### **UCLA**

# **American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

#### **Title**

The Arapaho Language. By Andrew Cowell and Alonzo Moss Sr.

#### **Permalink**

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9qd9m7k5

### **Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 35(2)

#### ISSN

0161-6463

#### **Author**

Anderson, Jeffrey D.

#### **Publication Date**

2011-03-01

#### DOI

10.17953

## **Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

when drawing conclusions about late-nineteenth-century Aleut life based on Turner's work alone.

Overall, this is a very nicely compiled and edited book, with only a small number of inconsequential errors escaping editorial notice. However, I believe a few things could have been done better. First, because most readers are unlikely to be familiar with many of the places mentioned in the text, the population of the Aleut region by village that is presented in table 3 (59) would have benefited by including the names of the islands or mainland areas where those villages are located. Second, the various maps and graphics in the book are valuable additions, yet several are reproduced so small that their full worth cannot be realized. Finally, and most significantly, the high-quality black-and-white and color artifact photographs and drawings lack either internal scales or size notations in their captions, an oversight that will leave many readers—especially those unfamiliar with Aleut material culture—confused.

In sum, An Aleutian Ethnography is a most welcome addition to the remarkably small body of firsthand descriptions of Aleut culture. Hudson has made Turner's contribution all the more useful by placing it within the intellectual context of Aleut studies of the late nineteenth century. A teacher, writer, and artist, Hudson lived and worked for many years in Unalaska, where he spearheaded local efforts to preserve Aleut cultural heritage. He has also written and edited a number of books on the region, and his expertise and familiarity with Aleut culture and history lend an unspoken but necessary authority to this work.

Douglas W. Veltre University of Alaska–Anchorage

The Arapaho Language. By Andrew Cowell and Alonzo Moss Sr. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2008. 544 pages. \$70.00 cloth.

This volume contains the first comprehensive description and analysis of the structure of the Arapaho language. It is thus a major leap forward in Arapaho language studies. Its appearance raises many questions for the fields of linguistics and linguistic anthropology about why it has taken more than a century of intermittent research on the Arapaho language to reach this point. As the authors point out, there are now only about 250 fluent Arapaho speakers left, or roughly less than 2 percent of the combined populations of the Northern and Southern Arapaho tribes.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, research into the Arapaho language, such as that of Alfred Kroeber or Truman Michelson, was

Reviews 187

often one among many interests in the overall ethnographic projects that took the field-worker from one tribe to another for short stays without stopping for a thorough analysis along the way. Published works and field notes about the Arapaho language from that era thus offer a few paradigms, plain narratives, and glossaries, but minimal systematic analysis. A wealth of archival material from that period exists that has yet to be tapped in subsequent or current language studies or publications. Zdenek Salzmann's research at midcentury was the first concerted study of the Arapaho language and resulted in a number of articles; however, as he admits, the scope was not comprehensive. Many features of aspect, semantics, and pragmatics, and many nonparadigmatic forms were left for future study.

This work takes up where Salzmann left off by going beyond the normal scope of a descriptive linguistic study of the code and lexicon to consider a vast array of other forms and functions in usage. The combined specificity and range are remarkable, including semantic and pragmatic connections and contextualization so often set aside by older approaches in descriptive linguistics. Although much of the paradigmatic structure of nominal and verbal inflection has been presented before, this volume is especially remarkable in the presentation of complexities of usage that go beyond inflection. While many local Arapaho scholars and speakers have discussed isolated examples of such forms and features in semantic terms for many years, only herein are they systematically presented, classified, and explained. Some of the apparent ambiguities in previous studies are also clarified, such as forms that function grammatically in one way but semantically in another or those that simply do not fit into the common linguistic categories and thus seem to function in multiple ways at once. For example, the construction teebkúútiinoo, or "I have broken it," is grammatically an intransitive construction but functions semantically as transitive in context, which the authors describe as "semitransitive." The analysis which delves into the "quantum level" of the Arapaho language upon which accepted structural categories must be merged or new descriptors invented in order to capture the grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic functions in total. Such refinement reveals the rich conceptual universe of the Arapaho language once sustained for an entire people and now glimpsed at by only a few. For some descriptions of very specific, unique forms, the question arises as to how extensive the evidence or usage of those forms is in the language, but in most cases the authors seem to be explicitly aware of the limitations.

The introduction to the text is rich in detail about the place of the work in the history of linguistic study, sources of evidence, and especially about the unique polysynthetic verb-centered nature of the Arapaho language. Signaling a pattern throughout the text, the introduction also recognizes the productivity afforded by semantic-grammatical options for conveying the same message

in multiple ways. The sequence of subsequent chapters proceeds along the common trajectory from phonology to morphology and syntax, with chapters covering special topics provided in closing. However, the descriptive analysis interposes many other dimensions along the way. Each chapter evolves from the most generally used to more specifically applicable forms.

The Arapaho Language will have many applications. First of all, it makes a major contribution to the stock of knowledge and conceptual tools in the comparative and descriptive linguistic study of the Arapaho, Algonquian, and Native American languages in general. As such, it also opens many doors to myriad future inquiries through explicit mention or implicit suggestion of many topics that deserve further study. Second, the format and scope will also serve as a model for other Native American language-renewal efforts that have not to date compiled a comprehensive grammar. Third, the text will serve for many years to come as a textbook for advanced students of the Arapaho language, both in the classroom and for personal study. Fourth, it will be an invaluable resource for Arapaho educators in developing lessons and curriculum for beginning to intermediate levels of instruction.

For anthropological concerns, the analysis offers many insights into the Arapaho worldview. Revealed through this work are unique Arapaho concepts of causation, number, time, space, personhood, creativity, and relations. Although Whorfian studies of the relationship between language and worldview have been pushed to the margins by mainstream anthropology, such studies are exactly what Native American communities need and are often doing themselves, not only to revitalize the language as code and lexicon but also to reinforce the metaphysical, aesthetic, pragmatic, and epistemological substrata of the language. Andrew Cowell and Alonzo Moss open many windows to those dimensions and thus have built opportunities for a move in language revitalization that goes beyond the older models that set language apart from culture. In all, this work breaks from the confining tradition of more than thirty years of Arapaho language-revitalization efforts, often stuck in word lists and maybe a few random aspects of grammar. Using this volume, it will be possible to build a comprehensive, sequenced curriculum for language education.

The partnership of Cowell and Moss is also an example of how contemporary linguistic and ethnographic research can bring academic and local scholars together. Cowell came to work on the Arapaho language not to pursue knowledge for its own sake or to build his dossier for career advancement, but to serve the greater purpose of helping out in the language-revitalization project on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. For the past thirty years, Moss has been a steadfast educator and researcher in the Northern Arapaho community. He has always been there amidst many struggles in language

Reviews 189

revitalization, within the tribe and imposed from outside, as well as throughout a constant changeover of folks participating in the effort. More important, he brings a uniquely Arapaho inside view of the language, which is supported by material and insights provided by his deceased brother Richard and many other consultants in the study. Though difficult to express in social scientific terms, the spirit of the language that many Arapaho speakers refer to—and at times doubt can be rendered in print—does come through in this volume. The collaboration results in a synthesis of the analytical, pragmatic, and poetic sides of the Arapaho language.

Although many still defend the borders of academic versus local or Native versus non-Native scholarship, the expediency and immensity of the task of language and culture revitalization require collaboration and cooperation among elders with various types of knowledge, tribal scholars with diverse sorts of expertise, and academic researchers from many disciplines. *The Arapaho Language* is an excellent example of what can happen through cooperative, concerted endeavors.

Jeffrey D. Anderson Colby College

Broken Treaties: United States and Canadian Relations with the Lakotas and Plains Cree, 1868–1885. By Jill St. Germain. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 504 pages. \$60.00 cloth.

The study of treaties has long been recognized as one of the unique pillars of Native, American Indian, and indigenous studies scholarship. The legacy of comparative analysis of treaties and the wider scope of diplomatic history run deep within indigenous peoples' relations with settler colonial societies and become a recurring historiographical theme in the examination of political confrontations experienced by most indigenous peoples in the invasion of the Americas. The perception about treaties being successfully implemented or falling short contributes to the assessment among the parties as to whether promises are kept or broken, or obligations are met or foregone.

Jill St. Germain, building upon her earlier contribution about comparative treaties dynamics in North America, *Indian Treaty-Making Policy in the United States and Canada 1867–1877* (2004), has followed with her more specific and concentrated study of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty with the Lakota and the Canadian Numbered Treaty, Number 6, negotiated in 1876 mostly with the Plains Cree. In the case of both treaties, St. Germain has drawn extensively on the published record. For example, she has utilized