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*Frank Lichtenberk – a life in linguistics*  
(*Introduction to the Special Issue*)

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## *Frank Lichtenberk – a life in linguistics*

### *(Introduction to the Special Issue)*

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#### **Dedication**

This Special Issue of *Te Reo* is dedicated to František (Frank) Lichtenberk (1945-2015), to commemorate his contributions to linguistics, and among these, to celebrate his strong involvement in forming new generations of linguists and inspiring new avenues for language research. For those who knew him personally, Frank's sudden death leaves an enormous gap; for those who knew him only by reputation, he leaves a vast and diverse body of work. This volume is the second collection of papers dedicated to him<sup>1</sup>, with the aim of paying tribute to his achievements as a scholar and teacher.

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#### **1 Frank Lichtenberk**

Amy Tan, a well-known author of Chinese immigrant fiction, once talked about a failing that she perceived herself to have as a writer, namely the inability to be concise, straight to the point, to be able to summarise her ideas neatly in a handful of words. Instead, she felt she needed to tell entire stories sprawling over many pages. This she perceived as a weakness of writers in general. Amy Tan had obviously never met Frank Lichtenberk.

Frank had the ability to take just about any complex linguistic phenomenon, be it a reciprocal construction, a reflexive or possessive, and summarise it in the most succinct of formulations. His papers were clear, well thought out and concise. In reading a student's draft paper, he would say "you are not writing a Pulitzer-prize novel, this is an academic text". He insisted on clarity and accuracy, eliminating any ambiguity and unnecessary textual embellishments. He was a stickler for appropriate and precisely defined terminology.

The discipline he imposed on his own writing and on that of his students was reflected in the quality of the publications he produced, spanning several different branches of linguistics. He was one of the most accomplished linguists of his generation. He is best known for his work on grammatical typology, seeking general principles of language change, but his contributions to Austronesian linguistics include two massive reference grammars, a large dictionary, studies in phonological and morphosyntactic reconstruction using the comparative method and dialect geography, and forays into culture historical reconstruction.

Frank Lichtenberk was born in Dubi, a small town in the former Czech Republic, on December 31, 1945.<sup>2</sup> When he was in his early teens the family moved to Prague, where he attended a technical high school and excelled at maths. After high school he completed two years of national military service then got a job at the Research Institute of Telecommunications, first working as a technician/draftsman in the electrical section and later as a translator of English and German technical and scientific journals into Czech. In 1969, a few months after the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia which crushed the "Prague Spring", he sought asylum in Germany. Within a year he migrated to Toronto, Canada, where he got a job as a draftsman and enrolled to do a BA program, attending night classes, at the University of Toronto. Frank chose to major in linguistics, a discipline he had become interested in while working in Prague. The U. Toronto had a strong and eclectic Department of Linguistics. In 1975 he began a Master's degree by coursework while employed by the Department as a teaching assistant. In the fall of 1976, with MA completed, and supported by strong references from Toronto, he embarked on a PhD in linguistics at the University of Hawai'i in Honolulu, where he joined a National Science Foundation-funded project headed by George Grace and Andrew Pawley. The project aimed to produce grammars and dictionaries of several little-known Austronesian languages of the north coast of Papua New Guinea.

Frank was asked to work on Manam, spoken on a small island of that name, famous for its active volcano, in Madang Province. He was only in Hawaii for a week before beginning a nine-month spell of fieldwork. As Frank had never done fieldwork, had never been to Papua New Guinea and had never worked on an Austronesian language, Grace and Pawley were concerned about how he might cope. They need not have worried. He turned out to be a natural at fieldwork. He lived with the chief of Dangale village and participated in village life, even planting his own crops. His letters from the field communicated his fascination and intense engagement with the community he had become part of as well as his progress in learning and analysing the language.

In mid-1977 Frank returned to Honolulu to write his dissertation, a reference grammar of Manam. During 1978 and 1979 he published seven substantial papers, several of them exploring theoretical implications arising from his descriptive work on Manam. The grammar of Manam in its published form ran to 647 pages and at the time was the most detailed grammar of any Austronesian language of Melanesia. It was clear that a formidable new talent had arrived on the scene.

It was also during this time that Frank took up long-distance running and completed his first ever marathon in Honolulu, in just over three hours. He ran more marathons and eventually reduced his time to two hours 40 minutes. The discipline and endurance displayed in his marathon running had something in common with his scholarship.

The University of Hawai'i proved productive not just professionally but also socially. It was there that Frank met Atsuko Kikuchi, another linguist, whom he married in 1982, and with whom he fathered a daughter, Sonya, now an accomplished lawyer, living with her husband in England. The marriage between Frank and Atsuko did not last, but they remained in close contact, and when Sonya moved to the UK, Frank took every opportunity to visit her there.

In 1980 Frank secured a postdoctoral position at the University of Auckland, where the linguistics program was taught mainly by staff of the Anthropology Department, with a strong research emphasis on languages of Polynesia and Melanesia. The following year he was appointed to a tenured lectureship at Auckland. His appointment as a third full-time lecturer made life a lot easier for his colleagues Ross Clark and Andrew Pawley. He proved to be a congenial colleague and a fine teacher, well organised and stimulating and generous with his time. In later years he became a mentor to young scholars in various parts of the world.

In 1981 Frank embarked on a project that was to occupy him for the next 30 years. Lawrence Foana'ota, a speaker of To'aba'ita, an Austronesian language of north Malaita in the Solomon Islands, had come to Auckland to do a BA, majoring in anthropology. With Lawrence as informant Frank began investigating the grammar of To'aba'ita. He subsequently made six field trips to Malaita and published more than 40 papers examining particular features of To'aba'ita that are of typological interest, and two monumental descriptive works, a two-volume, 1375 page grammar and a 400 page dictionary, both appearing in 2008. The dictionary contains a great deal of information about the culture of To'aba'ita speakers, showing that Frank was no mean ethnographer. (Frank preferred to spell the name of the language as Toqabaqita, arguing that to write glottal stop as a raised comma was an insult to an important consonant.)

Frank's work in linguistic typology gained him a reputation well beyond the Austronesian domain. Among his most influential papers were "Multiple uses of reciprocal constructions" (1985), "On the gradualness of grammaticalization" (1991), and "Semantic change and heterosemy in grammaticalization" (1991). In these and other papers he sought explanations of linguistic phenomena in broader cognitive processes reflecting human experience of the world. For instance, the extension of reciprocal constructions to encode reflexive, collective action and chaining situations and to encode other types of constructions such as middle voice and passive, reflects similarities among the internal structures of the situations they encode, such as multiple identity of roles and low level of individuation of participants. His 1991 article on heterosemy in the prestigious journal *Language* was among the 25 most cited and the 10 most downloaded papers published in that journal between 1925 and 2000.

The flow of high quality publications continued for the rest of Frank's life. But such was his modesty that he never fully appreciated his own worth and had to be pushed into applying for promotion.

In the early 2000s the linguistics staff at Auckland became part of a new Department, Applied Language Studies and Linguistics, with a very different ambience from the Department of Anthropology. Frank encapsulated a solid and calm pillar of stability to both colleagues and students, a regular participant in the daily departmental morning tea, but preferring to direct the conversation to others rather than to himself. He was a very private person, yet he was open and friendly, empathetic and always interested in others' points of view.

## 2 This Volume

This volume is a collection of papers embodying current research in two main fields of inquiry in which Frank Lichtenberk had a strong presence, namely, Oceanic linguistics and functional-cognitive, cognitive grammar. The articles represent a combination of work by well-seasoned scholars and by early career researchers – testimony to the influence that Frank had across different generations of linguists. The eight contributions in the collection also exemplify the wide geographical reach of his ideas. Through the journals and volumes he chose to publish his papers in and his steady attendance at international conferences and meetings, Frank's work is well known to scholars based in Europe and the Americas, as well as Australia and the Pacific region.

The first section of the Special Issue concerns Oceanic linguistics. The section begins with a paper by Hawaii-based linguist Joel Bradshaw, entitled "Polysemy and complementarity: core verbs and their uses in Numbami". Following observations from lexicographical works on Papuan languages of the New Guinea mainland in which a small core of functional verbs play a large role in forming verbal predicates, Bradshaw discusses the two main types of core verbs

found in Numbami (an Oceanic language in the Huon Gulf), namely manner-of-action verbs which often serve as light verbs combining with nouns and adjectives to derive verbal predicates, and manner-of-action verbs which are positional ('stay, dwell') or path-related ('go', 'ascend', 'reach'). Comparisons with Manam, as detailed in Lichtenberk (1983a), and other Oceanic languages are also made.

Next is "Possessive classifiers in Raga, Vanuatu: an investigation of their use and function in natural speech" by Marie Duhamel, a former student of Frank's now completing a PhD at the Australian National University. Raga is an Oceanic language spoken in North Pentecost, Vanuatu. For some categories of noun, such as kin terms and part-of-a-whole terms, possession is marked in Raga by directly suffixing a possessive pronoun to the noun. For other categories, such as alienable possessions, possession is marked indirectly, by suffixing the possessive pronoun to a classifier marking a particular semantic relation, such as valued possession, between possessor and possessed noun. Previous studies of Oceanic languages have reported the disappearance of specialised classifiers. This study asks whether, in a corpus of spontaneous speech (137 narratives by 58 speakers) representing three generations of Raga speakers, we find a change across the generations in their encoding of the classifiers or a shift from direct possession of nouns to indirect possession. One previously described specialised classifier (for sugar cane) has fallen out of use but no intergenerational change of classifiers is found in the corpus. The body of work which Frank Lichtenberk produced on possessive constructions (Lichtenberk, 1983b, 1985, 2009a, 2009b, 2013, Lichtenberk, Vaid, & Chen, 2011) serves as a theoretical basis for some of the results discussed.

The third paper in the Oceanic linguistics section is by New Zealand linguist Sally Nicholas on "Inclusory constructions in the Māori languages of Aotearoa and the Southern Cook Islands". Frank coined the term "inclusory constructions" following his work on To'aba'ita, which Nicholas defines as a "type of coordination in which there is a pronominal element that corresponds in number with the sum or 'superset' of all notional coordinands, and some further specified element that refers to a subset of that inclusory pronoun". She compares and contrasts inclusory constructions in these closely related languages and notes the strong preference for the inclusory construction in the Māori language spoken in Aotearoa; a preference not observed in the Māori spoken in the Southern Cook Islands. Her study draws on the typological classification proposed by Lichtenberk (2000) and examines its fit to the Māori languages analysed.

The fourth paper is by a French scholar, Claire Moyse-Faurie, on "Existential and locative predication in Oceanic languages". Her typological study demonstrates the richness and complexity of existential and locative constructions in this branch of Austronesian, paying particular attention to their compatibility with tense-aspect combinations, negation markers and choice of subjects. What might be expressed by means of a simple-seeming 'be' in a language like English, takes part in constructions which express a diverse array of meanings in Oceanic languages, including various types of possession (Lyons, 1967) and a number of postural positions (Lichtenberk, 2002).

Section two of the Special Issue consists of four articles in the area of functional, cognitive grammar. The first is by German scholar Martin Haspelmath, entitled "Indexing and flagging, and head and dependent marking". It presents an in-depth theoretical manifesto arguing against the notions of head/dependent marking. Haspelmath proposes that the newer concepts of indexing/flagging are much more robust and suitable to cross-linguistic comparison than those of head/dependent marking. He argues that head/dependent marking encapsulates a problematic concept because it relies on an abstract notion of "head" and places undue importance on the place where a marker might be found in the discourse, over and above its function in it. In contrast, indexing and flagging are non-abstract, operationalizable concepts which come in two types, depending on their function: either as role-identifiers (on nominals

or combined with person markers) or as concordants (adnominal “agreement” markers with no role-identifying function). In formulating his arguments, Haspelmath draws on a wide range of cross-linguistic data, including examples from grammars written by Lichtenberk (1983, 2008).

In response to Haspelmath’s challenging of the Nichols’ distinction between head and dependent-marking marking, the contribution which follows is a commentary by US-based linguist Bill Croft. Croft’s main goal is to show that neither head/dependent marking nor indexing/flagging should be understood or judged to be better than the other. Instead, he argues that each opposition needs to be linked to the empirical investigation that gave rise to it in the first place. As such, the usefulness of these concepts cannot be assessed in a vacuum, separated from either the data used to develop them, or the theoretical standpoint of the researcher involved in the analysis of that data.

Next is an article by Andreea Calude, a former student of Frank’s, now based at the University of Waikato (New Zealand). In it, she revisits a topic to which Frank first introduced her, namely the middle voice. The article treats the middle voice in Romanian, a Romance language geographically surrounded by Slavic-speaking countries. Using a corpus linguistic, quantitative approach to the indirect middle construction in Romanian, Calude proposes that in Romanian the cognition middle (situation types denoting cognition) has a close affinity with the indirect middle. Using frequency counts and naturally occurring data, she shows how a corpus approach can complement typological work in order to provide a more detailed picture of a complex, multifaceted construction; and one which has attracted the attention of both cognitive linguists and generative theorists.

The final piece is by American psychologists Jyotsna Vaid and Hsin-Chin Chen on “A processing advantage for inalienable possession”. This outlines work which Frank himself contributed to and he is listed as such. Following on from a previous study of possession in English based on corpus data, whose findings point to possible differences in retrievability between alienable and inalienable possessive phrases (Lichtenberk, Vaid, & Chen, 2011), the authors present a plausibility experiment which they designed to further probe their initial corpus findings. Their original hypothesis was that inalienable possessive phrases (e.g. *the man’s mother*) may be directly retrievable from the meanings of the relational possessum, whereas alienable possessive phrases (e.g. *the man’s car*) may require further computation, thus rendering them comparatively less retrievable. Their findings confirm a processing advantage for inalienable possessive constructions over alienable possessives. Moreover, they also find an animacy effect, independent of alienability, with possessive phrases involving animate possessors being judged (as plausible or not) faster than possessive phrases involving inanimate possessors.

The array of papers presented here show Frank’s deep intellectual influence on other scholars. They were offered by the authors to show their great appreciation and respect for Frank as a scholar and as a wonderful human being. Although Frank was too modest to easily accept praise, we believe he would have been pleased to read these contributions and we hope they provide a fitting tribute to him.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The other collection is entitled *Lexical flexibility in Oceanic languages*, published in *Studies in Language* (2017) and edited by Eva van Lier.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed biographical sketch see Pawley (2015).

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