How different languages talk about BRINGING & TAKING events

Many of the world’s languages are endangered and at risk of disappearing.

Research on the nature of human language, linguistic diversity, and the connection between language and cognition needs to draw on as many different languages as possible, and with the loss of each language our knowledge base diminishes.

The project is funded by the Documentation of Endangered Languages Program (DoBes) which has supported documentation projects world-wide. The present project continues this research by analysing and enhancing corpus data from endangered languages compiled during such documentation initiatives. These corpora are hosted by the Documentation of Endangered Languages and the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC) archives which safeguard data from endangered languages for the benefit of minority language communities and researchers alike.

The project explores questions about linguistic diversity with a focus on expressions of BRINGING and TAKING events. How do these concepts translate across languages? Not all languages have simple verbs like English “bring” and “take”.

Can we assume that speakers have comparable concepts of BRING and TAKE if they are expressed not by single verbs but by several clauses? What about languages which use a single verb for BRINGING, GIVING, and PUTTING events?

The project reveals a high degree of diversity across languages, which raises questions about the conceptualisation of such events and ultimately about whether and how the languages we speak shape the way we think.

The project brings together researchers with expertise in endangered languages of Indonesia, the Pacific, and the Americas in an international collaboration. It employs methods of cross-corpus analysis and showcases the importance of corpora from endangered languages for advances in corpus-based typology and the digital humanities.

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