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## Review of *Caddo Verb Morphology* By Lynette R. Melnar

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**Caddo Verb Morphology.** By Lynette R. Melnar. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. xviii + 224 pp. Tables, figures, appendix, references, index. \$75.00 cloth.

When I was a graduate student on the West Coast, we used to play a little game to make fun of East Coast formal linguistics by asking each other, "What would transformational grammar look like if Chomsky spoke X instead of English?" Obviously, if Caddo were X, the answer would not involve tree diagrams, phrase structures, or transformations. Things haven't changed very much. Faced with describing a language like Caddo, a linguist receives virtually no help from the massive literature on syntactic and morphological theory from the last forty or fifty years.

Lynette Melnar, wisely eschewing all of that literature, nevertheless presents us with a clear, organized, coherent description of the way meanings are expressed in Caddo verbs. She adopts the template or position class model of morphological structure, but her description is then organized by semantic category rather than position class.

Caddo presents the analyst with two gigantic problems, both overcome in this work. The first is basic morphological analysis. In all the Caddoan languages, taking words apart to find the constituent morphemes involves unraveling many complex phonological changes—and Caddo is probably the most difficult in the family. One should read Melnar's appendix first if there are doubts about how the surface forms of the words could possibly contain all those morphemes.

The second challenge is finding appropriate labels for the morphemes discovered. Since there are hundreds of these, the standard arsenal of grammatical terminology proves insufficient. Melnar has been very inventive in some areas, especially with respect to subtle distinctions in aspect and modality.

Today Caddo is virtually extinct. Melnar conducted some field work, but mostly relied on data collected since the 1960s by Wallace Chafe. Without such a corpus gathered from fluent, adult speakers who learned the language as children and used it into their adult lives, this work would have been impossible.

If the field of linguistics is about discovering the range of variation possible in linguistic structures, with concomitant conclusions about human

cognitive abilities and processes, then languages like Caddo must receive a prominent position in the evolution of linguistic and cognitive theory. This is a primary reason why the loss of such languages impoverishes our knowledge of ourselves. We must be grateful to scholars like Melnar and Chafe, however, for providing us with at least a little peek into otherwise unacknowledged ways in which our brains can enable thought and communication. **David S. Rood**, *Department of Linguistics, University of Colorado at Boulder*.