Preface

Narratives are the key to indigenous cultural heritage and knowledge. They are a repository of millennia-long traditions, reflecting the intricate relationships between language and culture in their multifaceted ecologies. This volume centres on linguistic and cultural aspects of narratives in the hot-spots of linguistic diversity across the tropics and beyond, the ways of framing discourse of varied genres, and salient grammatical features which make each story-telling tradition so special.

The volume starts with an introduction which weaves together the multiple threads in the twelve contributions – how narratives are organized, how the protagonists and the narrator interact, how the art of narration is taught to children, how the impact of post-colonial experience results in the creation of new genres, and many more issues. The idea for the volume was sparked by the Workshop “Celebrating indigenous voice: Legends and narratives in languages of the tropics” (25–27 November 2020) organized by the editors within the then Language and Culture Research Centre. The Workshop served as an impetus for this project, which took shape and was prepared for publication within the nurturing environment of the Jawun Research Centre at Central Queensland University.

It is our hope that this volume will contribute to creating a consolidated conceptual and analytic framework, for further work on how narratives and their grammatical features reflects the world around us and the features of the societies in which we live. Our aim is to highlight what is special about the narrative means deployed, opening further perspectives on how languages work and why they are the way they are. Each contributor has undertaken intensive fieldwork and has firsthand in-depth knowledge of the languages under discussion. This is what makes the discussions and the results within this volume particularly reliable.

We are grateful to all the participants of the 2020 Workshop and colleagues who took part in the discussion. Many thanks to Joe Blythe and Dineke Schokkin for their fascinating contributions. Thanks are also due to the editors of the series, and the reviewer, for their incisive comments. We owe a debt of gratitude to Brigitta Flick and Bruce Allen, for their invaluable support during the preparation of this volume.

Last but not least, we would like to express our appreciation to Professor Adrian Miller, member of the Jirrbal Nation, Deputy Vice-President Indigenous Engagement, BHP Chair in Indigenous Engagement, and Director of the Jawun Research Centre at Central Queensland University without whose on-going support this enterprise would have not been feasible.

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