fish   (with) a strong skin

(3) SUBJ   PRED

NP   NP   POSSESSIVE AP

A   booboo   a   iana   a   kapa   kikis.
ART *booboo*   ART fish   ART skin   strong

kuri   takaku   '(having) a broken arm
kahoo tamamata **'**(having) an open head'

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Non-verbal clauses (3)

SUBJ   PRED
O   poka o hum
ART shelf ART place

'The shelf is a place

RELATIVE CLAUSE
to   vavaobetera-   ara   bona maa taba.
REL put   1PL.INCL.IPFV- 1PL.INCL ART   PL   thing

that we put things on.' (MD House, *poka*)

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Definitions of "thing"-words

supply excellent examples for:

    1. non-verbal clauses

    2. topicalisation

    3. various kinds of modifiers

        (1)   adjectival phrases ('big')

        (2)   possessive adjectical phrases

               ('having a thick skin')

        (3)   relative clauses

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Definitions of "action"- words

NMLZ   DEM   COMPLEMENT CLAUSE
'The tearing...   this (is) when we remove ....'

A   siri   atovo
ART tear sago.palm.leaf
'The tearing of the sago palm leaf,

ei   be-   ara   gono kahi o paka
DEM when- 1PL.INCL   get   from ART leaf
this (is) when we   get   from   the leaf.'

bonosikiri nae.
ART midrib 3SG.POSS
the midrib

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6.2.3 Narratives vs procedural texts

Narratives	Procedural texts
Paratactic clauses Coordinate clauses "Tail-Head-construction"	Adverbial clause constructions: 'when ..., then...'
Sequence of past events	Regular fixed order of actions

**> create a corpus of
    parallel narrative and procedural texts**

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Buy and chicken and ...

Make series of photographs and use them as stimuli for

1. the description of how to butcher a chicken
2. the narrative of how the twins helped their father butchering a chicken

procedural text: 40 clauses, 12 adverbial clause constr.

narrative text: 53 clauses, no adverbial clauses

13 paratactic clauses

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6.4 Different themes – different grammatical phenomena

6.4.1 Tropical fishes are colourful

Do colour-words behave like *beera* 'big' and *mataa* 'good'?

-do they have the same morphology?

- do they have the same syntactic functions?

- do they enter comparative constructions?

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NPSUBJECT **VC**   **NP**OBJECT

The *sinarona* [is redding passing] the *aranavi.*

The *sinarona* is redder than the *aranavi*

A sinarona na gogooravi oha nana bona aranavi.
ART sinarona TAM red pass TAM ART aranavi

TAM = tense/ aspect/ mood marker

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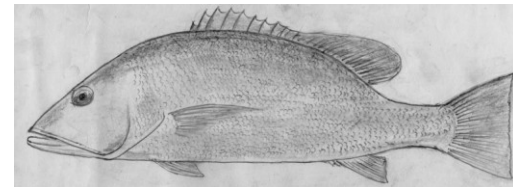
6.4.2 What trees are good for

Teop clause structure:

intransitive:	SUBJ VC	
transitive:	SUBJ VC	OBJ
	agent	patient/ recipient / theme
ditransitive:	SUBJ VC	OBJ$_1$ OBJ$_2$
	agent	recipient theme
	agent	patient instrument

The man gave   the child   a coconut.
The man made the canoe from wood,

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Clause patterns of *hee* 'give'

Clause pattern				frequency
SUBJ	VC	OBJ$_1$	OBJ$_2$	25
OBJ$_1$	VC	SUBJ	OBJ$_2$	6
OBJ$_2$	VC	SUBJ	OBJ$_1$	4

When is the primary or secondary object used
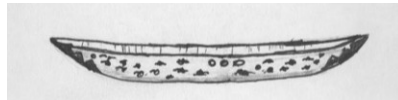in the first position?

Is this a "marked constituent order"?

Is **SUBJ VC   OBJ$_1$ OBJ$_2$** the dominant order?

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**Descriptions of trees and
what the parts of trees are
used for:**

	OBJ$_2$	**VC**	**SUBJ**	**OBJ$_1$**
(18)	'The putty-nut	plaster	they	the canoe.
(19)	(topic)	plaster	they	the knotholes.'

'The putty-nut tree (its nuts), they use for plastering
                                                the canoe.
'(The putty-nut), they plaster the knotholes.'

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The more tree descriptions, the more clauses with
OBJ$_2$ VC SUBJ OBJ$_1$ wordorder!

It makes only sense to speak of a dominant word order
with respect to a particular type of genre.

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Conclusions

If you come across a grammatical problem

       - distinction of word classes
       - relative clauses
       - nominalisations
       - inanimate topics
       - expression of the semantic role of instrument

try to find out which genre or theme might provide relevant natural data.

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When writing a grammar, be aware that

different registers/ genres have different preferred constructions and

that the grammar you write is
the grammar of your data,
not the grammar of the language as such.

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