# 1  Introduction

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Oceania has traditionally been the 'place' in which great debates about the human condition have been started, conducted, and sometimes resolved.[1] This volume on the conceptualisation of space in Oceania proves once more the vitality, usefulness, and necessity of the research conducted in this geographically vast, linguistically varied, and culturally fascinating area of the world.

This book is about three-dimensional space as a knowledge domain.[2] The first major goal of the volume is to contribute to research on space, in particular to the linguistic, mental, and cultural representations of spatial relationships. The second major goal is to provide for the first time a survey of the research on space in one specific cultural area, that is, Oceania. The final major goal is to suggest strongly within the research on space the value of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research as well as the surveys of cultural areas.

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[1] In 1997 I organised a session for *The 96th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association* held in Washington, DC, entitled 'Familiar space in language and mind: representations of spatial relationships in Oceania'. The novelty of the subject matter and the enthusiasm of the participants convinced me that the papers presented needed to be brought to a larger audience. After eliciting further contributions from other scholars who could not participate in the AAA session, I proposed the publication of the volume to Pacific Linguistics. The positive response I received from Pacific Linguistics (especially from Andrew Pawley) witnessed to the quality and dedication of the contributors. I want to thank the editorial board and staff at Pacific Linguistics for their support and expertise during the realisation of this project. Each contributor deserves special thanks, especially for putting up with my continuous requests and messages. The comments of one anonymous reviewer were greatly appreciated. Finally, I want to thank all the people of Oceania who made this volume possible. It is to them that I dedicate our collective efforts towards a better understanding of their island worlds.

[2] Space is one of the favourite metaphors used in much contemporary anthropological discourse (e.g. Wilson & Dirlik, 1995). This book is not about space as a metaphor. A metaphor implies two knowledge domains and some of the content of the first knowledge domain is occasionally used to clarify and/or make it easier to talk about the second knowledge domain. This implies that the first domain must be well known. Consequently, regarding the use of space as a metaphor, the more we know about the specific domain of space, the better we will be able to use it in metaphorical terms. It is the primary goal of this volume to expand our understanding of the knowledge domain of space.

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This volume will be mainly of interest to sociocultural and linguistic anthropologists. However, linguists and cognitive psychologists interested in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research will also be able to profit from its content. Finally, any scholar or layman interested in Oceania will find extensive material to expand his/her knowledge about this cultural area.

## 2 Space in language, mind and culture

Conceptualising and talking about spatial relationships is a universal characteristic of human beings all over the world. We all need to conceptualise the spatiality of our environment, that is, mentally represent our surroundings as a well defined space that contains a variety of objects standing in particular spatial relationships to one another. Without this capacity we would not be able to move in our environment nor locate objects in it. It is also crucial for all humans to be able to communicate linguistically about this space and these spatial relationships. We all do this so efficiently and effortlessly that we are, most of the time, unaware of the complex mental and linguistic operations we use in this process.

However, there are specific occasions when we do become aware of the complexity of the task we are involved in, that is, representing and speaking about spatial relationships. One of these occasions is communicating long-distance within one language community. Either in writing or on the phone, for example, the whole process of talking about location or movement of objects in space requires our attention in a way that is not done when we talk in a face-to-face encounter. In long-distance communication we become aware, among other things, of perspective-taking before describing the location of an object in a specific environment.

For example, when reporting on the phone or in writing about the position of an object in a room, for instance a chair, we cannot simply state its location in relation to us because the addressee cannot see us. We must indicate a fixed point of reference. In our case it could be the room door. From there, further indications can be supplied to identify the position of the object. 'The chair is to the right of the door from which you enter the room' could be a good example of a sufficiently adequate description.[3] All of us make, and still occasionally produce, location descriptions that are utterly confusing for our addressee. However, it usually takes very little to realise how inaccurate we have been, and we immediately search for a more appropriate solution.

Other occasions in which we become aware of the complexity of these tasks are when we communicate with speakers of other languages both in our or their language. In these situations the difficulty lies in the fact that different languages distribute spatial descriptions over different parts of speech. For example, where some languages rely mostly on prepositions, others use mostly nouns, while still others put most of the load on verbs. Habituation due to extensive use of the solution intrinsic to our native language complicates the linguistic encoding of our spatial descriptions (either about location or movement) in the situations including two or more languages.

Finally, the cross-linguistic occasions just indicated are but a subpart of what can be labelled cross-cultural encounters. There are very clear differences between the two types of

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[3] The description could still be ambiguous because 'the right of the door' could be our right when we are entering the room or the right of a person looking at the door from inside the room while facing the door/exit. The two interpretations would result in an opposite solution for the position of the chair in the room. However, in this case the 'canonical' interpretation in a Western context would usually be the first one.

events, though. In fact, while a linguistic difference may be described as distributional (spatial descriptions distributed differently over parts of speech), I define cultural difference at another level. It is the frequency, quality, and content of the spatial description (not its linguistic expression[4]) that are culturally determined. When, how, and which spatial descriptions one decides to express (linguistically and otherwise) and use more frequently among the possible ones that are universally (often perceptually) available is a cultural decision.

Evidence is being accumulated by research conducted in a variety of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contexts all over the world (see Bennardo 1996; Hill 1982; Levinson 1996; Ozanne-Rivierre 1997; Pederson 1993, 1995; Pederson & Roelofs 1995; Senft 1997) about the peculiar preferences of some languages and cultures to express spatial relationships in habitual modalities. In other words, some speaking communities, culturally defined, show mental and linguistic preferences in describing spatial relationships.

The research conducted, however, has no regional (that is, Africa, Latin America, Oceania) organisation and scholars often present their findings in isolation.[5] Even comparative studies tend to ignore the possibility of regional patterns. That is, there is no attempt to look extensively to only one cultural area or any effort to collect evidence at the linguistic level, mental level, and cultural level within one chosen area.

Comparative studies within a specific cultural area should provide the first necessary stage towards any generalisation about universal features of the human mind. Combining data from linguistic, psychological, and ethnographic research must be regarded as the inevitable step to arrive at those preliminary generalisations. Too much research is based on only one type of data[6] and too many times generalisations about universal characteristics of the human mind are made based only on investigations limited to one specific cultural context (typically Western academia).

This volume of collected works tries to fill this void in the contemporary research on space. Moreover, this work differs profoundly from other works on the subject by linguists and cognitive psychologists because of its cultural and ethnographic component. All the contributions, in fact, embed the discussion and/or analyses of their data in specific cultural contexts. These latter are considered as informative and informing as the specific type of data, either linguistic, psychological, or ethnographic on which the authors are focusing. I will now indicate in some detail the major goals of the volume.

## 3 Major goals of the volume

The first major goal of this volume is to contribute to the research on space, in particular to the linguistic, mental, and cultural representations of spatial relationships. The data and the

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[4]   I acknowledge here the fact that even the specific linguistic distribution can be the result of cultural choices, but choose to leave this controversy aside since it would not add anything to the core of the argument I am trying to make. I only add that a discussion of this controversial point would require a definition of culture within the general architecture of cognition (see Bennardo 1996:20), but it would be superfluous here.

[5]   For a recent volume of works at least topically connected see Bloom, et al. (1996). See also Senft (1997), for a collection of works about the relationship between language and space in Austronesian and Papuan languages.

[6]   For a clear exception see Pederson, et al. (1997).

findings that are introduced represent a new frontier in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research about this area of inquiry. The methodology employed in the collection of these data is innovative and varied. It consists of sophisticated linguistic analyses, experimental cognitive psychology tests, and accurate interpretations of ethnographic descriptions.

The second goal of the volume is to provide for the first time a survey of the research on space in one specific cultural area, that is, Oceania. The contributions deal with languages and cultures that belong to all three major subdivisions of Oceania: Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. This volume demonstrates that spatial representations in Oceania are distinctive. The authors draw upon data from linguistic, mental, and cultural representations of spatial relationships. From the ample survey of the area—geographical, cultural, and topical—provided by the contributions emerges a picture of spatial representations that may be defined as specifically 'Oceanic'.
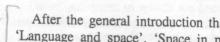
The third and final goal of the volume is to suggest strongly within the research on space the value of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research as well as of cultural area studies. It is impossible to conceive of investigating such an abstract realm as that of the representations of spatial relationships without comparing data from a variety of languages and cultures. Universality issues come immediately to mind. It is much safer and definitely more scientifically sound to provide answers that arise from a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts.

At the same time, it is appropriate not to generalise from results obtained in a group of related—linguistically and culturally—contexts to the whole of human experience. Cultural area studies such as the one proposed here provide the backbone for further comparison across regions around the world. Future researchers will benefit from the work contained in the present volume when planning and/or conducting extensive comparative research across cultural areas.

Finally, this volume can be a point of reference for future research on space and the representations of spatial relationships by scholars working in Oceania. The foundations are laid for new and exciting research projects that would broaden the relevant but unavoidably limited data that are presented. The discourse started here is so significant that it calls for a necessary continuation within the Oceanic scholarly community.

## 4  Contents and subdivisions of the volume

After the general introduction that opens the volume, three sections will follow entitled 'Language and space', 'Space in mind', and 'Space and culture'. A conclusion entitled 'Spatial representations of island worlds' will close the volume.

The first section, 'Language and space', contains four contributions that privilege analyses of linguistic data. The extensive data and the insightful analyses presented immediately immerse the reader in the peculiarity of the spatial world of Oceania. The authors investigate the distribution of spatial descriptions over the parts of speech in various languages of the Pacific. A common finding characterises and unifies these four contributions. They all highlight the privileged status of nouns over other parts of speech as a major Oceanic feature in the linguistic representations of spatial relationships.

The section starts with Florey and Kelly's survey of the linguistic representations of location and movement in Alune, an Austronesian language (Central Eastern Malayo-Polynesian). I decided to include this article even though Alune is spoken in the island of Seram in Eastern Indonesia, geographically not considered to be in Oceania. This language,

in fact, belongs to a group that is genetically related to the Oceanic ones and it is spoken in a geographical area that could be considered the 'motherland' for Oceanic languages and cultures.

Florey and Kelly's major assumption is that 'idealised' uses of spatial referents can be different from their actual uses in discourse. They first introduce the 'key components of the Alune spatial reference system'. Then, they analyse these components as they are used in discourse. The results of the analyses highlight a variety of phenomena such as the 'use of locatives to mark movement'. The authors finally suggest that social factors—'greater shared knowledge within the community'—are the explanatory reasons behind the phenomena that they discovered in their discourse data.

We enter the 'proper' Oceanic world with the article by Hyslop on spatial reference in Ambae, a language spoken in the island of Ambae in the north of Vanuatu. Hyslop investigates a set of directionals and the way they realise linguistically a variety of perspective-takings or frames of reference. Uses of the absolute frame of reference in Ambae differ from canonical uses in Western contexts. Finally, the author investigates a 'set of relational location nouns' that realise an intrinsic frame of reference.

With Sperlich's article on Niuean space we land in the Polynesian motherland. Sperlich's discussion of Niuean spatial nouns is based on a comparison with Tongan spatial nouns as described by Bennardo (2000). Thus, the two articles taken together provide an overall treatment of the subject for the Tongic branch of the Polynesian languages. Similarities and differences between these two very close languages are indicative of the salience of this typical Polynesian lexemic phenomenon.

The fourth article by Cook takes us into one of the three corners of the Polynesian world, Hawai'i. He discusses the distinctive grammatical behaviour of Hawaiian 'locative nouns'. Cook shows how these nouns are differentially case-marked as either placenames, personal names, or common nouns. Finally, he finds support for his grammatical analysis in a brief exploration of the contemporary Hawaiian music scene. This move, as well as others to be found in the previous articles, represents a clear indication of the specific quality that characterises the contributions to this volume. The sophisticated linguistics' analyses introduced never fail to consider the linguistic phenomena investigated within their rich socio-cultural contexts.

The second section, 'Space in mind', contains three contributions. Their focus is on the way in which Oceanic people mentally represent spatial relationships. The authors introduce important hypotheses about specific characteristics of the mental representations of spatial relationships in Oceania. Palmer's article starts the section by surveying a variety of Oceanic languages. He describes how these languages grammaticalise an absolute spatial reference system (or frame of reference). He proceeds to show how perceptually salient characteristics of the environment seem to correlate with the grammaticalisation of this specific (absolute) system over the other possible ones. His conclusion includes possible implications of these phenomena for the structure of cognition. He proposes that salient input from perception can have consequences for the linguistic module only if spatial conceptualisation represents an overarching area between the two.

The second contribution by Bennardo, instead of spanning over a number of Oceanic contexts, focuses on a specific one—the Tongan linguistic and cultural milieu. Tongan linguistic, psychological, and ethnographic data allow the author to obtain an insight into some distinctive features of the representations of spatial relationships in Tonga. Bennardo argues that Tongans privilege a 'radial' frame of reference in their representations of spatial

relationships. He also shows that this 'radial' frame of reference is a subtype of the absolute one. Since features of Tongan spatial cognition are reflected into both linguistic and sociocultural behaviour, the author suggests that spatial cognition is accessible to and informs both language and culture. This suggestion is in line with the conclusions of the previous article in this second section.

The third contribution by Lehman and Herdrich focuses on the basic conceptual form of the Oceanic mental representations of space. They first discuss two systems of conceptions of spatiality: 'point field' and 'bound container'. Then, the two authors introduce a variety of Samoan cultural and linguistic data. Supported by the empirical evidence provided by the Samoan data, Lehman and Herdrich reach the conclusion that Samoans conceptualise space by using a point-field system.

Clear links can be established between these three contributions. The 'point field' system of conceptualising space by Samoans correlates highly with the 'radial' frame of reference preferably used by Tongans. Both phenomena correlate with the generalised grammatical-isation of the various subtypes of the absolute frame of reference in the Melanesian languages surveyed by Palmer. In fact, the 'point field' system and the 'radial' frame of reference share substantial, constitutive conceptual features with the absolute frame of reference.

In the third section, 'Space and culture', the focus shifts to ethnographic analyses with linguistic data as their background. The aim of these discussions is to describe the intricate ways in which various cultural and conceptual domains interact in the linguistic and physical expressions of spatial relations.

Keating argues that the places that people occupy in space during culturally salient, social activities, as well as the way in which they interact in that space, is highly significant in the construction and maintenance of social inequalities in Pohnpei. Historicised physical spaces are 'offices' of the hierarchical social structure. Some people occupy them to demonstrate their status, others negotiate them—linguistically and physically—in a continuous attempt to better their positions.

Toren argues that Fijian 'space-time coordinates' contribute to a specific 'Fijian subjectivity'. Gender, seniority, and morality are projected onto and expressed by spatial language. Toren discusses Fijian physical and social space—places that people occupy during their daily life (for example the interior of the house), socially salient events (for instance village meetings), as well as the spatial relationships between the houses of a village.

Allen's article—the last of this section—focuses on architectural language in Samoan culture. A parallel is drawn between the physical meanings of the terms used to describe the architectural features of the Samoan house and those same terms used to indicate social relationships. Spatial distinctions within the house are realised by a set of words that are also used to express relationships between social units, such as individuals, families, and villages.

The volume closes with Keller's contribution, 'Spatial representations of island worlds'. In it, Keller addresses the cultural and conceptual constraints on spatial relations as they are demonstrated in Oceanic systems of thought and practice. Regional patterns are identified against a background of universal possibilities. Variations within the culture area are situated in the context of regional similarities. In her concluding remarks, Keller also explores the potential of the unique interdisciplinary approaches that characterise this volume, namely, the integration of ethnographic, psychological, and linguistic problems and methods.

## 5 Audience and readership

This volume is mainly of interest to sociocultural and linguistic anthropologists, and cognitive psychologists. Particular attention was devoted to make the volume accessible to both undergraduate and graduate students. In this volume, linguists, anthropologists, and psychologists alike will be able to find data, ideas, and suggestions that can enrich and widen their understanding of the relationships between language, culture, and mind. In addition, both cognitive anthropologists and Oceanists will be able to expand their knowledge of their subdiscipline and/or of their geographical/cultural area.

However, the readership of this volume is not limited to these scholars. Cognitive scientists interested in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research can also profit from its content. In fact, the methodology, the data, and the findings presented in the volume represent challenging material for researchers investigating issues of representations of spatial relationships. Finally, any scholar or layman interested in Oceania and its fascinating cultures will discover that the reading of this book provides a substantial step towards a better understanding of Oceanic people.

By way of closing, I want to add that the research conducted on space and its relationships to language and mind is one of the most fascinating areas of research of this decade. Much research has been conducted and revealing findings have been published, but significant new questions have arisen and remain unanswered. I hope that this volume adds a piece to the puzzle that we are trying to put together.

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