

Book Review for Studies in Language (16 May 2010)

**Dixon, R.M.W.** 2010. *Basic Linguistic Theory, Volume 1. Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. xvi + 381 pp (ISBN 978-0-19-957107-9)

*Volume 2. Grammatical Topics*. xvii + 489 pp (ISBN 978-0-19-957105-5).

**Reviewed by René van den Berg (SIL International)**

## **Introduction**

Reviewing a book of this caliber is a daunting task. R.M.W. Dixon (hereafter D) is a top scholar in the field of descriptive linguistics and language typology, who has made enormous contributions. Not only has he authored five major grammars (Dyirbal, Yidiñ, Fijian, English, Jarawara), several reference works on the languages of Australia and numerous articles on and sketches of Australian languages, but he has also produced various seminal works on typology (ergativity, adjectives, words, complementation among others), most of them co-edited with Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald. And this list leaves his work on music and his novels unmentioned. The three-volume series *Basic Linguistic Theory*, of which two volumes are reviewed here (volume 3 is scheduled to appear in 2011), can be viewed as the author's legacy after over forty very active and productive years in the field, a legacy in which he summarizes what he has discovered during these decades and wishes to pass on to the next generation of linguists. To a reviewer such as myself (who has some experience in grammar writing but none in typological research), the task feels like commenting on the seaworthiness and capacity of a huge ocean trawler while sitting on a self-built bamboo fishing raft. But at least we share a love for the ocean and a desire to catch fish!

In this review I will give a brief outline of the contents of the two volumes, followed by a list of distinctive features and recurrent motifs. This in turn is followed by an evaluation, in which I raise a number of critical questions. A word of warning is in order here. There is simply no way to do justice to the wealth of information and the new insights and perspectives offered in these two volumes. Especially for volume 2 (chapters 10-18), I just list the barest essentials, with considerable less detail than for volume 1.

## **Volume 1**

In **Chapter 1 Basics** D lays out the focus and scope of these books. He sees linguistics as one of the natural sciences, the aims of which are to come to grips with empirical

# Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 1 Methodology

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## **Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 1 Methodology:**

**Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 1** R. M. W. Dixon, 2010 In *Basic Linguistic Theory* R M W Dixon provides a comprehensive guide to the nature of human languages and their description and analysis The books are a one stop text for undergraduate and graduate students the triumphant outcome of a lifetime s immersion in every aspect of language and a lasting monument to innovative scholarship

**Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 3** R. M. W. Dixon, 2012-05-24 R M W Dixon provides a comprehensive guide to the nature of human languages and their description and analysis The volumes comprise a one stop introduction for undergraduate and graduate students of linguistics Truly a guide for the perplexed *Basic Linguistic Theory* is destined to be a classic Nick Enfield

*Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 1* R. M. W. Dixon, 2009-10-01 In *Basic Linguistic Theory* R M W Dixon provides a comprehensive guide to the nature of human languages and their description and analysis The books are a one stop text for undergraduate and graduate students the triumphant outcome of a lifetime s immersion in every aspect of language and a lasting monument to innovative scholarship

*Basic Linguistic Theory* Robert M. W. Dixon, 2010

**Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 1** R. M. W. Dixon, 2009-10-01 In *Basic Linguistic Theory* R M W Dixon provides a new and fundamental characterization of the nature of human languages and a comprehensive guide to their description and analysis In three clearly written and accessible volumes he describes how best to go about doing linguistics the most satisfactory and profitable ways to work and the pitfalls to avoid In the first volume he addresses the methodology for recording analysing and comparing languages He argues that grammatical structures and rules should be worked out inductively on the basis of evidence explaining in detail the steps by which an attested grammar and lexicon can build up from observed utterances He shows how the grammars and words of one language may be compared to others of the same or different families explains the methods involved in cross linguistic parametric analyses and describes how to interpret the results Volume 2 and volume 3 to be published in 2011 offer in depth tours of underlying principles of grammatical organization as well as many of the facts of grammatical variation The task of the linguist Professor Dixon writes is to explain the nature of human languages each viewed as an integrated system together with an explanation of why each language is the way it is allied to the further scientific pursuits of prediction and evaluation *Basic Linguistic Theory* is the triumphant outcome of a lifetime s thinking about every aspect and manifestation of language and immersion in linguistic fieldwork It is a one stop text for undergraduate and graduate students of linguistics as well as for those in neighbouring disciplines such as psychology and anthropology

*Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 3* , 2012 *Basic Linguistic Theory* provides a fundamental characterization of the nature of human languages and a comprehensive guide to their description and analysis In crystal clear prose R M W Dixon describes how to go about doing linguistics He show how grammatical structures and rules may be worked out on the basis of inductive generalisations and explains the steps by which an attested grammar and lexicon can built up from observed utterances He describes how the grammars and

vocabulary of one language may be compared to others of the same or different families explains the methods involved in cross linguistic parametric analyses and shows how to interpret the results Volume 3 introduces and examines key grammatical topics each from a cross linguistic perspective The subjects include number systems negation reflexives and reciprocals passives causatives comparative constructions and questions The final chapter discusses the relation between linguistic explanation and the culture and world view of the linguist and speakers of the language he or she is describing The book ends with a guide to sources a consideration of the number of languages in the world a glossary and indexes of authors languages and subjects covering all three volumes Volume 1 addresses the methodology for recording analysing and comparing languages and includes chapters on analysis typology phonology the lexicon and field linguistics Volume 2 like the present work considers underlying principles of grammatical organization and has chapters devoted to the word nouns and verbs adjectives transitivity copula constructions pronouns and demonstratives possession relative clauses and complementation **Basic Linguistic Theory** is the triumphant outcome of a lifetime s thinking about every aspect and manifestation of language The volumes comprise a one stop introduction for undergraduate and graduate students of linguistics as well as for those in neighbouring disciplines such as psychology and anthropology

**Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 2** R. M. W. Dixon, 2010 In **Basic Linguistic Theory** R M W Dixon provides a comprehensive guide to the nature of human languages and their description and analysis The books are a one stop text for undergraduate and graduate students the triumphant outcome of a lifetime s immersion in every aspect of language and a lasting monument to innovative scholarship

**Basic Linguistic Theory Volume 2** R. M. W. Dixon, 2010 R M W Dixon provides a comprehensive guide to the nature of human languages and their description and analysis The books are a one stop text for undergraduate and graduate students the outcome of a lifetime s immersion in every aspect of language

**A grammar of Kagayanen** Carol J. Pebley, Thomas E. Payne, 2024-07-05 Kagayanen is a resilient Austronesian Greater Central Philippine Manobo language spoken by about 30 000 individuals mostly in Palawan province in the Philippines This grammar is the result of nearly 40 years of research by Carol Pebley and a team of Kagayanen speakers and non Kagayanen co workers The primary data source is a corpus of texts collected over a 20 year period These texts three of which appear in an appendix to this book provide vivid insights into Kagayanen ways of being The grammar is written with a general linguistics audience in mind from a communication first perspective It should prove useful to specialists in Austronesian languages linguistic typologists and others interested in doing research in the central Philippines It is also hoped that this grammar will be an encouragement to Kagayanen speakers proving that their language is wonderfully complex and deserves an equal place alongside other regional and international languages

**A typology of marked-S languages** Corinna Handschuh, 2014-03-05 A typological study of the rare marked S language type which overtly marks the single argument of intransitive verbs S while one of the arguments of transitive verbs either A or P is left zero coded The formal overt versus zero coding as well as functional

aspects range of uses of individual case forms of the phenomenon are treated The book covers languages from the Afro Asiatic and Nilo Saharan languages of Africa and of the North America Pacific Northwest and Pacific regions

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