Editors’ Note: Five Years of *Language Dynamics and Change*

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General Editors

With this issue, we are very pleased to see *Language Dynamics and Change* (LDC) finish its fifth year of publication. When the journal was launched, our goal was to establish an outlet for high-quality work on diachronic linguistics and connected fields written from both traditional and emerging perspectives. We believe that we have been successful in this regard. Already in our inaugural issue, we present, on the one hand, work from a strongly linguistic perspective in Hyman’s (2011) consideration of how proposals for major linguistic macro-areas within Africa should (or should not) impact our reconstruction of the Proto-Niger-Congo. And, on the other hand, immediately following, there is Pakendorf et al.’s (2011) interdisciplinary synthesis of work on the linguistic and genetic prehistory of speakers of Bantu languages.

Based on the global distribution of the authors who have published in the journal (covering much of Europe, North America, and Australia) and their stage of career (from well-known senior scholars to rising mid-career and junior researchers), there is good evidence that the journal is filling what had previously been an open niche in the linguistics publishing landscape. Its pages have also contained articles focusing on a wide range of language families and groups, such as Uto-Aztecan (Hill, 2011), Alor-Pantar (Robinson and Holton, 2012), Chinese (List et al., 2014), non-Bantu languages of southern Africa (Güldemann and Loughnane, 2012), and Indo-European (Barðdal and Smitherman, 2013), as well as papers covering a diverse set of topics within historical linguistics, from areality (Michael et al., 2014) and borrowing (Seifart, 2015) to cognitive models of language change (Morley, 2012). Importantly, it has also featured papers on the computational and mathematical modelling of language change (e.g., van Trijp, 2013).

While many aspects of the way the journal operates are similar to other humanities journals, there are also some features that are more likely to be found in a hard science journal, intended to enhance the speed with which content is published: reviewers are asked to hand in their reports in just three...
weeks, and there is an Advance Article option for publishing papers as soon as they have been copy-edited. This option is used for cases where there is a significant gap between the time of availability of content and the issue in which it would otherwise appear. Another feature not often associated with humanities journals is the possibility of publishing online supplements alongside a paper. LDC requires research results to be replicable, and data necessary for this purpose, as well as other kinds of supporting data in general, are published online in case their inclusion in a paper would cause the word count to exceed the limit of 10,000 words that is normally imposed on research articles. In other respects, the journal is similar to many other linguistics journals. Papers are normally reviewed by three relevant experts, although in some circumstances—typically a combination of one reviewer’s failure to deliver and two timely, high-quality reviews—two reviews are deemed acceptable. In our first five years, we have also had a number of special issues: Methodology in Linguistic Prehistory edited by Tom Güldemann, Gary Holton, Robyn Loughnane, and Laura Robinson (LDC 2.2), Phylogeny and Beyond: Quantitative Approaches to Language Diversity edited by Michael Dunn (LDC 3.2) and Quantitative Approaches to Areal Linguistic Typology edited by Harald Hammarström and Lev Michael (LDC 4.1). We welcome future proposals for special issues. Papers for such special issues are treated in the same way as regular submissions, the only differences being that the guest editors screen contents before submission, suggest at least some of the reviewers, and, if they feel the need, provide an introduction. Because special issues can be fit into the journal’s existing publishing timeline and make use of its online editorial management system, they can be published in a much quicker timeframe than a typical edited volume.

LDC is indexed in ERIH PLUS, Linguistic Abstracts, Linguistic Bibliography, and, most importantly, SCOPUS. The last is currently the commercial citation index with the best coverage. Although an impact factor has not been issued yet, it is clear that LDC already compares favorably to even much more established outlets for work in historical linguistics in terms of average citations to its articles. We believe that a good deal of the credit for the journal’s high citation rate, despite its relative youth, is due to LDC’s openness to publishing work that employs new methods in the general area of language dynamics, a

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1 This assessment is based on a comparison of citations of articles published in LDC with those of other historical linguistics journals (as well as other linguistics journals in general) from 2011–2015 as collected by Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com) and aggregated using the Publish or Perish tool (Harzing, 2007). Book reviews were excluded from the calculations.
domain discussed in Wichmann (2008) and Loreto et al. (2011). Here we reproduce the tentative definition of language dynamics found in Wichmann (2014) with some minor modifications:2

The study, through observations, reconstructions or simulations, and, whenever possible, quantitative methods, of processes of emergence, change and interaction of languages at any time scale, possibly in relation to processes within or among human agents and their specific sociohistorical and geographic environments.

A portion of this definition would describe historical linguistics in a traditional sense, which tends to focus on the study, through observations and reconstructions, of processes of change and interaction of languages at a time scale where the comparative method can be applied. Shortening the time scale brings in dialectology and sociolinguistics. Widening it brings us to the study of language evolution and large-scale historical typology. Considering human agents in interaction brings in the sociology of language and studies of language competition; and modeling processes within human agents invites psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic perspectives. Explicitly bringing ‘environment’ into the picture follows recent shifts in typological investigation that emphasize areal and historical explanations for contemporary typological distributions over universalist ones. Computational simulation is a tool which can aid in all these enterprises, but one which is alien to historical linguistics as traditionally practiced. Finally, the definition deliberately avoids viewing the field solely as a branch of linguistics, since other fields such as archaeology, genetics, and geography, are clearly important for understanding key aspects of linguistic diachrony.

The novelty of the methods that many papers within the field of language dynamics rely on can often make them a poor fit for journals strongly grounded in traditional linguistics, though this is clearly not due to a general lack of scholarly interest in their application. Indeed, in recent years, work within language dynamics has been published in journals like Nature and Science (Dunn et al., 2011; Bouckaert et al., 2012), high-profile outlets where linguistic work is otherwise rarely featured prominently. While well-established linguistics journals have published significant work within language dynamics, as seen, for instance, in Chang et al.’s (2015) response to Bouckaert at al. (2012), published in Language, our impression is that the barriers to publishing such work

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2 Some of the discussion here is borrowed from Wichmann and Good (2014).
are, in general, too high, given the necessity of allowing for experimentation and timely presentation of results when a new field of inquiry is becoming established, in particular one that rests on the rapid proliferation and steadily increasing availability of new methods of data analysis.

LDC is, thus, proud to have emerged as a forum for work which employs emerging methods to reach new historical conclusions (Jansson et al., 2015), evaluates such methods so that linguistics and allied disciplines can better understand how to apply them effectively to particular research questions (Denham and Donohue, 2012), or presents detailed discussion to motivate and document possible revisions to common methodological practice (Jäger, 2013). We further believe that, as a journal centered within the field of linguistics but with strong connections to other domains, LDC has an especially crucial role to play in ensuring that work like that just described above is thoroughly reviewed by experts with the requisite linguistic, interdisciplinary, and methodological expertise. This allows us to publish promising new investigations without sacrificing editorial standards, and we are extraordinarily grateful to the experts who have given their valuable time to review submissions to the journal. We would, therefore, like to end this note by publicly acknowledging the scholars below who have reviewed one or more papers for LDC.


References


Denham, Tim and Mark Donohue. 2012. Reconnecting genes, languages and material culture in Island Southeast Asia: Aphorisms on geography and history. Language Dynamics and Change 2: 184–211.


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