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NICOLE NAU, *A Short Grammar of Latgalian*. (Languages of the World/Materials, 482.) München: LINCOM Europa, 2011, 119 pp. ISBN 978-3-86288-055-3.

Reviewed by THOMAS STOLZ, Bremen

Nicole Nau's descriptive grammar of Latgalian is a valuable addition to the catalogue of sources from which typologists can draw information for cross-linguistic studies. In previous samples—even in the most sizable ones—Latgalian was hardly ever represented, because the necessary information about its structural properties was available almost exclusively in articles and monographs written in languages other than English. There are publications in Latgalian, Latvian, Russian and German on Latgalian matters. However, publishing in these and other languages has proved to be an obstacle to the diffusion of knowledge about Latgalian beyond the limits of Baltic philology. I do not deny the existence of a variety of scholarly articles in English which treat Latgalian (mostly in the wider context of Latvian dialectology or Circum-Baltic areal linguistics). However, there had been no full-blown synchronic grammatical description of Latgalian accessible to the worldwide linguistic community until the book under review saw the light of day in 2011.

Nau's Latgalian grammar is not only a first on the international scene. It is remarkable also because the author takes a stance different from the normative preoccupations of Bukšs/Planciskis (1973). *A Short Grammar of Latgalian* is descriptive in lieu of being prescriptive, since Nau takes account of performance data (with heavy emphasis on written material). Accordingly, what she describes is not an ideal 'purified' Latgalian but a Latgalian showing Latvian impact, occasionally rather strong. The focus on the written register is problematic to some extent. However, this is a general issue with descriptive linguistics and its reliance on printed primary sources. Suffice it to say that Nau's laudable treatment of, so to speak, 'literary' Latgalian could desirably be complemented by insights based on a sizable corpus of the oral register. Admittedly, this will remain wishful thinking as long as electronic data-bases of regional languages such as Latgalian remain rare resources.

Since this book is part of the series *Languages of the World/Materials*, it sets out to address a general linguistic audience—and not students of Baltic languages in particular. The series editor expects the publications to respect certain principles of internal organization and length restrictions. With almost 120 printed pages, Nau's grammar of Latgalian is twice as long as many of the other items in this series. Thus, it is somewhat more than just a 'short' grammar, although it cannot claim to be comprehensive either. After a general introduction (pp. 4–9) including socio-demographic and historical information, a state-of-the-art report on Latgalian linguistics and a typological sketch of the language, Nau addresses phonological (pp. 9–15) and morphonological issues (pp. 15–21). Especially for the former, she has to rely on secondary sources since her own corpus is overwhelmingly written material. Chapter 4 (pp. 21–42) is devoted to nominal morphology (covering nouns, adjectives, numerals and pronouns). Verbal morphology is the topic of chapter 5 (pp. 42–62). The distribution of word-classes and their further sub-divisions over these two chapters is largely unproblematic. The only controversial issue is the verbal noun (pp. 61–2) since it shares declinability with the nominals, i. e., it can be inflected for case and number albeit defectively. However, grammatical tradition assigns the verbal noun a place in the chapters on verbs, and thus Nau's decision is absolutely in line with the expectations of Baltic philologists. Syntax and discourse are looked at in chapter 6 (pp. 63–107). In terms of size, this chapter rivals those dealing with morphological issues. In the main body of the text, there are 270 sentential examples. This means that the phenomena scrutinized by the author are richly documented. Apart from these sample sentences, there are two short Latgalian texts (one of which dates back to the late 19th century) with an additional 76 sentences. Except in some extended fragments of texts (such as examples 92 and 97), Nau provides full morpheme glosses and English translations for all of her sample sentences. The book closes with a list of primary sources and a bibliography which also contains additional reading matter not referred to in the grammar.

In the descriptive part of the grammar, remarks on diachronic issues and comparative side-lines are relatively infrequent because the potential readership of this book cannot be expected to be sufficiently

knowledgeable in Baltic philology. On the other hand, there are phenomena which require explicit reference to the structural properties of Latvian. A case in point is the co-existence of four comparative constructions and several superlative constructions (pp. 72–4). In presenting this abundance of constructions, Nau makes (admittedly vague) quantitative statements as to which of the competing constructions is especially frequent in which of her primary sources. Moreover, she identifies some of the phenomena as probably relatively recent copies from Standard Latvian. In yet other sections, Russian and Belarusian influence is discussed as well (e. g., p. 102 on particles). In this way, the dynamics of the Latgalian system are captured in the guise of synchronic variation. The evidence seems to point in the direction of increasing Latvianization of Latgalian. At some points, Nau also raises controversial issues such as the autochthonous status of the debitive in Latgalian (p. 54).

In general, the text is carefully edited. There are, however, occasional errors, the most serious being the confusion caused by wrong headings in the table of cardinal and ordinal numerals (p. 33). For readers versed in Baltic philology, an error of this kind is practically irrelevant. However, for the intended reader without Baltic expertise, it might prove a source of serious difficulties.

Discounting such relatively unimportant shortcomings, I consider *A Short Grammar of Latgalian* a success. It is up to the standard of the same author's previous work on Latvian (Nau 1998). The book is certainly worth having on one's shelf (and desk) if one takes an interest in the typological diversity of human languages. It is also recommended to Baltic philologists—perhaps not so much as a reference grammar of Latgalian but as a source of inspiration for ongoing debates within the discipline; mostly in passing, Nau raises a considerable number of issues which should be tackled in the not too distant future. It is to be hoped that other (nonstandard) Baltic varieties will be the object of similarly good descriptions in the years to come.

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### **A note from the review editor**

Those who read Russian are also advised to peruse Alexey Andronov's review of Nicole Nau's *A Short Grammar of Latgalian*, which has recently appeared in *Вопросы языкознания*, 2012 № 4, pp. 139–145. The latter review contains a useful list of the book's errata and corrigenda, some of which occur in the Latgalian data. This review is also accessible online at: [www.genling.nw.ru/Staff/Andronov/publicat/NauLGrec.pdf](http://www.genling.nw.ru/Staff/Andronov/publicat/NauLGrec.pdf).