

Yuki Grammar, with Sketches of Huchnom and Coast Yuki

Uldis Balodis,
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016,
658 pages, ISBN 9780520292192,
\$95.00 (hardcover).

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For nearly three-quarters of a century, *University of California Publications in Linguistics (UCPL)* has been one of the premier venues for publishing scholarship related to the indigenous languages of California. Beginning with Alfred L. Kroeber's *Classification of the Yuman Languages* in the inaugural volume in 1943, and especially after the establishment of the Department of Linguistics and the Survey of California Languages at U.C. Berkeley a decade later, dozens of important studies of languages of the region, and indeed the world, have been published under the auspices of *UCPL*. Sadly, U.C. Press has reportedly decided to discontinue this venerable series, no doubt a casualty of the many challenges currently facing the academic publishing world. While scholars of California's indigenous languages and cultures will therefore rightly mourn the end of an era, they can take comfort in the fact that Volume 151, Uldis Balodis' *Yuki Grammar, with Sketches of Huchnom and Coast Yuki*, is an eminently worthy conclusion to the series, embodying many of the best traditions of scholarship represented

in earlier volumes and of Americanist grammatical description more generally.

The overall organization of the volume is familiar and straightforward, making it easy to find information of interest—an important feature of any good reference grammar. Following a useful and engaging introduction, fourteen chapters address Yuki phonology and morphophonemics, the form and function of words belonging to various classes, switch-reference marking, and clause structure. Throughout the volume, Balodis' treatment of Yuki grammar is sophisticated and contemporary. His discussion of stress placement, for example, is tightly argued and grounded in instrumental measurements of the phonetic correlates of stress found in archival recordings of the language. The last two chapters covering grammatical phenomena above the level of the word are especially welcome, since many descriptive grammars of California's languages, written as they were in early or mid-century structuralist frameworks, are virtually silent on these topics. A minor criticism is that the coverage of the grammar is sometimes uneven: a chapter on quantifiers, for example, is a mere three pages long, describing only the three most common lexical items. Even so, the descriptions of major lexical categories are robust and provide genuine insights into the complexities of Yuki grammar.

One of the most remarkable achievements of this work is how much Balodis has managed to accomplish with challenging sources of information. Yuki has not had any fluent first-language speakers for several years now; the last one is believed to have passed away in the early

1980s. This grammar is therefore based entirely on over a century of documentation produced by other scholars, much of it in the form of unpublished raw field notes and recordings held by archives. Developing a grammatical description based on this kind of small, finite corpus of materials, with no possibility of consulting living speakers to elicit new information, requires an extraordinary level of sensitivity on the part of the researcher: one must be ambitious enough to identify true generalizations while exercising appropriate restraint to avoid making claims that cannot be plausibly supported by the corpus. One is also very much at the mercy of the eclectic transcription conventions, theoretical frameworks, and interests of the researchers who gathered the data. A special challenge for Yuki in particular is the fact that it is not closely related to any other language. Although a phylogenetic connection between Yuki and Wappo is accepted by some scholars, the resemblances between them are not numerous enough for Wappo to offer much practical guidance for interpreting Yuki materials (see Golla 2011:192–193; Thompson, Park, and Li 2014:xi–xii). This stands in contrast to some other dormant languages of California; e.g., Wailaki, where gaps in the corpus can sometimes be filled by comparison with Hupa, a closely related member of the Dene (Athabaskan) language family for which more substantial documentation and descriptive materials are available.

Despite these challenges, Balodis has done an excellent job of being responsive to the entire documentary corpus of Yuki, offering principled resolutions to discrepancies in his sources, and acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of each. Given the limitations imposed by the data he has to work with, at critical moments Balodis is careful to consider competing interpretations of phenomena and provide explicit arguments to support particular analyses. In doing so, he largely avoids the trap that descriptive grammarians sometimes fall into of merely naming grammatical elements without fully justifying why a particular label is apt. Where data are insufficient to reach a definite conclusion, Balodis is willing to speculate about plausible analyses, but he is clear about where he is doing so. Balodis thus is able to offer reasonable interpretations of the data without losing sight of the fact that absolute certainty on some points may simply be beyond reach. This is nowhere more apparent than in the sections on the Huchnom and Coast

Yuki dialects located at the end of most chapters: the data for these dialects are even sparser than for Yuki proper, and while Balodis gives them full consideration, he is appropriately cautious in the conclusions he attempts to draw.

The volume also contains ten appendices that will be of interest to many readers of this journal. This includes a set of maps showing Yuki placenames and tribal subdivisions based on various sources—useful and informative on the whole, although some of the numbered sites are rendered in an extremely small font and are difficult to read. By far the most important appendix is the last, where Balodis presents five Yuki texts, heretofore unpublished except in English translation, told by Ralph Moore to Alfred L. Kroeber in 1902. These texts have been re-transcribed and thoroughly analyzed, following the same format as examples presented in the grammar: each word appears with an interlinear morphological analysis and gloss, and there are copious footnotes offering additional analysis and information about particular forms. These texts are inherently interesting in their own right for the cultural content they express, and doubtless they will be a valuable asset for academic researchers in various fields and for community scholars engaged in linguistic and cultural revitalization projects. They are, moreover, one of the primary sources of information that the grammatical description is based on, making it easy for readers to examine the narrative context from which examples are drawn. This level of accountability is refreshing, since transparency and how best to provide access to primary data are topics of much current discussion among descriptive grammarians.

Criticisms of the volume are relatively few. As noted above, for the most part the organization is clear, and it is easy to find the main section where a given topic is discussed by using the detailed table of contents. Still, the absence of a proper index will sometimes make information less accessible than might be ideal. Another issue that may make the grammar difficult to use for some purposes is found in the texts and example sentences: there are frequent mismatches between unanalyzed words in the text line and their interlinear morphological parses. Such mismatches are to be expected insofar as the morphological analyses consist of underlying phonemic representations that abstract away from surface adjustments found in the unparsed transcriptions, and

in most cases readers will be able to determine the reasons for the mismatches by consulting the chapters on phonology and morphophonemics. Sometimes, however, the mismatches cannot be resolved so easily, and readers will occasionally be left to wonder whether they are due to general phonological processes, mis-transcription on the part of the researcher whose notes the example is drawn from, sporadic variation on the part of the speaker, or some other reason. Such cases are probably few enough that they will not cause too much difficulty, but readers should nonetheless be alert to this aspect of the grammar.

These minor blemishes, however, should not obscure the fact that Balodis has produced an excellent description of Yuki grammar. It will be an indispensable resource for future research on the language, both for revitalization efforts that have recently gotten underway and as a way to clarify the historical and areal relationships obtaining among Yuki, Wappo, and other languages of northern California. This volume is also important for California linguistics in a more general way by continuing the longstanding tradition of drawing on challenging archival data to produce high-quality descriptive grammars. Many of the interpretive methods needed for this kind of work are essentially philological in nature and far enough outside the mainstream of contemporary linguistics that they are mostly transmitted informally across scholarly generations orally and with reference to similar studies

produced in earlier decades. Balodis, and other younger researchers who are doing similar descriptive work based on archival materials (e.g., Jany 2009 for Chimariko, and Lawyer 2015 for Patwin), are helping ensure that this mode of scholarship will be carried forward into the future and that grammatical descriptions of other languages of California with good documentation may someday be produced. Although UCPL may no longer be the natural home for their publication, we can earnestly hope that alternative venues will emerge so that resources such as this grammar of Yuki will continue to be available for various audiences who will want to use them.

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