This book is intended to be the reference of first resort for linguists, archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, ethnohistorians, and others who in the course of their work find themselves in need of a guide to what is known to scholarship about the indigenous languages of California.

Part 1, a short introductory essay, proposes a definition of the California linguistic area primarily in geographical and sociopolitical terms—a region in which a mosaic of language differences and a multitude of tiny village-level polities have evolved together in tandem for millennia.

Part 2 is a narrative history of the documentation and study of California languages from the contact period to the present, emphasizing the social and institutional contexts in which the work was carried out.

Part 3 is a detailed survey of the language diversity of California in the framework of the twenty-eight basic classificatory units into which the languages of the region fall (either uncontroversial language families or subfamilies, such as Miwok or Takic, of no more than two to three thousand years’ time depth, or classificatory isolated languages, such as Karuk or Takelma, that do not belong to such a group). The characteristic phonological and grammatical structures of each family or isolate are outlined, and information is provided on the geography and dialectology of each language of a given group, with a thorough summary of its documentation. These sections are divided into six groups, five for the larger classificatory units to which most of the languages of California have been assigned with varying degrees of certainty (the Algic, Na-Dene, and Uto-Aztecan superfamilies, and the Penutian and Hokan phyla) and a sixth for the small residuum of languages whose deeper affiliations have not been determined (the Yukian and Chumashan families, and the languages of the southern tip of Baja California). A short introductory essay on the nature and implications of these deeper classifications accompanies each section.

Part 4 provides a nontechnical summary of the structural features that characterize the languages of the California region, from phonology through discourse-level syntax, along with some consideration of the sociolinguistic profile of precontact speech communities and of the patterns of linguistic borrowing within the region.

Part 5 summarizes what is known (or has been speculated) about the linguistic prehistory of the California region, following the general classificatory outline of Part 3.

One of the principal goals of this book is to direct researchers to the full range of published and archival materials on California languages. Citations of the published literature, if not exhaustive, are as thorough as the author can make them, and special effort has been put into identifying the nature and location of archival materials and into untangling the history of research. Separate appendixes are devoted to the voluminous collections of data amassed by John P. Harrington and C. Hart Merriam.

“California” is defined here in the most inclusive sense. All the aboriginal languages originally spoken inside the present political boundaries of the state of California are covered, however small their toehold. Takelma is included, for instance, since a tiny part of the territory claimed by one of the Takelma-speaking communities extended a few miles south of the California border. Furthermore, since the principal unit of discussion is the language family, all the languages in contiguous states (Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona, as well as Baja California del Norte in Mexico) that belong to any family (or family-level branch of a superfamilial phylum) that is represented in modern California are covered, at least cursorily, no matter how disproportionate the balance. Thus, since Chetco-Tolowa was spoken in Del Norte County, California, all the other Oregon Athabaskan languages are discussed with equal thoroughness in §3.6, as, by a similar logic, are all of the Numic languages as far afield as Comanche in §3.31. Application of the same classificatory
principle at a somewhat greater geographic distance leads to the inclusion of a short section on Lower Columbia Athabaskan (¶3.5), since it is usually grouped with Oregon and California Athabaskan in the Pacific Coast subfamily of Athabaskan, and of Cochimí and Seri, Hokan-affiliated languages of Baja California and Sonora respectively (¶3.19–3.20), insofar as they have sometimes been treated as members of an expanded Yuman language family. However, the other languages of northern Mexico (and beyond) that have been classified as Hokan are not within the purview of this book, nor are the other languages of Oregon and the Northwest that have been classified as Penutian, since in both cases their historical connections to California languages exist only as unproven hypotheses at the phylum level. These criteria have been relaxed only for Waikuri and the otherwise minimally attested languages of southern Baja California, a short section on which (¶3.37) seems warranted by the light these isolates might shed on the deep prehistory of the region (see ¶5.1).

Whatever merit this work may have as a guidebook to California Indian linguistics, its ultimate value derives from the generations of amateur and professional observers whose documentation of the languages of the First Californians is described and utilized in these pages. Among these, four extraordinary men stand out: Alfred L. Kroeber, Edward Sapir, John P. Harrington, and C. Hart Merriam. Without the decades of focused work that all four men devoted to the task, each in his own way, what has been preserved for us of the variety and complexity of aboriginal California languages would be much diminished. Their names are everywhere in this book.

The published record is dominated by Kroeber and Sapir and their academic descendents. Quite literally, neither California ethnography nor California linguistics would exist in their modern forms without these paradigm-creating giants. The massive collections of Merriam and Harrington, in contrast, made largely outside the academic research paradigm and deliberately kept private by their creators, had little impact on the field before the 1970s. Today, microfilm editions of these collections (Merriam 1898–1938; Harrington 1982–1990) provide wide access to data of previously unsuspected richness on languages long thought dead. Twenty-first-century students of Californian linguistics, especially those with ties to Native communities, are likely to know and care more about Harrington than about Kroeber, as the success of the University of California, Davis, Harrington project testifies (Macri, Golla, and Woodward 2004). Less attention has been paid to Merriam’s work, but its value as a detailed and comprehensive survey of California dialectology—the only one ever carried out—is coming to be appreciated.

Beside this heroic quartet, it seems invidious to single out any others. But insofar as this book is also a contribution to the history of California ethnolinguistics, I cannot leave unmentioned the name of Robert F. Heizer (1915–1979). Bob Heizer understood, long before the rest of his twentieth-century colleagues, that the ethnography of the California Indians had become a historical discipline. While remaining an enormously productive archaeologist, he devoted a significant part of his intellectual energy to locating and publishing neglected gems of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century documentation of California languages and cultures. It was Heizer who single-handedly rescued from obscurity Stephen Powers’s vivid accounts of California Indian life in the 1870s. It was he who collated and published Pinart’s and Henshaw’s Mission vocabularies. And it was he who, for thirty years, served as the vigilant custodian of C. Hart Merriam’s massive collection of linguistic and ethnographic materials.

This is a book that has been long in coming. That it has finally appeared, after decades of procrastination, is in no small part due to the encouragement of two good friends, Robert L. Bettinger of the University of California, Davis, and Andrew Garrett of the University of California, Berkeley, and to the enthusiasm of my editor at the University of California Press, Hannah Love. I also deeply appreciate the support of Lyle Campbell and Ives Goddard, coeditors of the University of Utah/Smithsonian Publications in American Indian Linguistics, the series for which an earlier version of this volume was drafted.

My sincere thanks go to all those Californianist colleagues who answered my queries, read drafts of chapters, patiently corrected my errors of fact and interpretation, referred me to publications and documents I had overlooked, or otherwise gave me much-needed help in this enterprise. These include, in alphabetical order, Richard Applegate, Juliette Blevins, Loren Bommelyn, Gary Breschini, the late William Bright, Catherine A. Callaghan, Lisa Conathan, Scott DeLancey, Catherine Fowler, Geoffrey Gamble, Jane Hill, Kenneth Hill, Leanne Hinton, Ira Jacknis, William H. Jacobsen, Jr., Carmen Jany, John Johnson, Terrence S. Kaufman, the late Daythal Kendall, Kathryn A. Klar, the late Sheldon Klein, Don Laylander, Charles Li, Christopher Loether, Steven Marlett, John E. McLaughlin, Sally McLendon, Amy Miller, Randall Milliken, Marianne Mithun, Mauricio Mixco, Pamela Munro, Bruce Nevin, Marc Okrand, the late Robert L. Oswalt, the late Harvey Pitkin, William Poser, William Seaburg, David L. Shaul, Alice Shepherd, the late William F. Shipley, Shirley K. Silver, Norval Smith, Sheri Tatsch, the late Karl V. Teeter, Sandra A. Thompson, Rudolph Troike, Katherine Turner, William Weigel, Kenneth Whistler, and Lisa Woodward. If I have omitted anyone’s name, it is inadvertent.

Portions of the book have also benefited from the feedback I received from students at the University of California, Berkeley, who used a preliminary version as their textbook in a graduate course in California Indian languages, taught by Andrew Garrett in the spring semester of 2007.

I am also greatly indebted to the archivists and librarians who have guided me to the not always obvious documentary resources on California Indian languages, with particular
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Martha Macri, the founder and director of the Native American Language Center at the University of California, Davis, deserves special mention. Her firm belief that the documentation of the native languages of California should be made as accessible as possible is what first gave me the idea of writing this book.

But the most special mention of all goes to my wife, Ellen Golla, for her sustaining love and for her endless patience with the obsessions of scholarship.

*Trinidad, California*

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