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Even Hovdhaugen (Ed.)

... and the Word was God

Missionary Linguistics and Missionary Grammars

Olshausen
1956

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Missionary Linguistics and Missionary Grammar



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1. qual a influência das missões
naíás do BR. p/o desenvolvimento
das normas literárias/orais de(s)
lge(s)

↓
como medir
esta questão?

- na resenha, enfatiza q
este trabalho n'ó + tes
marginal: cita o paper
apresentado NASHOLS em
meio ICHOLS VII

- chamar a atenção p/o conceito
de missões do séc. 16. (? qual era?)

Preface

If asked, most linguistic historiographers would probably subscribe to the following statement:

Important contributions to all branches of linguistics have been made as a result of the activities of Christian scholars and missionaries, ...

...

As a result of their work, many languages and dialects were recorded for the first time, and the first grammars and dictionaries produced. (Sawyer 1994: 3533)

However, the interesting question then is why there is so little research done on this material and why it is so marginally treated in the historiography of linguistics? (not anymore)

At ICHOLS VI at Georgetown in 1993, four participants — identical with the authors of this book — who had research interests connected with the historiographic study of missionary linguistics, came together. We decided to do something to promote this field of research and met for a colloquium in Oslo September 1994. The articles in this book are extended versions of the papers we presented at that colloquium.

A number — maybe the majority — of languages got their first and in many cases only linguistic descriptions from missionaries, and a number of theoretical and descriptive linguistic studies owe their data to linguistic works by missionaries. Furthermore, missionaries have had a profound influence on the development of literary, and sometimes even oral, norms of many languages (Nowak *forthc.*). Accordingly, we think that a satisfactory history of linguistics cannot be written before the impressive contribution of missionaries is recognized.

We hope that this book may contribute to changing the current marginal status of missionary linguistics and to stimulate further research in various as-

pects of this field thereby giving it the place it deserves in linguistic historiography.

Even Hovdhaugen's article *Missionary Grammars — An Attempt at Defining a Field of Research* tries to situate missionary grammars within the tradition of Western grammar writing and to delineate aspects of these grammars and of their study.

Elke Nowak's article *Considering the Status of Empirical Research in Linguistics. Approaches and Attitudes since 1800* puts the study of missionary linguistics in the broader perspective of descriptive linguistics pointing out the neglect of empirical linguistics, in general, in linguistic historiography.

In his case study *The first Grammatical Sketch of Nimip-timt*, Michael Mackert shows how important missionaries were for providing data for linguists and he also provides important details on how the missionary linguists worked.

Finally, Rüdiger Schreyer presents in *Take your Pen and Write. Learning Huron: A Documented Historical Sketch* an in-depth analysis of missionary field work and how the missionaries approached the learning of an unknown language in their missionary field.

The authors would like to thank the Oceania-group at the Department of Linguistics, University of Oslo, for financing the colloquium in 1994 as well as the publication of the present book.

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Even Hovdhaugen

Missionary Grammars — An Attempt at Defining a Field of Research¹

0. Introduction

From a historiographic point of view, the study of missionary grammars belongs both to the history of missionary linguistics and to the history of grammar writing. Unfortunately, none of these fields have received much attention so far.

Missionary linguistics has been treated in some articles and monographs (e.g., Hanzeli 1969; Bendor-Samuel 1994; Hewson 1995; Nowak *forthc.*)² and is given some attention in some handbooks in the history of linguistics (Auroux 1992; Brekle et al. 1992 ff.).

There exist numerous historiographic studies of single grammars and even a few collections of such studies (e.g., Ahlqvist 1987; Dahmen et al. 1991) have been published, but there has so far been no more general methodological approach to the historiographic study of grammars — let alone the study of missionary grammars. It is significant that in none of the many encyclopaedic surveys of linguistics that have appeared over the last years are there any entries for missionary linguistics or for the history of grammar writing.

- 1) Thanks to Elke Nowak and Elizabeth Lanza for thorough comments on an earlier version of this paper.
- 2) Cf. also the extensive treatment of missionary linguistics in Hawai'i in Schütz (1994).

1. Parameters for Classifying Grammars

A grammar is a collection of information on some components of a language normally systematized for normative and/or pedagogical purposes. These two practical foundations of grammar writing are closely connected since a pedagogical grammar will practically always focus on presenting one (in a few cases several) norms of the language. So-called descriptive or scientific grammars which represent a late and rare species of grammars also inevitably — but usually unconsciously — have a normative aspect since no grammar can avoid choosing between variants and basing the description on a few selected data thereby establishing a certain norm for the language described. There are, however, certainly many normative-descriptive grammars that are written with no pedagogical aim!

Grammars — frequently of one and the same language — can furthermore vary at least according to the following parameters:

1. Extent of coverage (phonology, morphology and/or syntax)
2. Time perspective (synchronic vs. diachronic grammars)
3. Data basis (oral corpus,³ written corpus, introspection and/or elicitation from informants)

2. A Sketch of the History of Western Grammar Writing.

Missionary linguistics has been a part of the missions of many religions — notably all variants of Buddhism and Christianity — and has existed as long as there have been missions. Typical preoccupations of missionary linguistics are alphabetization, the translation of religious texts, and semantic and etymological interpretations and studies. Missionary grammar, on the other hand, largely belongs to the Western Christian mission of the post-Renaissance period. Accordingly, I shall give a short survey of some basic features of the Western grammar tradition which missionary grammars built upon and of which they are part.

The first description of Greek which we would consider to be a grammar is probably the famous *Τέχνη γραμματική* attributed to Dionysius Thrax (cf. Law/Sluiter 1995). It is in the introduction explicitly defined as a pedagogical grammar designed as a basis for the reading and understanding of literary texts

³ I.e. data gathered by listening (besides actively trying to learn to speak the language).

⁴ Etymology is here not used in a modern sense, but in the way etymology was cultivated at a given time, e.g. medieval Christian or Buddhist etymology.

Missionary Grammars — An Attempt at Defining a Field of Research

in the schools. The book itself is a taxonomic systematization of Greek phonology (including several aspects of metrics) and morphology.

Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticarum* is the first grammar in Western linguistics which covers phonology, morphology, and syntax and which is based on an extensive corpus of data. Such a corpus-based analysis was rather uncommon in Antiquity. Except for the treatment of prosody and lexical and syntactic errors and irregularities, the other Roman grammarians and also the Greek ones (except Apollonius Dyscolus) largely used their own intuitions when rendering data.

The Roman grammarians saw language as a set of rules and did not only give a taxonomy of the data but formulated rules that further regulate and structure the classification. The introduction of grammatical rules in the description of Latin was probably due partly to a professionalism among the teachers of grammar (Hovdhaugen 1991) and partly to the gradually increasing differences between the spoken and the written language in the Empire. The introduction of rules as a basic feature of grammars gradually created the concept of a grammar as a set of rules for a language. This, however, did not necessarily imply that the collections of rules, or the rules themselves, were considered identical with the language or constituted the language. Rules were just practical means for pedagogical ends.

Modern grammar writing started in the Renaissance. The first grammar of the vernaculars was Nebrija's grammar of Castilian from 1492. The main motives for writing grammars of the vernaculars — frequently clearly spelled out in the introduction to the grammars — were a combination of pedagogical and nationalistic ones. A grammar was considered to be a very practical means to speed up and facilitate the foreigner's learning of the language. And in the schools, a knowledge of the grammar of the native tongue was considered to be a great pedagogical advantage before the children were to embark on learning a foreign tongue (mainly Latin, Greek, and Hebrew).

Secondly, and equally important, a language without a written grammar was not a real language. It would not be recognized and respected if it did not (as other decent languages had) a grammar written on it. Grammarians thought that it would not function as a national written language without a grammar. In Antiquity and the Middle Ages, grammar was something that was in the language, i.e. the language was not chaos, but system. But in the Renaissance a spoken language was considered as a fluctuating, dangerous chaos without stability and rules.⁵

⁵ Observe that many authors at that time used the term *lex* "law" and not *regula* "rule" for grammatical rules.

True, the spoken language could be represented in script, but this was by itself not a desirable situation, but something that could be even more dangerous. If everyone wrote as s/he spoke, anarchy would result which was threatening to both state and church. The situation was even worse from a diachronic point of view. Written laws would be unintelligible in a few generations and new Bible translations would, with short intervals, be necessary making the Lord's word rather unstable. Accordingly, the main task of a grammarian was to give rules for the language and this was really a task of great importance. The unchangeability of the written language was linked to the very moral foundation of the society. A breakdown of linguistic norms could easily bring about a breakdown of moral norms as well!

The Renaissance grammars of Latin had in their preference for the correct Latin of antiquity and in their abhorrence for later medieval barbarisms quite a lot in common with the grammars of the vernaculars. Their authors also wanted to create a norm, a standard, out of chaos. However, they had to work in another way concerning data than did the authors of the vernacular grammars. While in the case of the vernaculars the authors mainly had to use and in fact used their own linguistic intuition (and accordingly must have had a significant influence on the codification of the language involved), the grammarians of classical Latin had to base their analysis on a corpus of written texts.

The Latin grammars of the Renaissance differed in one important aspect from the Latin grammars of Antiquity: syntax became a central, and in many cases dominant, part (e.g. in the grammars of Sanctius and Linacre) and the syntax was furthermore based on principles of universal grammar which made it easily transferable to other languages. When Sanctius defined ablative as the case preceded by an explicit or implicit preposition, there was no problem in using the term for any language having prepositions no matter what kind of case morphology the language had; cf. Colombat (1995).

Very few grammars of the period 1500-1800 had any impact on linguistic theory or were written within a specific theoretical frame with an awareness of basic theoretical issues. Exceptions were the Port Royal grammars and John Wallis' grammar of English. The more famous theoreticians in linguistics of the post-Renaissance period, like Condillac, Dalgarno, Leibniz, Wilkins to mention but a few, did not write grammars.

It is not until in the 19th century that prominent linguists started to write grammars — Rasmus Rask and Wilhelm von Humboldt⁶ may be the first ones — and took some serious interest in grammar writing and also started to read and use grammars as data for their theoretical works. These changes were pro-

⁶ Cf. Humboldt (1994).

bably connected with the beginning of language typology and comparative-historical linguistics. Rask, who was a very prolific grammar writer, argued that good grammars were a necessary prerequisite for comparative studies (Rask 1827: 6-8). This meant that the study of grammatical structures could be pursued in its own right and not only as a means for normative or pedagogical ends.

To sum up, the Western grammar tradition up to 1800 was quite stable and uniform characterized by the following features:

- The purpose of a grammar was to create a norm for the language often implying that a language had no norm or rules before the grammarian established them. This norm was considered a necessary prerequisite for language learning and language teaching, for functioning as a stable and stabilizing national literary language and for the international prestige of the language.
- The grammars were all synchronic and they were based on data from either written corpora or introspection.

This is the background upon which we have to understand missionary grammars.

3. Meeting Unknown Languages

People coming to an area for which they do not know the language and in which there is no lingua franca have always had a problem. Either they can force the people they encounter to learn their language, or more common they have to learn at least something of the foreign language to communicate. For the European explorers and colonists in America, Asia, and Africa from 1492 onwards, the language barrier became a crucial problem. Small vocabularies and phrase books were soon produced, but to learn the new languages properly was considered an impossible or at least too time consuming task. Instead they kidnapped natives, brought them back to Europe to learn the language of the colonists with the purpose to act later on as interpreters; cf. Greenblatt (1992) and Schreyer's article in this volume. When the great explorers of the enlightenment in the late 18th century 'discovered' and investigated exotic societies, they collected words just like plants and animals to compare and classify languages, but they did not write grammars of these languages because they only learned them superficially — and apparently were not interested in learning

them properly either — and gave superficial and biased accounts of their lack of grammar and extremely poor vocabulary.

Missionaries, on the other hand, mostly had as a main and first purpose to learn the language of the people they were trying to convert. They needed to learn it to preach their faith and to translate the holy scriptures into that language. This applies both to the Christian and the Buddhist missions, but the Islamic mission is an exception since they were not only converting people to Islam but also to the Arabic language.

To reach their main purposes, viz. to preach in the new language and to be able to translate the scriptures, the missionaries used various techniques in language learning. They listened to the new languages and tried to speak them — and preach in them! — from the very beginning and with a rudimentary knowledge of the language in question, they worked with informants — missionaries were the first professional field workers — and they started to collect words ranging from small handwritten vocabularies for their fellow brethren to extensive dictionaries. For translation work as well as for language learning, this was perhaps both the most important and easiest task. But they also wrote grammars, and frequently good and extensive grammars too, of the languages of their missionary field.

4. Missionary Grammars — a Definition and Delimitation

A tentative definition of missionary grammar is as follows:

A missionary grammar is a description of a particular language created as part of missionary work by non-native missionaries.

A grammar written by a missionary of his mother tongue is excluded by this definition as well as grammars written by missionaries of other languages (e.g. Latin) or grammars written by clergymen who were not missionaries.⁷

There are some borderline cases. One is the first grammar of Finnish (Petræus 1649). The author Æschillus Petræus (1593-1657) was a Swede, educated in Uppsala 1619, who came to Turku in 1628, and became the first professor of theology at the university of Turku in 1640. In 1662 he became bishop in Turku. Accordingly, he was a theologian and a foreigner and he had to cope with problems very similar to what most missionaries faced, having to analyze

⁷ Observe that most linguistic work and also most grammars of the vernacular languages of Europe from the Middle Ages to 1800 were also written by clergymen.

a language with a structure completely different from Latin and other Indo-European languages. His grammar is also in most cases very similar to contemporary missionary grammars. The same applies to the first grammars of Sámi which were all written by Swedish and Danish-Norwegian pastors working in Sámi-speaking areas where Christianity in many places was a recent and superficial phenomenon.

Actually, there is only a small minority of grammars of non-European languages before 1800 that were written by others than missionaries. And the others were a mixed lot of travellers, explorers, amateur gentlemen, merchants, soldiers, officers, and teachers in the colonies. The linguistic material they produced was also not so much grammars as phrase books and word lists.

In some respects, the missionary grammars are not homogeneous. They vary very much in quality and coverage reflecting the variation in the qualifications of their authors, their time and their country, cf. 6. But if we look at the parameters for classifying grammars in 1. above, we can define more precisely the prototypical missionary grammar with features that actually a significant majority of missionary grammars would share:

A missionary grammar is a description of a particular language created as part of missionary work by non-native missionaries. It is a pedagogical, synchronic grammar covering phonology, morphology and syntax based on data mainly from an oral corpus (in a few cases from religious — mainly translated — texts).

5. The Intended Audience of Missionary Grammars

For whom did the missionaries write their grammars?

The main, most obvious and sometimes sole intended audience was their fellow missionaries; cf. Hanzeli (1969) concerning Algonquian and Iroquoian, Hovdhaugen (1992) concerning Mochica (Perú) and Hovdhaugen/Mosel (forth-c.) concerning Polynesian languages. Many of these grammars were never printed, but were copied by hand by other missionaries in the field.

Another more marginal group of possible users was the natives who were to learn to read their own language — preferable the Bible — and/or more easily learn the language of their rulers.

A third and even more marginal audience was scholars or people belonging to the court, i.e. people with secular or intellectual status and power. This was clearly one intention behind Carrera's Mochica grammar (cf. Hovdhaugen

1992: 114), but in general we can say that few missionaries writing grammars had an academic audience in mind.

In addition to the needs of possible users, there may also at times have been other reasons behind the grammar writing of missionaries. Many missionaries opposed — especially in the first centuries of colonization of Latin America — the cruel and discriminating behaviour of the colonizers and defended the culture and status of the Indians. And writing a grammar of a language was one way of elevating the group's status by showing that the speakers were not uncivilized brutes, but human beings of equal status and moral to Europeans and in possession of the same ability for norms and order.

Other missionaries, who did not have the same regard for the culture and language of their converts, also wanted to regulate the language by grammatical rules and within the same framework as Latin as a part of a more general attempt of regulating a heathen and uncivilized society within the frames of Christian culture and moral.

6. The Missionary Grammarians

Not all missionaries wrote grammars and who were the ones who did? Why did they among their brethren take up this task and why did the missionaries start writing grammars at all after 1500? Two simple and preliminary answers would be:

The grammar writers were those who had an interest in language and above all who were gifted in language learning. The journals of the London Missionary Society and missionary diaries from Tahiti and Samoa substantiate strongly this conclusion.

And the reason why they started to write grammars was but a reflex of the *grammatization massive* (Auroux 1992: 11) which was characteristic of the whole tradition of Western linguistics after 1492 and which again was linked to three factors:

- the emergence of the new nation states of Europe,
- the invention of printing, and
- the colonial expansion of European powers, primarily the conquest of the Americas.

The missionaries were also, of course, influenced by the practical pedagogical arguments behind the vernacular grammars of the Renaissance: A grammar was a practical means to speed up and facilitate the foreigners' learning of the

language in question and the native children's learning of a foreign tongue (in Europe mainly Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, but in the colonies mostly the language of the colonial power or missionaries). But there was, in addition, a theological purpose that was important: by learning a language faster and better one could also save more souls in a more efficient way (Hovdhaugen 1992: 116).

An important aspect of future research would be to clarify the differences in the general attitude towards grammar writing among the missionary societies and the differences in how they wrote grammars. We know at least that there were significant differences in the qualification of missionaries.

Most of the Catholic missionaries were well educated with a good command both of classical languages and Hebrew and of grammar in general. Yet here there were also differences that deserve further study. In the area dominated by Spanish, the influence of Nebrija's grammars of Latin was significant on the structure of the missionary grammars, while this influence is absent in the work of the French Marists. Furthermore, there were differences between the various religious orders and the Jesuits had apparently their own tradition in grammar writing. Frequently — but by no means always — the Catholic missionaries represented the establishment and worked together with the secular power in the colonies.

The Protestant missionaries, on the other hand, were usually not well educated and had frequently no knowledge of any other language but their mother tongue. Accordingly, they had of course also hardly any knowledge of a grammatical model and had probably only seen an elementary school grammar of their mother tongue, and sometimes not even that. The reason for this is that the Protestant mission was mainly based on smaller congregations like Calvinist and Methodists, i.e. the Low Church and/or fundamentalist congregations in which the clergy mainly consisted of laymen and were frequently anti-academic and oppositional.

For instance, when the London Missionary Society (LMS) at the end of the 18th century recruited missionaries for the South Seas, the principal qualification was that they knew a handicraft and were sincere believers, but no demand was put on their theological education and even less on their more general education and knowledge of languages. Yet sometime we can be lead to draw too hasty conclusions from the educational background of the missionaries. The educational level of the LMS missionaries in the South Seas mentioned above does not at all mean that they were without interest in linguistics or unfamiliar with what was going on in that field; cf. Mosel/Hovdhaugen (1992: 12).

The missionaries more or less unconsciously used the model of elementary Latin grammar when writing grammars of the languages they described. It could hardly have been otherwise since they — as all grammar writers — obviously could not start from scratch but had to have a theoretical framework from which to start. And the current framework for grammatical description for every European — missionary or not — up to the middle of the 19th century was traditional Latin grammar — either as reflected in school grammars of Latin or in school grammars of English (many missionaries had very little schooling and no knowledge of Latin).

Furthermore, the authors had to use a structure and a metalanguage that was familiar to their readers. After all, they were not theoreticians, but had very practical purposes in mind with their grammars. In many cases, we may suspect, and in some cases we know, that the missionary grammarians had a much more profound understanding of the structure of the language they described than is evident from the grammars they wrote. The accommodations to the Latin grammar scheme — frequently as found in school grammars of English — were rather due to pedagogical reasons than to lack of insight. As an example we can give the following quotation from one of the first grammars of Maori:

To accommodate the English reader, the following grammar has been constructed as much as possible on the model of that of the English by Lindley Murray;⁸ and the author has the more readily done so as he occasionally has found it convenient to shelter himself under the authority of so good a grammarian. In some respects it is true he would have been glad of a different arrangement, particularly in that of cases, the author being of opinion that, strictly speaking, we have no distinct possessive case in Maori. He has made however no alteration, chiefly lest he should create inconvenience, and incur the suspicion of a groundless desire of innovation. (Maunsell 1842: xiii)

Another point largely overlooked is the strong influence of Hebrew on the metalanguage and grammatical analysis of many missionary grammars. When encountering linguistic phenomena that were foreign to Latin or other known Indo-European languages the missionaries frequently looked to the only non-Indo-European language available and known to them. A thorough study of the influence of Hebrew on grammatical descriptions of non-Indo-European languages in the 17th and 18th century is really a strong desideratum in the historiography of linguistics.

There is no reason to assume that missionary grammars have been the same over centuries and that the importance of missionary grammars has been the same. Different grammar writing traditions may also have emerged in dif-

ferent areas like, e.g., South America or the Pacific. These are largely points that need further investigation.

A historiographic study should draw upon all available sources and integrate all possible information like unpublished manuscripts, letters, diaries, etc., of the authors involved. This is absolutely necessary in the study of missionary linguistics. The journals of the missionaries in Tahiti and Samoa reveal almost day by day their work on the grammar of the language, their arguments for deciding what linguistic work (translation, dictionary, or grammar) should be given priority, who should do it, how it should be done, etc.

7. Missionary Grammar Traditions in Samoa

The comparison of the grammar writing of various missionary groups working in the same area is another important part of the historiography of missionary grammar. A case in point — maybe not typical, but also hardly unique — is Samoa.

It is an open question which mission first came to Samoa, but the one that has had a continuous position there from 1832 onwards is LMS. The LMS grammarian was George Pratt (1817-1894) who arrived in Samoa in 1839 and who knew Greek, Latin, and Hebrew grammar. Pratt's grammar and dictionary of Samoan first appeared in 1862 (Pratt 1862). The grammar was very short, but was nevertheless the first grammatical sketch of Samoa where the basic structures of Samoan phonology and morphology were described. In the second edition (Pratt 1876) both the vocabulary and the grammar were significantly enlarged.

Catholic missionaries arrived in Samoa in 1845. One of these missionaries, Le R. P. L. Violette, published a dictionary of Samoan (Violette 1879), which also contained a long and thorough grammatical introduction, much more extensive and systematic than the grammatical section of Pratt.

The first Methodist missionaries in Samoa arrived about 1830 but were later — due to an agreement between the Methodists and the LMS — forced to leave. In the 1850s, Methodist missionaries returned to Samoa but the Methodists' interest in Samoan grammar came later. The Methodist missionary Spencer Churchward published his grammar in 1926.⁹ The language of the Bible was the main source of data (besides proverbs and other specimens of Samoan literature) for Churchward (1926; 1951) which is basically a description and systematisation of the language of the Samoan Bible.

⁹ Churchward (1951) is an enlarged and revised edition.

These three missionary traditions knew about each others' linguistic works, but had little scholarly contact and the three grammatical descriptions mentioned above are in many respects quite different. This and similar cases should be an ideal comparative field of research to understand the grammar writing policy of the missionaries and their grammatical models.

8. Conclusion

Missionary grammars represent an important source of data for many languages, data that partly are unknown and not utilized by scholars. These grammars represent an enormous amount of basic linguistic research and can tell us a lot about the long and strenuous journey of Western linguistics to free itself from the frame of classical grammar opening the mind to new possibilities of linguistic categorization and presentation of information. The history of basic concepts like *ergative*, *polysynthesis*, *local cases*, etc., as well as of morphology and phonetics cannot be written without taking this material into account. And such topics are probably as central to the study of human languages as universal grammars and truth logic which presently have a much more prominent place in the history of linguistics.

Furthermore, missionaries have had in many language societies a profound influence on language normalization and language policy and the number of orthographies — many of them in daily use — designed by missionaries run into hundreds; cf. Nowak (*forthc.* b).

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Considering the Status of Empirical Research in Linguistics Approaches and Attitudes since 1800

1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to outline a new perspective on empirical research in linguistics in general and the series of developments leading up to empirical, descriptive linguistics as it is known today. It is meant to draw attention to the status of empirical research and the resulting descriptions of languages, generally called grammars.

I have chosen to pursue this objective because of the still-prevailing attitude in most influential approaches to language and linguistics, namely, to assume that the relation between observational adequacy and descriptive adequacy, i.e., the relation between data and linguists' perception of them, and the representation of these data in defined modes of description is a straightforward matter — and not a potential source of difficulties.

I will question just this assumption: there is no unproblematic, unbiased relationship between observation and observational adequacy and description and descriptive adequacy, let alone explanatory adequacy.

This scepticism concerning the relation of observational to descriptive adequacy is based on the well-known history of grammar writing of European vernaculars; it is, furthermore, corroborated by the examination of grammatical attempts at non-Indo-European languages, especially Eskimo languages, dat-