SPECIAL ISSUE ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES: INTRODUCTION

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The year 2019 was established as the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL) by the United Nations General Assembly. The goal was to call attention to the risks faced by indigenous languages all over the world and to promote the maintenance and revitalization of threatened languages in order to reduce the likelihood of a catastrophic global loss of linguistic diversity. This is a two-part Special Issue of *Language* that highlights the contributions made by linguists to understanding the history, structures, and use of indigenous languages, as reflected in the Linguistic Society of America's flagship journal *Language*. The issue is divided by date: articles published in the twentieth century, from the journal's first volume in 1925 through volume 75 (1999), are in the first volume, and twenty-first-century articles, from volume 76 (2000) through volume 95 (2019), are in the second. This introduction covers both.[1]

In spite of the chronological imbalance, the two volumes contain roughly the same number of articles. The uneven number of *Language* issues covered by each volume is meant to emphasize the fact that more and more linguists have been investigating indigenous languages in recent decades.

The selection of articles to include in the Special Issue was based on two main criteria: geographical distribution of the languages represented in the articles and topical distribution across linguistic subdisciplines. An additional criterion, especially in the twentieth-century volume, was authorship; many of the most illustrious names in our field appear here. No author appears more than once, though a few of the languages do. All but a very few of the languages included are endangered, and one of them, Chitimacha (Swadesh 1934), lost its last native speaker in 1940. At least two of the languages that are not classed as endangered, Huichol (Hamp 1957) and Seri (Baerman 2016), are 'vulnerable' according to UNESCO's *Atlas of the world's languages in danger* (Moseley 2010).

In the first several decades of the Linguistic Society of America, the overwhelming majority of *Language* articles on indigenous languages focused on languages spoken in the United States and Canada; in second place were languages of Latin America. Indigenous languages elsewhere in the world were represented very sparsely indeed in the journal. Global coverage has expanded greatly in the last few decades, but the Americas still predominate. Together, in a pared-down selection from the total list of *Language* articles with indigenous language material, the Americas accounted for 136 languages, while only forty-two languages represented the rest of the world. Given the early dominance of New World languages, the twentieth-century volume mostly comprises articles on languages of the Americas, especially North America, so that geographical balance in the Special Issue has been achieved (though only partially) by a concentration in the twenty-first-century volume on languages of other continents. The Special Issue contains twenty-two US and Canadian languages, fourteen Latin American languages, eight languages of northern Eurasia, five African languages, three Australian

[1] Many thanks to Marjorie Herbert for compiling the initial long list of potentially suitable articles for this collection, and to Brian Joseph for helpful comments on an early draft of the introduction.

languages, two languages of Oceania (one of which, Chamorro (Chung 1983), is spoken on Guam, a US territory), two languages of Papua New Guinea, and one United Kingdom language. Two of the languages included in the Special Issue are mixed languages: Chinook Jargon (Jacobs 1932), a pidgin language that flourished in the Pacific Northwest (Oregon, Washington, British Columbia) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Light Warlpiri (O'Shannessy 2013), a bilingual mixed language that emerged very recently in Australia.

Unsurprisingly, the most-discussed topics are core areas of linguistic structure: morphology and syntax (twenty-nine articles) and phonetics and phonology (fifteen articles). Nine articles focus on endangered languages, seven of them in the set edited by the late Ken Hale (Hale et al. 1992). Other areas represented in the Special Issue are historical linguistics (six articles), semantics (three articles), sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics (two articles each), and general description (two articles, both from the journal's earliest years). The specific topics range widely, including articles comparing language groups (both historical and typological studies, eight in all) and articles on glottalized continuants (Sapir 1938), language death (Dorian 1978), switch-reference (Austin 1981), the pronominal argument hypothesis (Jelinek & Demers 1994 and LeSourd 2006), phonological change (e.g. Yu 2004), the acquisition of noun classes (Gagliardi & Lidz 2014), and whistled speech (Sicoli 2016), among many others.

Our field was much, much smaller in the early years of the Society, with the result that most of the authors from the first few decades of *Language* were well-known linguists of great prominence in their lifetime and beyond. For instance, the authors of seven of the first ten articles in the twentieth-century volume, published from 1925 to 1961, became presidents of the LSA: Franz Boas (LSA president in 1928), Edward Sapir (1933), Leonard Bloomfield (1935), Kenneth Pike (1961), Mary Haas (1963), Charles Hockett (1964), and Eric Hamp (1971). The fact that only four LSA presidents—Ken Hale (LSA president in 1994), Sandra Chung (2011), Alice Harris (2016), and Marianne Mithun (2020)—appear later in the Special Issue reflects the enormous increase in LSA membership in more recent decades, just as the geographical range of LSA members' research on indigenous languages has expanded enormously since 1961.

The connections between indigenous languages and language endangerment are spelled out clearly in the United Nations proclamation of the IYIL and, like almost all of those in this Special Issue, the great majority of the world's indigenous languages are endangered to a greater or lesser degree. According to the most optimistic estimates of language loss, at least fifty percent of the world's 7,000 languages will vanish as everyday spoken languages by the end of this century. It is therefore fitting that *Language* played a major role in making linguists aware of the impending (and ongoing) loss of linguistic diversity, with the publication of the set of seven articles collected and edited by Ken Hale in *Language* 68(1) (Hale et al. 1992). This set of articles not only awakened linguists (especially but not only in North America) to the critical issue of diminishing linguistic diversity, but it also marked the emergence of the new disciplinary subfield of language endangerment studies and stimulated a dramatic increase in documentary projects on endangered languages all over the world. It would be difficult to overstate the significance of this publication for our field, and it is appropriate to remember it in this, the International Year of Indigenous Languages.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the two volumes of the Special Issue contain a small subset of the many articles that could have been included. The long list of candidates for inclusion had several hundred entries; after less suitable items were eliminated for various reasons—among them book reviews and articles by authors who had an-

other article on the list—the list still contained almost two hundred entries. In order to keep the Special Issue to a reasonable size, therefore, many excellent and appropriate articles had to be omitted. The final selection is representative of the writings on indigenous languages that have appeared in *Language* throughout its ninety-five-year history and that will surely continue to appear in the journal in future decades as well.

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