Writing culture in grammar in the Americanist tradition

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Throughout the twentieth century, the Americanist tradition in linguistics placed the interaction between grammar and culture at the center of its project. The founders of the modern development of the tradition in the twentieth century, especially Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Benjamin Whorf, wrote major theoretical statements about the relationships between language and culture, and linguists formed in the Americanist tradition continue to produce such statements. Yet, if we examine monographs and sketches written by these authors under titles like “Grammar of X” or “The X Language”, we find that their theoretical work on language and culture had little impact on their practice as grammarians. The present paper will evaluate the ways in which attention to “writing culture in grammar” does and does not appear in this tradition.

There are at least five ways in which a linguist might “write culture in grammar”:

1) A grammar can include background material on the history and culture of the language community, including dialectology and comparative statements, but with attention as well to cultural geography, modes of subsistence, social organization, and ritual life.

2) Example words, constructions, and sentences in the grammar implicitly reflect culturally-appropriate usage, either because they were uttered in some context other than elicitation, or because they were drawn from a corpus of texts.

3) Explicit attention is given in the grammar to usage, including discussion of idioms, conversation, and other characteristic discourse structures.

4) Explicit attention is given in the grammar to the ways in which grammatical categories and constructions may imply cognitive categories, and either reflect or shape cultural forms.
The internal logic of a language, including both covert and overt categories, rather than categories drawn from universal grammar or typological theory, shapes the organization of description in the grammar. Since the Americanist tradition was self-consciously developed as a part of a general anthropology, we would predict a well-developed presence of all of the above components as a part of Americanist grammatical practice. Franz Boas, who had definitively demonstrated the impact of the forms of language on the forms of thought in his great essay on sound perception of 1889, “On alternating sounds,” wrote in 1911 an eloquent justification for why linguists should study the grammar of the languages of the Americas. In his “Introduction” to the Handbook of American Indian Languages Boas pointed out that

... language seems to be one of the most instructive fields of inquiry in an investigation of the formation of the fundamental ethnic ideas. The great advantage that linguistics offer in this respect is the fact that, on the whole, the categories which are formed always remain unconscious, and that for this reason the processes which lead to their formation can be followed, without the misleading and disturbing factors of secondary explanations, which are so common in ethnology, so much so that they generally obscure the real history of the development of ideas entirely. (Boas 1911a: 71)

Boas proposed several projects suggested by this basic insight. In addition to its promise of new methods for the psychological dimension in local ethnographic interpretation, it contributed such a dimension to a universal history, “to seek in the peculiarities of the grouping of ideas in different languages an important characteristic in the history of the mental development of the various branches of mankind” (Boas 1911a: 71). The careful study of the diversity of representations of ideas had as well practical implications, permitting the scholar to identify linguistic sources of inaccuracies and confusions in human thought “which are known to influence the history of science and ... the general history of civilization,” as well as “the thoughts of primitive man” (Boas 1911a: 72).

Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf extended Boas’s position in new theoretical statements, reaching perhaps their highest level of refinement (as suggested by Lucy (1992), which includes a detailed review of this body of work) in Whorf’s treatment of individuation and pluralization in Hopi in a paper written in Sapir’s memory (Whorf 1941).
I examine eight grammars written by Boas, Sapir, and Whorf, to determine the degree to which their theoretical positions influenced their practice as grammarians. Franz Boas contributed four grammatical sketches to the 1911 *Handbook of American Indian Languages*, on Tsimshian, Kwakiutl, Chinook, and Dakota, the last jointly authored with John Swanton. Edward Sapir published two major grammatical descriptions. *The Takelma Language of Southwestern Oregon* (1922), describing a language isolate with many unusual features, was originally his Columbia University doctoral dissertation of 1909. The *Takelma Texts*, with an accompanying vocabulary, were published separately (1909). *Southern Paiute, a Shoshonean Language* appeared in 1930, accompanied by a volume of texts and a substantial dictionary. Whorf published two grammatical sketches, on Second Mesa Hopi and Milpa Alta Nahuatl, in a volume of 1946, *Linguistic Structures of Native America*.

We might regard the first practice itemized above, the inclusion of background cultural information as a section of a grammar, as the easiest and most obvious way in which an author might express commitment to an anthropological linguistics. Yet, while the Americanist grammars do include such introductory sections, they are remarkably brief, a page or so in length. Boas apparently developed and recommended a sort of formula: a note on the geographical location of the language, a note on dialect diversity, brief mention of the genetic affiliations of the language, and sometimes a note on the identity of informants. These introductions include, however, no information at all on any cultural dimensions of the language community. Of course these authors published cultural information elsewhere, but they maintained a fairly rigid boundary between publication in cultural anthropology and the writing of grammars, that implied a commitment to the “autonomy” of grammar that contradicted the explicit claims of at least some of their theoretical writings. This Americanist practice continues to the present day, with most grammars in, for instance, the distinguished series from the University of California Publications in Linguistics, still including only very brief introductions, with most of the space even there devoted to dialect variation and comparative issues rather than to sociocultural questions.

This Americanist practice is in striking contrast to that encountered in recent grammars, e.g. within the Australian grammar-writing tradition, which open with detailed sections under the title “The language and its speakers” (first appearing, as far as I can tell, in Dixon’s Dyirbal grammar (1972)), which include, in addition to information on dialect diversity and

The second practice enumerated above by which a linguist can “write culture in grammar” is to select as illustrations of grammatical analyses examples that reflect culturally-appropriate usage. This practice is certainly exemplified in the early years of the Americanist tradition. Boas and Sapir both published extensive text collections. Many example constructions in their grammars are drawn from these, although others seem to be the result of discussion and elicitation (as in the last example below, from Whorf’s (1946a) Hopi sketch. These examples are striking and evocative, yielding a cumulative sensation of immersion in an exotic world, heightened by the fact that many of their texts were stories of the creation time, or about cultural matters that even at the time of collection were mere memories:

“One canoe after another being out seaward” (Tsimshian: Boas 1911b: 302),

“They said the porcupine to the beaver” (Tsimshian: Boas 1911b: 36a),

“And so I, on my part, am also a chief” (Kwakiutl: Boas 1911c: 492);

“Clam baskets” (Chinook: Boas 1911d: 567),

“There with that shaman is thy soul” (Chinook: Boas 1911d: 622);

“I squeezed and cracked many insects (such as fleas)” (Takelma: Sapir 1922: 80),

“Just when they touch the eastern extremity of the earth, just then I shall destroy them” (Takelma: Sapir 1922: 197);

“The Kanab Indians’ having learned (the) bear dance” (Southern Paiute: Sapir 1930: 202),

“He bet (it) together with his wife (i.e. staked his wife too)” (Southern Paiute: Sapir 1930: 222),
“The antelope fell down dead before reaching him” (Southern Paiute: Sapir 1930: 231);

“Upon lightning striking the pine tree, I heard it thunder” (Hopi: Whorf 1946a: 182)

Some contemporary grammars of Native American languages continue this tradition – although the examples are likely to be rooted in contemporary experience, as in this from Dayley’s (1989) Túmpisa (Panamint) Shoshone Grammar:

“‘I don’t like you Indians,’ that cop said.” (Dayley 1989: 380)

However, there is an increasing tendency in American grammars to favor the transparent representation of grammatical phenomena over the cultural interest of the example sentences. Selecting two random cases from my bookshelf, a very interesting categorical-grammar study of Luiseño (Steele 1990) uses mainly sentences that surely reflect a rather playful relationship between the linguist and her consultant, the late Villiana Hyde, but have little connection with everyday usages or contexts:

“I will kick the boy’s bear” (Steele 1990: 150)

“They were trying to tickle themselves” (Steele 1990: 195).

Most of the example sentences in contemporary grammars are merely dull, as with these, from Gordon’s Maricopa Morphology and Syntax:

“You will sing and I will dance” (Gordon 1986: 285)

“You were sick for a month” (Gordon 1986: 127)

Opinions on this matter differ. I have heard a critic argue that the (to me) very interesting example sentences in Dedrick and Casad’s (1999) Sonora Yaqui Language Structures are too complex to clearly illustrate the grammatical points under discussion. However, my own view is that linguists documenting indigenous languages, especially in a context when languages and cultures are threatened, should make every effort to include in that documentation a rich exemplification of actual usage about contexts that speakers do talk about, including the recitation of heritage texts that may constitute a very important cultural resource. These examples can do double duty. Example constructions in a grammar can simultaneously document the “habitual ways of speaking” of those speakers the community considers to exemplify appropriate usage, record textual resources such as
histories, songs, and specialized vocabularies, and illustrate phonological and grammatical points as well. Typographic solutions like bolding (not used in Dedrick and Casad 1999) can help in making examples serve multiple functions.

While the Americanist tradition, at least in its early years, gave implicit attention to usage by including so many examples from text, the third type of practice in writing culture in grammar, explicit attention to usage, is strikingly rare in their work. Of course there are occasional dialectological notes, such as the observations in Boas’s (1911b) Tsimshian grammar that certain forms appears only in the Nass dialect. Sapir closes his grammar of Southern Paiute with a brief note on “idiomatic usages”, focussing on examples where generalized verbs TO DO and TO SAY are used where English would, in Sapir’s view, prefer a more specific lexical choice (Sapir 1930: 273–75). Whorf (1946a) includes two sentences on “men’s and women’s speech.” However, we must await the theoretical work of Hymes on the “ethnography of speaking” (e.g. Hymes 1966), and, especially, the work of Hymes (1981) and like-minded colleagues on poetics and rhetoric, for detailed work on usage in the Americanist tradition (However Hymes’ proposals, which subordinated grammar to a more general “sociolinguistics” (Hymes 1977), had remarkably little effect on Americanist grammatical practice sensu strictu). Explicit notes on usage remain sparse in contemporary grammars. Again, we can contrast this Americanist practice with practice in the Australian tradition. For instance, Dixon’s A Grammar of Yidi (1977) includes an exceptionally interesting section on Yidi conversational conventions, where it is preferred that conversational pair parts are constituted by full sentences, but with artfully minimal variations in lexical choice.

There are notable examples in the Americanist tradition of the fourth kind of practice in writing culture in grammar, attention to the ways in which grammatical categories seem to constitute certain kinds of understandings of situations. We encounter examples in the work of Boas, a prolific grammarian. Boas’s psychological approach to grammar is apparent in the division of his four 1911 Handbook sketches (on Tsimshian, Kwakiutl, Chinook, and Dakota) into sections, with much of the discussion of the morphology presented under the heading “Ideas expressed by grammatical processes.” The analytical payoff of this kind of attention is exemplified in the Tsimshian grammar, where Boas, illustrating the discussion with examples like “paddle-polish” and “seal-harpoon”, makes what must have been one of the earliest observations of a now well-known property of noun in-
Incorporation of the nominal object occurs principally in terms expressing habitual activities. In these it is well developed” (Boas 1911a: 295). In the same grammar he notes systems of numeral classification, with three classes of numerals in the Nass dialect, for counting human beings, canoes, and fathoms, with an additional set of numerals for “long objects” in the Tsimshian dialect.

In Boas’s grammar of Chinook, we encounter an especially striking ethnopsychological discussion:

It seems likely that, in a language in which onomatopoetic terms are numerous, the frequent use of the association between word and concept would, in its turn, increase the readiness with which other similar associations are established, so that, to the mind of the Chinook Indian, words may be sound-pictures which to our unaccustomed ear have no such value” (Boas 1911c: 629).

Boas discusses in the grammar a number of onomatopoetic forms, and Sapir contributed to it a richly-attested section on “Diminutive and augmentative consonantism in Wishram” (an example assigned significant theoretical importance in Silverstein’s (1981) essay on “The limits of awareness”).

In spite of the examples reviewed above, where Boas’s descriptive method does reflect his ethnopsychological theories about grammar, most of the exposition in his descriptions is conventional, with minimal attention to “fundamental ethnic ideas.” And Boas’s student Edward Sapir was even more conventional than his mentor in his approach to grammatical description. Like Boas, Sapir made major contributions to cultural anthropology and published essays that are among the founding documents of language-and-culture scholarship. Yet he maintained a fairly strict separation between writing grammatical description and writing about language and culture. Indeed, Sapir was wary of admitting unsophisticated parallels between grammar and culture, cautioning that “It is only very rarely ... that it can be pointed out how a cultural trait has had some influence on the fundamental structure of a language.” (Sapir 1949 [1933]: 26).

Scattered through Sapir’s grammars, of course, are statements that can only have been written by a scholar with a Boasian concern for grammar as a window into “the fundamental ethnic ideas”. Yet these are “psychological” (today we would say “cognitive”) rather than cultural. An example comes from Sapir’s discussion of “vowel-ablaut” in Takelma stems, where /o/ and /a/ become /ʊ/ and /ɛ/ respectively under conditions that resist precise statement. Sapir observes “The only trait that can be found in common
... is that the action may be looked upon as self-centered, ... as taking place within the sphere of the person of central interest from the point of view of the speaker...the palatal ablaut will be explained as the symbolic expression of some general mental attitude rather than of a clear-cut grammatical concept.” (Sapir 1922: 61). Another example comes from Sapir’s discussion of the instrumental prefixes of Takelma. Summarizing a brief comparison of Takelma and Siouan instrumental prefixation with verb stem formation in Algonkin and Yana, he remarks that while the two types of systems are not similar in detail, but “The same general psychic tendency toward the logical analysis of an apparently simple activity into its component elements” is characteristic of all the cases (Sapir 1922: 86).

I have found only one discussion where Sapir uses specifically Takelma cultural information, in his survey of what would today be called “evidentials”. Sapir takes many examples of evidential usages from myth texts, since “the context gives them the necessary psychological setting” (Sapir 1922: 200). In order to sort out the semantics of the “inferential,” Sapir depends on his understanding of how the Takelma see the character of Coyote.

An excellent example of how such a shade of meaning [that the action is not directly known through personal experience] can be imparted even to a form of the first person singular was given in §70; (Takelma sentence): THEY WOKE ME UP WHILE I WAS SLEEPING! 74.5 In the myth from which this sentence is taken, Coyote is represented as suffering death in the attempt to carry out one of his foolish pranks. Ants, however, sting him back to life; whereupon Coyote, instead of being duly grateful, angrily exclaims as above, assuming, to save his self-esteem, that he has really only been taking an intentional nap. The inferential form (Takelma form) is used in preference to the matter-of-fact aorist (Takelma form) I SLEEPING, because of the implied inference, I WASN’T DEAD, AFTER ALL, ELSE HOW COULD THEY WAKE ME? I WAS REALLY SLEEPING, MUST HAVE BEEN SLEEPING. (Sapir 1922: 200).

The fifth practice that an anthropological approach to “writing culture in grammar” might yield is a thoroughgoing grammatical relativism, where the internal logic of a language shapes a description that gives little attention to categories and labels already established in the grammatical tradition. Certainly Boas favored such a relativist practice – I have already mentioned his chapter heading “Ideas expressed by grammatical processes.” In practice, though, the expression of this relativism is quite restricted in his work, where descriptions begin with phonetics and proceed through mor-
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phology, closing with sections on matters such as numerals, imperatives, and subordinate clauses. In some cases, such as in the Kwakiutl grammar, the reader can see that Boas is attempting to have the language data itself drive the analysis of the morphology, with suffixes categorized in the table of contents as, for instance, “suffixes denoting space limitations”, “temporal suffixes”, “Suffixes denoting subjective judgments or attitudes relating to the ideas expressed” (Boas 1911b: 425).

In contrast to Boas’s occasional relativist gestures toward “the expression of ideas,” Sapir’s grammars are unashamedly organized in terms of scientific-linguistic grammatical categories: Phonology, Morphology, Noun, Verb, Prefixing, Reduplication, Derivation, and the like. Sapir invokes specifically European grammatical models when it is useful – although sometimes, as in this illustrative passage, with a bow to his relativist heritage:

It is artificial, from a rigidly native point of view, to speak of causal, temporal, relative, and other uses of the subordinate; yet an arrangement of Takelma examples [of sentences with subordinate clauses] from the viewpoint of English syntax has the advantage of bringing out more clearly the range of possibility in the use of subordinates. (Sapir 1922: 193).

Of all the Boasians, Sapir was the most thoroughly trained in linguistics, and he deploys technical terminology like “enclisis” and “mora” brilliantly and innovatively, especially in the Southern Paiute grammar. He even invokes the Sanskrit grammatical tradition, observing the presence in Southern Paiute of what he calls “‘bahuvrihi’ compounds” (Sapir 1930: 74), like “coyote-headed” (or, to mention an especially colorful example, that Sapir was apparently unable to resist, “Buffalo-hoof-clefted vulva”).

Perhaps the most thoroughgoing effort to fully exploit the relativist logic of the Boasian linguistic program is a brilliant failure: Benjamin Whorf’s (posthumously published) grammatical sketch entitled “The Hopi Language, Toreva Dialect”. The result is fascinating, and includes a classification of the Hopi verb conjugations that is a major contribution to comparative Uto-Aztecan studies. However, the sketch requires very close reading and some familiarity with Hopi based on other sources for today’s linguist to make much sense of it. The major problem of the work is that parts of it are made almost inaccessible by Whorf’s efforts to base the description on “covert categories”, to which he assigns neologistic grammatical labels (Lee 1996 is a helpful in sorting out the rationale for Whorf’s eccentric grammatical labels, such as “tensor,” Whorf’s term for non-inflected ad-
verbs of time and degree that express “intensities of various types” (Whorf 1946: 179)).

The sketch includes elaborate notional analyses of phenomena that today are seen as typological commonplaces – and that probably would have been recognized as such by Sapir (who died when the volume was in the planning stage). For instance, Hopi is a null-subject language. For Whorf, this yields the insight that “... Hopi has very many verbs denoting events that are essentially complete wholes and need not be analyzed into an agent and an activity. Thus, if a flash of light is to be reported, Hopi need not manufacture a subject for it ...”.

Whorf does use European-language grammatical terminology and categories, as in his (somewhat wrongheaded) analysis of Hopi postpositionals as “case markers”. However, where he does this, he usually hedges, as in the case at hand, where he observes that

“... these case relations ... are actually used in terms of a sort of unconscious ideology of space and movement that is typically Hopi. Thus the illative does not always mean “into” in our sense, but is used for “to” instead of the allative whenever the goal of motion is out of sight. It also denotes the instrumental relation, as though something of the action or actor went into the instrument” (Whorf 1946: 168).

Whorf’s discussion of the “eventive” voice (which contrasts with the “simple” voice) is a vintage piece of Whorfian prose; it goes on for a page, but the flavor of it can be given by an early sentence – itself interrupted (after “figural arrangements”) with a long footnote about Hopi phonaesthemes that express certain kinds of visual effects.

The eventive is the distinctive, almost untranslatable voice of the zero form of the k-class and all ambivalents ... a rich vocabulary of CVCC roots, which denote manifestation of characteristic visual outlines and figural arrangements, occurring as moving outlines, or as movements that leave more or less lasting representative outlines, or as simple appearances of figure and ground ... (Whorf 1946: 173)

Exacerbating the difficulty of understanding what might be meant by such a description is the fact that almost none of Whorf’s claims are exemplified. The sketch of Hopi is only 28 pages long, and Whorf includes only five example sentences, confined to a single final section, where their properties are compared to those of the English translations.

Whorf’s second sketch in the 1946 volume, The Milpa Alta Dialect of Aztec, is slightly less eccentric, and uses examples in a more conventional
way. However, even this sketch, of a language that was very well described by the mid-seventeenth century, includes some astonishing Whorfian riffs. An example is Whorf’s analysis of “entitives” – here the footnote informs us that “Categories freely producible by either inflectional or collocational techniques are called moduli in the system used by the author for describing Utaztecan languages.”

An entitive, noun, adjective, or other, has two moduli, the modulus of a substantive and that of a modifier. The mark or signature of each modulus is simply word order. The meaning of the moduli is difficult to define, but fortunately it is a familiar one: in most cases it is very similar to what we understand by substantive and modifier, or head and attribute, in English and Western European generally (Whorf 1946b: 377).

This kind of extreme relativism in grammatical practice is understandably largely absent from grammar writing today. Not only does such a grammar require the linguist to start from scratch in attempting to understand the description, but in the case of Whorf’s sketch, it obscured the many commonalities that Hopi shares with other languages while simultaneously neglecting ways in which Hopi may in fact exhibit rare and unusual properties. The terminological consistency and attention to cross-linguistic comparability encouraged by the contemporary orientation of grammar writing to a typological project, whether within a formalist or a functionalist theoretical framework, surely represents a significant advance.

Most linguists of all theoretical persuasions today admit with Sapir that “It is only very rarely ... that it can be pointed out how a cultural trait has had some influence on the fundamental structure of a language.” (Sapir 1949 [1933]: 26). However, one goal of a grammatical practice that integrates typological concerns with attention to culture in grammar might be to query this generalization. In some areas of grammar the development of such resonances seem not to be rare at all. One example is that of “classification,” in both noun classes and classificatory verbs. Aikhenvald (2000: 340) has pointed out that “of all nominal and verbal grammatical categories, classifiers are the easiest to immediately connect with extralinguistic phenomena – either of physical environment, or of culture.” The categories projected by classifiers seem to be accessible to speaker awareness – for instance, jokes exploiting classifier systems are frequently reported in the literature – and so can become the object of ideologically-driven reflection. Apparent cultural influences on classifier systems are widely reported. Aikhenvald provides a thorough review of this literature; recently-published examples include the kin-type classifiers reported by Bradley
(2001) for the Yi languages, and the reassignment of plural marking of kin terms seen in two Uto-Aztecan languages, Tohono O’odham (where the language community practices patrilineality) and Hopi (with matrilineality) (Hill and Hill 1997). Even when we attend carefully to the problem of circularity, which often makes it very difficult to see how grammar-cultural resonances have played out historically in a classification system, it remains clear that classification is a sort of “hotbed” of grammar-culture influence.

Another example of what may be a “hotbed” phenomenon is ergative case. It seems clear that speakers can become aware of the “agentivity” that is mapped by an ergative-absolutive distinction. For instance, Duranti (1990) shows that Samoan speakers use ergative case very cautiously, deploying it only where they wish to make a strong imputation of responsibility. Children, who nearly always speak of people who are of higher status than they, hardly use it at all. In Cupeño, a Uto-Aztecan language of California, ergative-case person-number clitics can be manipulated for special agentive effects, encoding first-person subjects of intransitive verbs like “run” and “sleep” to represent inappropriately boastful speech of mythic characters (J. Hill 2001; an example is seen in endnote vi). This kind of awareness-driven expression may be the ultimate source of the well-known hierarchies in grammaticalized ergative splits identified by Silverstein (1976).

Why should certain grammatical phenomena – nominal and verbal classification, ergative versus absolutive case marking – be apparently more susceptible to invasion by what Boas (1911: 71) called the “misleading and disturbing factors of secondary explanations” than are other areas of grammar? For instance, systems of tense and aspect, the object of considerable ideological attention in the Einsteinian twentieth century (and a Whorfian favorite), do not seem to be nearly as susceptible to baroque local elaboration as are systems of noun classification. Another very interesting question involves possessive expressions. Dixon (1972) states that it is necessary to note the aboriginal conception of “possession” as a sort of right (1972: 30) in order to understand the Dyirbal “proleptic” construction, where the recipient in a sentence with the verb TO GIVE is in the genitive case, as if the gift implicitly “belonged” to that person (Dixon 1972: 237). However, as far as I know the languages of the world exhibit relatively little culturally-grounded elaboration of possessive expressions. Heine (1997: 47) observes that “eight event schemas ... account for the majority of possessive constructions in the languages of the world.” There is little correlation be-
between which schemas are exploited in the grammar of a language, and ideologies about possession and ownership; instead, areal and genetic factors seem to be the best predictors of what kinds of constructions a language will exhibit. The main site of culturally-shaped elaboration around possession involves, not unexpectedly, noun classification, as with elaboration of possessive classifiers or assignment of referents to the domains of alienable vs. inalienable possession (Aikhenvald 2000). While, “possession” has been the object of considerable ideological attention in western thought, possessive constructions do not seem to be a hotbed of grammar-culture resonances.

I propose this contrast between “hotbed” zones and other zones where we are less likely to see grammar-culture resonances in the spirit of speculation (I am not at all sure I am right about the cases mentioned), as a possible avenue toward testing Sapir’s proposal that, to repeat again, “It is only very rarely ... that it can be pointed out how a cultural trait has had some influence on the fundamental structure of a language.” (Sapir 1949 [1933]: 26). It may be that careful research will show that all areas of grammar are, under the right circumstances, accessible to speaker awareness and secondary elaboration.10 However, we will not know the answer to this question unless the systematic exploration of grammar-culture resonances becomes a regular part of grammatical practice. The current tendency, to isolate attention to such resonances in essays developed apart from mainstream grammar, and relatively isolated in journals and collections devoted to language-and-culture issues, certainly retards research on these questions.

Fortunately for the grammarian who feels that increased attention to the relationships between culture and grammar is needed, the last decade or two has seen renewed interest in the relationship between grammar, culture, and thought that has yielded many useful tools and examples. Dixon’s (1972) analysis of Dyirbal noun classification, and Schmidt’s (1985) account of recent decay in this system, inspired Lakoff’s (1987) development of the idea of the “radial category,” a conceptualization which permits the identification of orderly phenomena in classification systems that had previously seemed chaotic and random. Other useful innovations that permit more precise analyses of implicit categorization are to be found in the work of Wierzbicka and her colleagues (cf. Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994, Wierzbicka 1997), and the “Vantage Theory” of Robert MacLaury (see papers in MacLaury 2002). Research on directional terminologies by the staff of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics at Nijmegen has contributed the best evidence since Boas (1887) for the direct influence of
habitual forms of language on forms of thought (cf. Levinson 1996); especially significant in this work has been the development of new experimental techniques for use in the field. “Ethnosyntax” (Enfield 2002) synthesizes cross-linguistic semantic analysis with attention to discourse pragmatics and grammaticalization, identifying new sites where the intersection of grammar and culture can be studied. Students of language ideologies, developing foundational work by Silverstein (1979) in which development of Whorf’s idea of “objectification” played a major role, have contributed new ways to explore cases where explicit ideological formations shape the development of language (cf. Rumsey 1990, Woolard, Schieffelin, and Kroskrity 1998).

Especially important in reviving interest in the relationship between grammar and culture has been increasing concern about the impact of language endangerment and loss. Woodbury’s papers (1993, 1998) on Central Alaskan Yupik expressive systems are exemplary exercises in writing culture in grammar, developed to answer the question, “When a language is lost, is a culture lost?” – a question of burning interest to speakers of threatened languages around the world. If, in fact, we intend to continue to base our case for documenting and developing threatened languages largely on a claim that they and their speakers contribute irreproducible understandings to the total store of human knowledge, we must do far more work of this type.

In summary, we have the privilege of working in a period when advances in typology can spare us from some of the naïveté that can be identified in pioneering attempts to write culture in grammar, and when increasingly sophisticated tools of analysis permit us to identify sites of resonance between culture and grammar that might have been invisible to the pioneers. Results in this area are badly needed, especially if we are to advance the cause of the documentation and revitalization of threatened languages. The problem that must be confronted, if we are to take full advantage of the potential before us, is the implicit division between “writing grammar” and “writing culture” that I have identified in the Americanist tradition. Although some contemporary grammarians are working to break down this boundary, the division continues to dominate, to varying degrees, linguistic practice of all theoretical persuasions in all the national traditions with which I am familiar. Such a division reproduces an implicit commitment to the autonomy of grammar that is probably premature in the present state of linguistic science, retards efforts to test whether such a commitment is ap-
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propriate, and challenges the humanistic claims that in part justify the study of grammar across the languages of the world.

Notes

1. The orthographies of the original-language sentences are in a complex narrow transcription; to avoid an endless struggle with fonts I give only the English glosses.
2. When could one say this? Perhaps to an addressee awakening from a coma? Reminiscing about a child’s early years?
3. I do recognize that sometimes communities or individuals do not want sentences from heritage texts included in published grammars and dictionaries. Such objections do not, however, preclude the linguist from illustrating a grammar with contextualized sentences that reflect contemporary ideas of interesting talk. A splendid model is found in Hopi Dictionary Project 1998, where the example sentences – many of them wise and witty – were all made up for the dictionary by Hopi elders who wanted it to be both interesting and very, very Hopi.
4. Wishram is the variety of Chinookan spoken on the Oregon side of the Columbia River at Celillo Falls; Boas’s description in the main sketch is based mainly on the Lower Chinookan of Charles Cultee.
5. Again, to avoid font problems, I do not include the Takelma examples, but merely note their presence in parentheses.
6. It is fascinating to note the presence of this very theme in a Cupeño story from southern California: Coyote, lying dead in a cloud of flies because of a series of foolish decisions, is found by his brother, who revives him with magical songs. The dialogue goes:

   Coyote: Eek! Iví’awṣene kúpwenet, buuchi ku’ut kú’lami, kú’al miqwpe-qa!  
   Brother: Heehee, kúpwenet. Iví’aw qáawish qál, étam’a șengeșengepeyaqal!  
   Coyote: Hey! I must have been asleep right here, my goodness, I was chasing flies!  
   Brother: Yeah, asleep. You were lying dead here, your teeth all grinning!

   Note that Coyote uses the ergative person-number clitic =ne in Iví’aw=se=ne “here=dubitative=1sg.erg”, heightening the agency of kúpwenet “asleep”, a nominalized intransitive that would not normally occur with the ergative.
7. The eccentricity of this sketch begins with the title. The members of the Hopi Dictionary Project established that “Toreva”, Toriva “twist-water” in the contemporary orthography, is the name of a permanent spring on Second Mesa, one of the three long extensions of Black Mesa on which the Hopi towns are established. Whorf says that it is the name of a town that has an “older” name
“Anglicized as Mishongnovi”. The Dictionary Project scholars were unable to confirm that anyone ever referred to “Mishongnovi” as Toriva.

8. Hopi Dictionary Project (1998) says that these are “usually intransitive and always perfective”.

9. For instance, Groenemeyer (1996) and K. Hill (2003) point out that properties of the exuberant development of noun incorporation in Hopi challenge contemporary typological theory. We can hardly hold Whorf responsible for today’s ideas about incorporation, but he might have noticed that Hopi noun incorporation challenged the claim made by Boas in the Tsimshian grammar, noted above, that “Incorporation of the nominal object occurs principally in terms expressing habitual activities” (Boas 1911b: 295) – especially since Hopi very commonly incorporates any theme, not just objects.

10. Silverstein (1981) proposed that susceptibility was heightened by the relative referentiality and segmentability of forms and constructions.

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