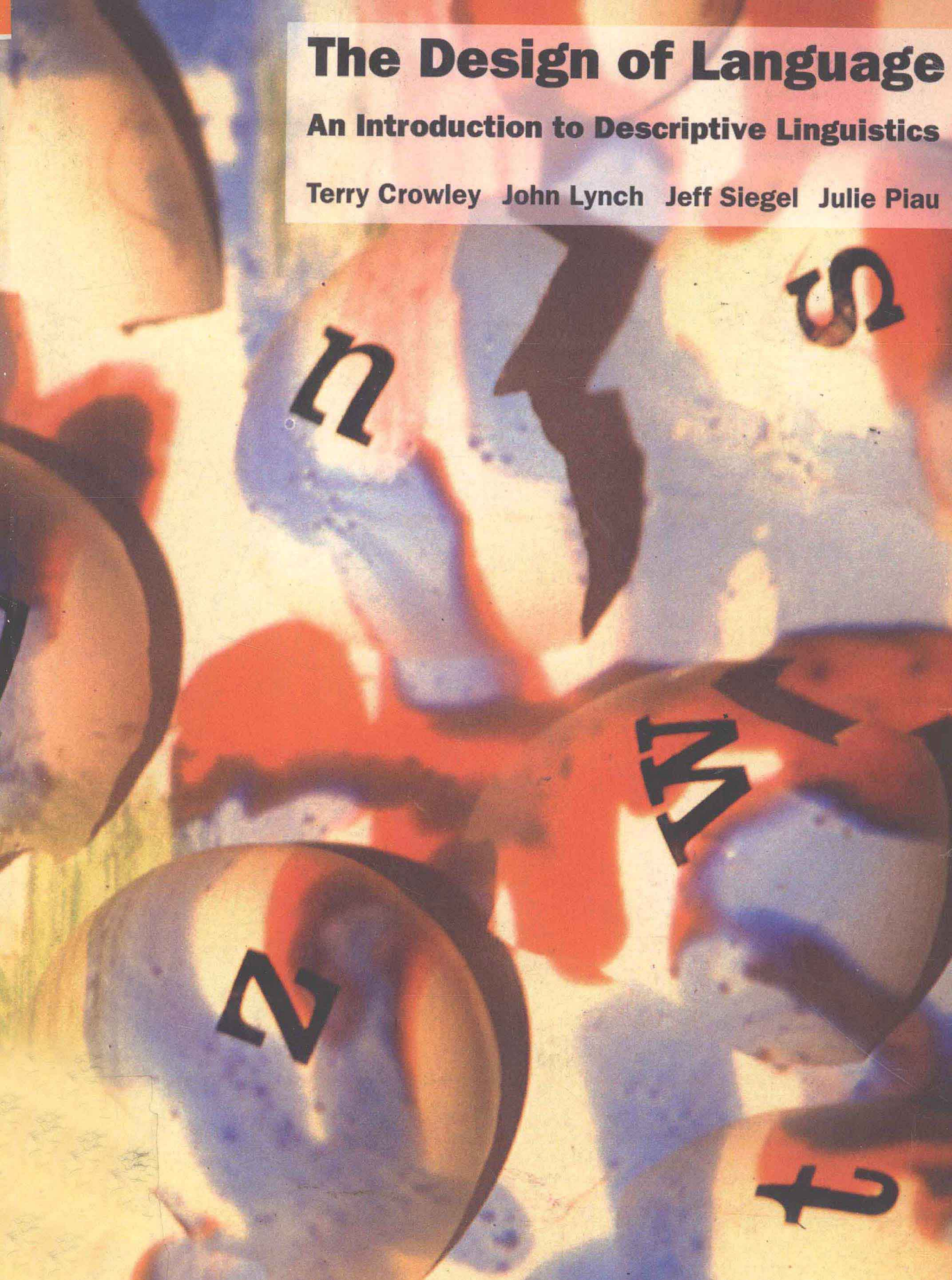
The Design of Language

An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics

Terry Crowley John Lynch Jeff Siegel Julie Piau



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An introduction to descriptive linguistics

**Terry Crowley, John Lynch,
Jeff Siegel, Julie Piau**

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Addison Wesley Longman New Zealand Limited
46 Hillside Road, Auckland 10,
New Zealand

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First published 1995
Reprinted 1998

ISBN 0 582 86117 9

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Produced by Addison Wesley Longman New Zealand Limited through Addison Wesley Longman China Ltd, WP
Typeset in 10/12pt Palatino

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Preface

This book has had a long gestation period. It was based initially on the perceived need of the authors to develop reading materials aimed specifically at second language speakers of English studying linguistics at the University of Papua New Guinea and the University of the South Pacific. While there are some good introductory texts in linguistics which our students were comfortable with, we still felt that there was also a need to provide further discussion, exemplification, and exercises which related specifically to the languages of the Pacific Ocean.

John Lynch initially produced his *Introduction to Phonetics and Phonology* in 1979 and his *Introduction to Morphological Analysis* in 1980, both of which were printed by the University of Papua New Guinea and used as teaching reference materials for linguistics students at that institution. In conjunction with Julie Piau, he revised these volumes in 1989, combining the two under the title *Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics*. Terry Crowley independently produced a set of distance teaching materials in introductory descriptive linguistics for use by students of the University of the South Pacific in 1983. These materials underwent a number of revisions, with input also from Jeff Siegel, who then further adapted these materials for distance teaching at the University of New England in Australia.

We decided that it was time that we put all of these teaching materials together, at the same time substantially revising and expanding them, and adding some discussion of syntax to complete the coverage of general descriptive linguistics. We also decided to include some information on different kinds of theoretical approaches to the analysis of linguistic data.

In this volume, we have maintained our original conversational approach to the discourse, in the belief that this makes for a student-friendly volume, though we have not allowed this to divert us from discussing a number of difficult concepts. We have also maintained a strong bias towards the use of data from Austronesian, Australian, Papuan, and other languages in the Pacific region in the choice of examples. These do, after all, represent about a fifth of the world's languages, as well as a significant range of typological diversity.

Regarding authorship, the writing process has involved input of various kinds from various authors for various sections, even though particular sections may initially have been primarily produced by one individual author. This means that we accept communal responsibility for what we have said.

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Julie Piau
Toronto, Canada

Acknowledgements

This volume owes a lot to our various students over the years at the University of Papua New Guinea, the University of the South Pacific, the University of New England, and the University of Waikato, who have encouraged us by commenting on the value of what began as written notes in support of material that was presented in lectures, or which came to be developed as correspondence teaching materials in linguistics.

Others who we would like to thank for having helped us over the years to improve various earlier versions of parts of this book to bring it to the point where it is now include – listed alphabetically by surname – Lea Brown, Brian Cheetham, Tom Dutton, Nick Faraclas, Libby Fitzgerald, Helen Fraser, Cliff Goddard, Frans Liefrink, Pete Lincoln, Otto Nekitel, Liz Pearce, Nick Reid and Jan Tent.

Finally, we would like to thank the University of Waikato Research Committee for funding a two-week visit to Hamilton (New Zealand) in September 1992 to enable John Lynch to spend time working with Terry Crowley and Jeff Siegel on this book.

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How to use this book

We hope that lecturers will find this book useful for teaching general descriptive linguistics at all undergraduate levels (and that students of linguistics will find it useful for learning as well!). We also hope that, at the same time, the book serves as a valuable introduction to linguistic typology.

As an initial note specifically for lecturers in descriptive linguistics: we have written this book on the assumption that students have not completed any courses in descriptive linguistics, though we have assumed that students have already been introduced to the fundamental distinction between a prescriptive and a descriptive approach to language, and that they will not fall prey to prescriptive tendencies. We have also assumed that students have been sensitised to the common early confusion between 'sounds' and 'letters'.

We have attempted to cover the kinds of topics in descriptive linguistics that are dealt with in most undergraduate courses on this subject, as well as enough areas of side interest that lecturers will be able to follow some of the more specialist areas as well. A general, introductory course in linguistics, on the other hand, could omit the material covered in Chapters 3 and 9 with no harm being done.

We would like to stress that this volume is intended as an *introduction* to all areas of descriptive linguistics. We apologise to those phonologists, morphologists, or syntacticians among you who feel that some aspects of your areas of special interest have been dealt with oversimplistically. In order to achieve a reasonable overall coverage of the field in a reasonable space, it would not be possible to satisfy everybody, and in order to introduce a wide range of descriptive linguistic concepts, it has been necessary to simplify some points, for purely pedagogical purposes.

We have also tried to make this book an introduction to the typology of language. Between us as authors, we have had considerable field involvement in Australian languages, Austronesian languages (especially those of the Oceanic subgroup), Papuan languages, South Asian languages, and Pacific pidgins and creoles. We have drawn extensively from our experience of these languages, as well as from our knowledge of some of the more widely known European languages. Although we have certainly not ignored languages from other groupings, with our particular biases we have provided a good sampling from about a fifth of the world's languages. Importantly, this sample of the world's languages is probably more than representative of the kind of phonological, morphological, and syntactic diversity that is to be found anywhere else in the world.

We have written this volume in what we feel is as theory-neutral a way as possible given the range of approaches that are to be encountered in modern linguistics. We have assumed a fairly widespread acceptance of the notion of underlying forms in phonology, morphology, and syntax, but we have not attempted to cover the vast range of different kinds of theoretical advances that have been made in recent decades in these areas. This, we feel, belongs in a series of more specialist volumes. What we have aimed to do is to give students a *solid* handle on the *principles* involved in analysing linguistic data, rather than what would necessarily be only a superficial

confidence in handling data if a wide range of different theoretical approaches were to be introduced. At the same time, we have attempted to make it clear to students that there is often more than one way of handling the same kind of linguistic data, and that some approaches to linguistic analysis will prove to be more satisfactory than others.

A preliminary note on the organisation of the material in this book is also in order. Our first chapter presents a brief overview of terminology and concepts at all levels of linguistics. Our experience has shown that, these days, it is regrettably no longer possible to assume that students arrive at university confident in their understanding of such basic notions as 'noun' or 'verb'. Chapter 1 therefore sets the scene by outlining the hierarchical nature of language, and defining some of the basic terminology that is required in order to understand the rest of the volume. Chapter 2 discusses phonetics and basic phonology, while Chapter 3 discusses some of the more abstract approaches to phonology. Chapter 4 includes a discussion of grammatical categories, which will set the scene for Chapters 5 and 6, which treat morphology and morphophonemics respectively. Chapter 7 takes the student beyond morphology into morphosyntax, while Chapters 8 and 9 are devoted to syntax proper.

Because we have had to deal with some points fairly briefly, we have included a list of supplementary readings at the end of many sections where students can begin their wider reading into more specialist or more detailed areas of descriptive linguistics. We have concentrated on referring students to readings that are available in fairly widely known textbooks on the assumption that they will easily be able to find these in their own university libraries. For more advanced courses in linguistic analysis, as well as for more theory-specific approaches to different aspects of linguistics, readings in specialist journals or more advanced textbooks will be necessary. We would suggest that if this book is being used as a text in a course taught at a higher level rather than at first-year level, individual lecturers will need to compile their own supplementary reading lists according to their own particular emphases.

All specialist linguistic terminology is introduced at its first appearance in the text in SMALL CAPITALS, and such terms are always explained (and generally also exemplified) for the benefit of students. Ordinary *italics* are used for emphasis within the text. Phonetically or phonemically transcribed material is presented within the text in **bould fənetɪk tʰaɪmz fɒnt**, while material that is presented in the traditional spelling system of a language is given in ***bold italics***.

We have also followed certain conventions in presenting interlinear glosses. Glosses for lexical equivalents are presented in ordinary font, while glosses for morphological categories are presented in SMALL CAPITALS. Glosses within the text are included in ordinary type immediately after a cited form, but are surrounded by single quotes, e.g. **loh** 'run'. The categories in morphologically complex forms which are not segmentable are linked by means of a colon, while segmentable morphological forms are separated by a hyphen. We have avoided the use of abbreviations in the main text, but we have used a number of abbreviations for brevity in interlinear glosses. Those abbreviations that we have used follow the conventions set out in the following Abbreviations section. Thus:

no-taŋ-ind
eat-HABITUAL-1SG:SUBJ
'I eat.'

We have tried to write this volume in a style that is clear in its exposition of sometimes complex concepts, yet at the same time understandable to undergraduate

students, so we have aimed to write conversationally rather than ponderously. As part of our goal in doing this, we have deliberately avoided loading the text with distracting references to our sources for particular pieces of information. Footnotes, endnotes, and the Harvard system of reference (e.g. Chomsky 1988: 153–230) have their place in academic publications, but not in large numbers, we feel, in a general introductory textbook.

We would not want students to feel that they should not acknowledge sources within the text of their own written work. One's sources of information should *always* be acknowledged. We have done this in this volume, but in order to maintain readability, these are for the most part listed in a separate Language Index towards the end.

Readers of this volume should note that we have used phonetic symbols that are widely used by linguists and which correspond for the most part to standard IPA symbols. Any deviations from IPA usage have generally been for reasons of typographical convenience, or because of fairly widespread use and acceptance in Australasia and the Pacific. Conventions which are not widely used are explained as they are introduced.

Consonants

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Labio-velar	Uvular	Glottal
Stop	p b		t̪ d̪	t d	ʧ ʤ	ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k g	kʷ gʷ	q ɢ	ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ	n̪	n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ŋʷ	ɴ	
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð				ç	x ɣ	xʷ ɣʷ	χ ʁ	h
Sibilant			s̪ z̪	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ					
Affricate					ʧ ʤ						
Lateral			l̪	ɬ l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			
Flap				ɾ		ɽ					
Trill				r						ʀ	
Approximant				ɹ							
Glide		ʋ					j		w		

Vowels

		Front		Central		Back	
		Spread	Round	Spread	Round	Spread	Round
High	Tense	i	y	ɨ	ʉ	ɯ	u
	Lax	ɪ	ʏ				ʊ
Mid	Tense	e	ø	ə ɜ	ɵ	ɤ	o
	Lax	ɛ	œ			ʌ	ɔ
Low		æ a		ɐ		ɑ	ɒ

We sometimes faced problems deciding whether to cite illustrative material in phonemic or orthographic representations. As a general rule, in the chapters on phonology and morphology, we present material in IPA script, because it is more important there to make fine distinctions of phonological detail. In discussions of points of syntax, where it is the order rather than the precise shapes of words that is the focus of attention, we have generally used traditional orthographic representations for those languages that have literary traditions. In languages without established literary traditions, even syntactic examples are presented in IPA script.

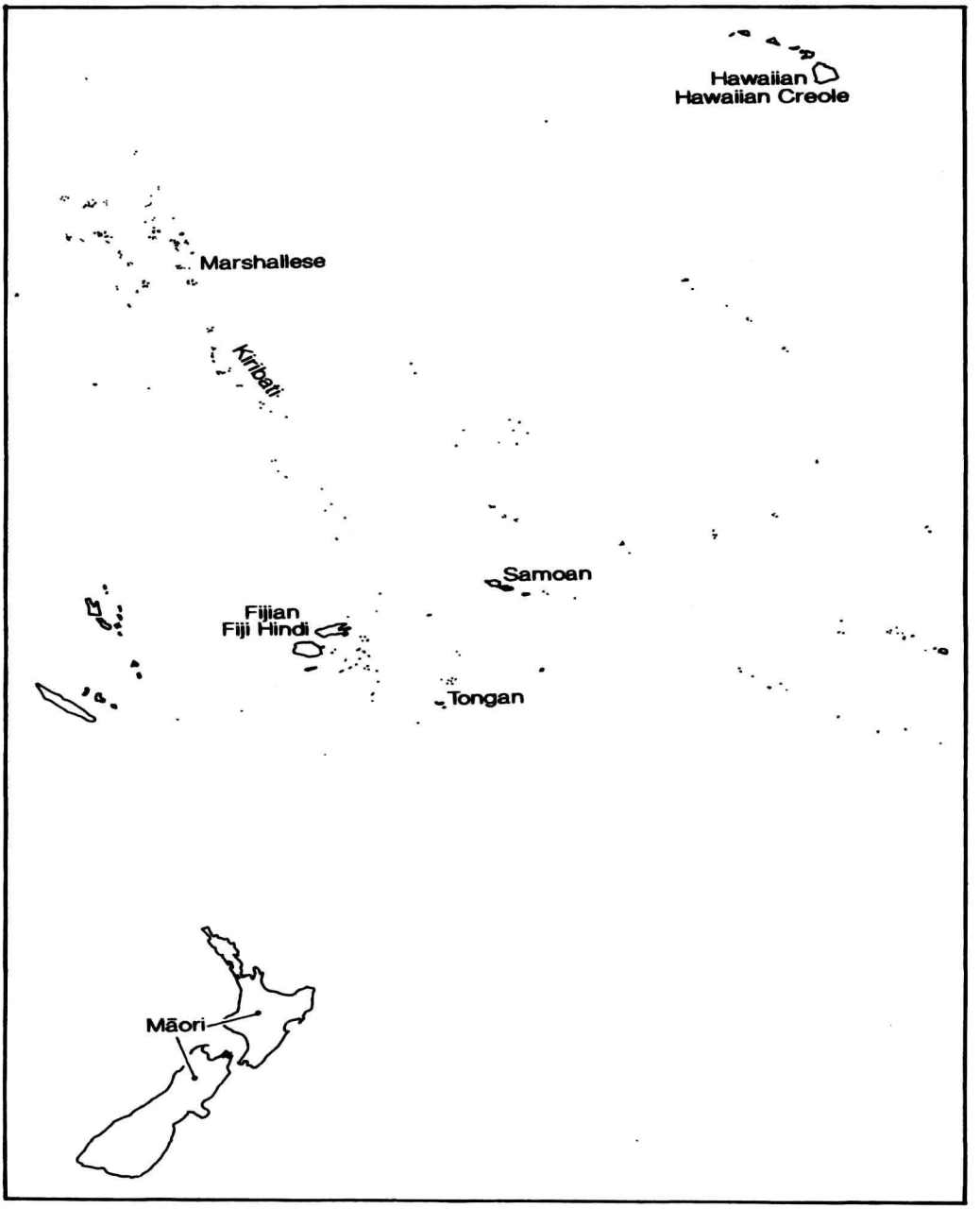
Readers should note that where English words differ in their pronunciation between national or regional varieties, these are generally transcribed phonetically to reflect the pronunciations that are typical in Australian, New Zealand, and South Pacific English, rather than the pronunciations of North American and British speakers.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
A	absolutive
ADJ	adjective
ADJP	adjectival phrase
ADV	adverb
ADVP	adverbial phrase
ART	article
ASP	aspect
AUX	auxiliary
CL	classifier
COMP	complementiser
DEG	degree
DET	determiner
EXCL	exclusive
F	feminine
INCL	inclusive
LOC	locative
M	masculine
N	noun
NEG	negative
NONSG	non-singular
NP	noun phrase
OBJ	object
P	preposition
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PP	prepositional phrase
PRED	predicate marker
PRES	present
Q	question
REL	relativiser
S	sentence
SG	singular
SUB	subordinator
SUBJ	subject
TRANS	transitive
V	verb
VP	verb phrase

Maps showing languages referred to in the text

Map 1: Pacific languages (excluding Melanesia)



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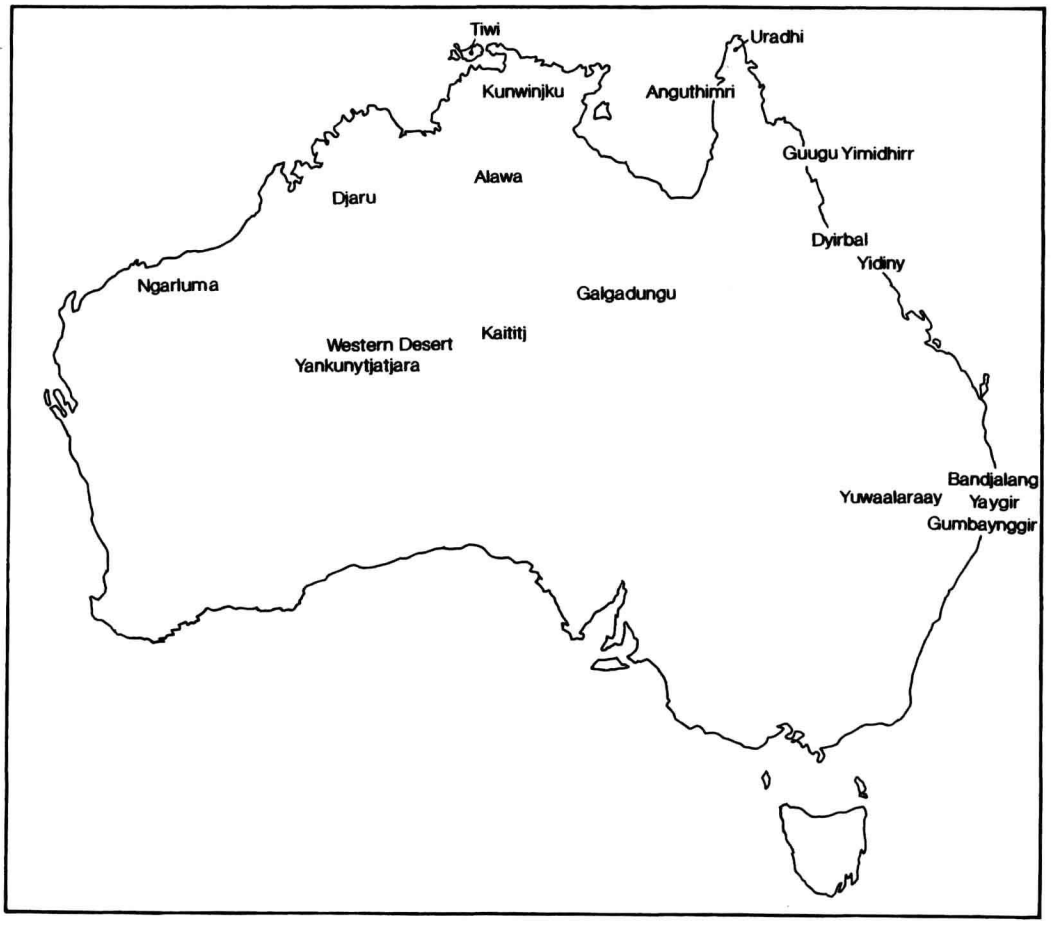
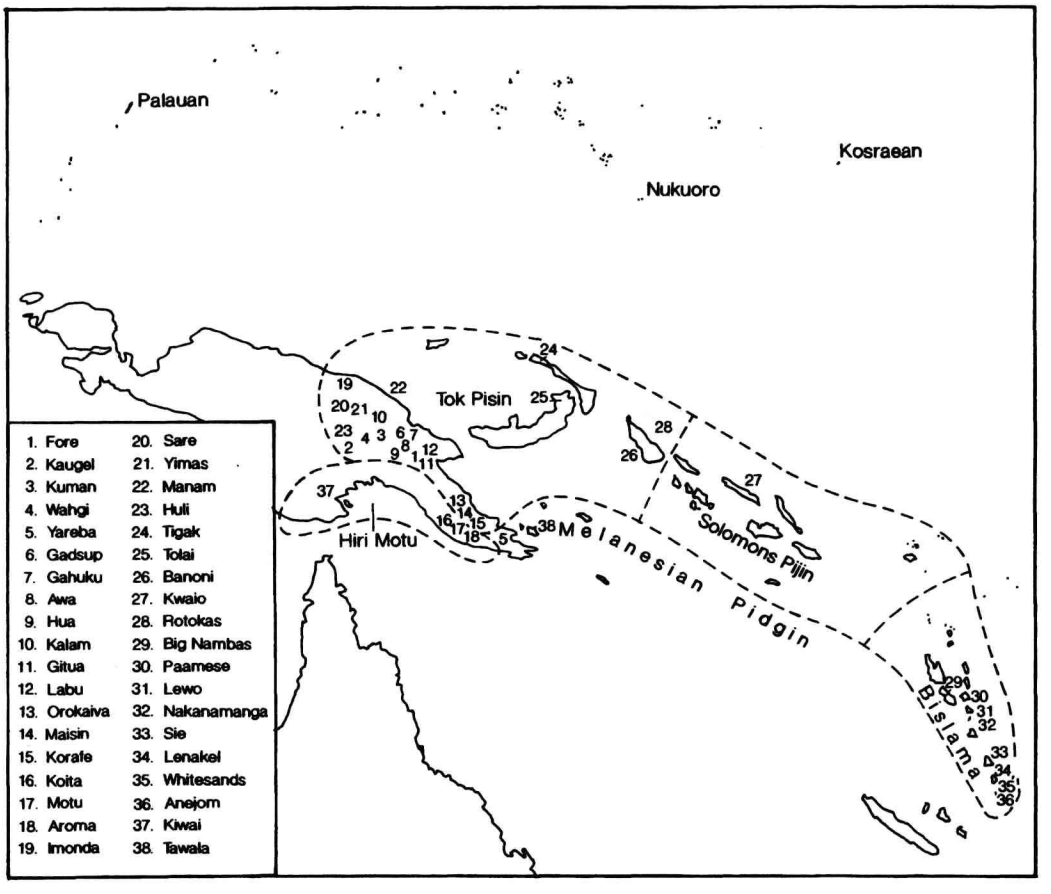
Map 2: Australian languages



Map 3: Melanesian and Western Micronesian languages, and major Melanesian lingua francas



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Chapter One

Linguistic levels

If you ask someone about how languages are organised or designed, you would probably get an answer about languages consisting of sounds or letters, which go together to form words, which combine to form sentences. But if you ask a linguist the same question, you would get a longer and more complex answer. That long and rather more complex answer is what this book is all about.

However, it will be convenient – in fact, it will be quite important – for you to have a very general overview of the way that languages are organised before we begin to look at the nature of this organisation in detail. In particular, there is a certain amount of linguistic terminology that it will be helpful for you to be familiar with before you go any further into this book. If we introduce these terms now, we will not be forced to explain them every time there is a need to use them in the text. This is what this preliminary chapter will be concerned with.

One of the fundamental features of language is the fact that it is hierarchically organised. This means that there is a series of levels, with units from lower levels being placed together to make up larger units. These complex larger units are then treated as single units at higher levels, where they are put together with other units at the same level to make up yet larger units.

What LEVELS do linguists recognise in language, and what are the UNITS that are characteristic of those levels? In this book, we will view language as consisting of the following levels (listed here from "lower" to "higher"):

- SOUND
- PHONEME
- MORPHEME
- WORD
- PHRASE
- SENTENCE

We will begin this brief overview of the hierarchical structure of language at the bottom level and work through to the top.

Sounds and phonemes

The lowest level in language is the PHONETIC level, where the units are individual SOUNDS (sometimes known as PHONES, or SEGMENTS). You should note at the outset that linguistic analysis works with sounds, and not with the letters of the alphabet that represent them in those languages which are written. Not all languages are written, and not all written languages have writing systems which clearly and unambiguously represent the sounds of the language (that is, with one separate symbol for each separate sound). The human vocal apparatus is capable of making a large number of sounds, many of which occur in some language or another, though no language uses

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