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MOUTON

Amalia E. Gnanadesikan

DHIVEHI

THE LANGUAGE OF THE MALDIVES

MOUTON-CASL GRAMMAR SERIES

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Amalia E. Gnanadesikan

Dhivehi

The Language of the Maldives

Edited by
Anne Boyle David

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Mouton-CASL Grammar Series

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Volume 3

Foreword

It is remarkable that, in this age of unprecedented global communication and interaction, the majority of the world's languages are as yet not adequately described. Without basic grammars and dictionaries, these languages and their communities of speakers are in a real sense inaccessible to the rest of the world. This state of affairs is antithetical to today's interconnected global mindset.

This series, undertaken as a critical part of the mission of the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), is directed at remedying this problem. One goal of CASL's research is to provide detailed, coherent descriptions of languages that are little studied or for which descriptions are not available in English. Even where grammars for these languages do exist, in many instances they are decades out of date or limited in scope or detail.

While the criticality of linguistic descriptions is indisputable, the painstaking work of producing grammars for neglected and under-resourced languages is often insufficiently appreciated by scholars and graduate students more enamored of the latest theoretical advances and debates. Yet, without the foundation of accurate descriptions of real languages, theoretical work would have no meaning. Moreover, without professionally produced linguistic descriptions, technologically sophisticated tools such as those for automated translation and speech-to-text conversion are impossible. Such research requires time-consuming labor, meticulous description, and rigorous analysis.

It is hoped that this series will contribute, however modestly, to the ultimate goal of making every language of the world available to scholars, students, and language lovers of all kinds. I would like to take this opportunity to salute the linguists at CASL and around the world who subscribe to this vision as their life's work. It is truly a noble endeavor.

Richard D. Brecht
Founding Executive Director
University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language

Series Editors' Preface

This series arose out of research conducted on several under-described languages at the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language. In commencing our work, we were surprised at how many of the world's major languages lack accessible descriptive resources such as reference grammars and bilingual dictionaries. Among the ongoing projects at the Center is the development of such resources for various under-described languages. This series of grammars presents some of the linguistic description we have undertaken to fill such gaps.

The languages covered by the series represent a broad range of language families and typological phenomena. They are spoken in areas of international significance, some in regions associated with political, social, or environmental instability. Providing resources for these languages is therefore of particular importance.

However, these circumstances often make it difficult to conduct intensive, in-country fieldwork. In cases where such fieldwork was impractical, the authors of that grammar have relied on close working relationships with native speakers, and, where possible, corpora of naturalistic speech and text. The conditions for data-gathering—and hence our approach to it—vary with the particular situation.

We found the descriptive state of each language in the series to be different from that of the others: in some cases, much work had been done, but had never been collected into a single overview; in other cases, virtually no materials in English existed. Similarly, the availability of source material in the target language varies widely: in some cases, literacy and media are very sparse, while for other communities plentiful written texts exist. The authors have worked with the available resources to provide descriptions as comprehensive as these materials, the native speaker consultants, and their own corpora allow.

One of our goals is for these grammars to reach a broad audience. For that reason the authors have worked to make the volumes accessible by providing extensive exemplification and theoretically neutral descriptions oriented to language learners as well as to linguists. All grammars in the series, furthermore, include the native orthography, accompanied where relevant by Romanization. While they are not intended as pedagogical grammars, we realize that in many cases they will supply that role as well.

Each of the grammars is presented as a springboard to further research, which for every language continues to be warranted. We hope that our empirical work will provide a base for theoretical, comparative, computational, and pedagogical developments in the future. We look forward to the publication of many such works.

Claudia M. Brugman
Thomas J. Connors
Anne Boyle David
Amalia E. Gnanadesikan

Preface

When I first came to the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), I told my new colleagues that I wanted to concentrate on a South Asian language. I had dabbled in various South Asian languages before, but I wanted to do better than that—I wanted to really learn one this time. David Cox suggested I work on Dhivehi and made it possible for me to do so—thank you! The result has been a fascinating ride. I cannot say that I have mastered the Dhivehi language, but I have learned a new and unique script, cudged my brain into processing a new set of syntactic structures, studied the Maldivian newspapers, and eaten *rihaakuru* (fish paste) and *garudhiya* (fish soup). I have even made some progress on identifying the many stages of coconut development and come to see a tulip as a kind of a tree (ގަސް *gas*). Along the way I have had the privilege of getting to know some Maldivians and of benefiting from their kindness. I am especially grateful to Dr. Maryam Mariya, who has served as a consultant, answering countless questions as well as facilitating my meetings with other Dhivehi speakers both in New Zealand and in Malé. My thanks also to Dean Abdul Rasheed (Absy) Ali, who provided me with working space at the Faculty of Arts at Maldives National University. The other Dhivehi speakers who generously shared their language with me must remain anonymous due to IRB (Institutional Review Board) ethics rules on the use of human subjects, but I always remember them and the friendship they extended to me with gratitude.

This grammar has also benefited from the input of many people at the University of Maryland. Anne David has served as the editor for this volume, catching typos, bad prose, poor formatting, and fuzzy thinking alike. Mike Maxwell and Tom Connors have also made editorial contributions. Aric Bills, Mike Maxwell, Sean Simpson, Stephanie Kramer, and Nate Clair have rendered technical assistance. Special thanks to Aric Bills for making the map and the other figures. Earlier versions of this work benefited from the proofreading skills of Rebecca McGowan, the formatting skills of Melissa Fox, and the indexing skills of Evelyn Browne, all of which were sadly missed in later versions. My thanks to all of them.

At de Gruyter-Mouton my thanks are due to Lara Wysong and her team for shepherding the book through the publication process. Thanks also to Jonathon Lum and an anonymous reviewer whose careful comments helped to improve the final text. None of the aforementioned people bear any responsibility for the errors that must surely remain in this work. A definitive grammar of Dhivehi remains to be written, but I hope that the current book represents a step in that direction.

Amalia E. Gnanadesikan

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