SOBRE CORBETT, Greville G. *Number.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 358 pp.

While aspect, tense, gender, case and mood have already got their due attention, number has remained the ugly duckling of grammatical categories, an underestimation which arises from the apparent simplicity that language-specific studies on number reveal. Yet number is much more interesting and varied than most linguists, philosophers and logicians realize. The aim of this book is to illustrate the interest of number by adopting a typological perspective to analyse the possible systems of number.

The book is structured thematically in nine chapters, starting with an outline of a set of incorrect assumptions about number which justify the typological perspective Greville Corbett takes: (1) number is just an opposition of singular vs. plural, (2) all relevant items (nouns, for instance) will mark number, (3) items which do mark number will behave the same, (4) number must be expressed and (5) number is a nominal category. The origin of these misconceptions is the rather limited range of languages considered. Corbett is aware of the need to 'cast the net widely' to capture the richness of number, since English and other Indo-European languages turn out to have quite unusual number systems, occupying no more than one corner of the typological space.

In order to embark on this 'linguistic tour', a number of questions must be tackled: firstly, we need to know whether a language has number. The association of (a set of) meanings with (a set of) forms will allow us to talk of a feature —number— with different values (e.g. singular and plural). Once the existence of a number system is demonstrated, the values in the different languages can be compared, bearing in mind that the plural is typically the value including in its meaning reference to the largest set of referents, irrespective of any other meanings or restrictions it may have. With a view to avoiding terminological confusion, Corbett gives priority to meaning in the use of terms.

A constant throughout the book is the importance of typologies in the investigation of the range of possible systems of number in over two hundred languages.

In chapter two, Corbett proposes a typology of the possible number systems, taking as a departure point the Number Hierarchy. Firstly, he draws a primary distinction between languages which can refer to entities without specifying number, which have 'general number', and those in which the expression of number is compulsory, which reveals the falsity of the assumption that number must be expressed (Assumption 4). He then investigates the values which can be distinguished within number, and in so doing demolishes the assumption that number is just an opposition of singular versus plural (Assumption 1) as further values like dual, trial, paucal, and quadrals may be found across languages, in addition to a secondary split into normal and greater within certain number values.

Turning to form, he also provides an initial typology of the possible ways in which number is expressed (chapter 5). Among them, Corbett first introduces number words, special words that some languages have just for the purpose of indicating number. The second candidate for number expression is syntax, which marks number through agreement. A recurrent theme is the interplay of the syntactic and the morphological expression of number, which can work together or not, resulting in different cases of matches/mismatches between nominal and verb. This other means, morphological expression, takes a central stage. The two morphological devices which signal relations between the number forms and the base for a given lexical item, namely inflection and stem formation, may occur separately or together, or they may not occur at all, in which case number is simply not marked morphologically (zero expression). The last means of expressing number dealt with, lexical means, refers to number forms which need to be specified for each nominal separately since singular and plural stems are partially or totally unrelated, i.e. they show different degrees of suppletion. It is necessary to underline the novelty implied by the establishment of a typology of a basic issue, the only claim being that the listed types can exist. While the focus up to this

point in the book has been on whole systems, when dealing with the morphological means of expressing number, Corbett concentrates on variety, a decision motivated by the little attention paid to the distribution of morphological subsystems within languages and the need to emphasize the coexistence of different types of morphology.

Again, when dealing with other uses of number (chapter 7), that is, instances where the regular expression of number is taken over for purposes other than its normal meaning, it is significant that numerous and varied as the 'other' uses of number may be, they also begin to fit into a typology, though careful work with substantial amounts of data is still required.

A further strong point of the book is the use of Hierarchies, which Corbett improves by proposing changes when required and by extending their use.

Firstly, in order to set the typology of possible number values he uses the Number Hierarchy (chapter 2), mostly derived from Greenberg's universal 34 (94), which states that no language has a trial number unless it has a dual, and that no language has a dual unless it has a plural. This Hierarchy poses two problems, the systems with paucal number and facultative number, which Corbett eliminates replacing it with an analysis based on binary branching.

A second hierarchy is found in chapter 3, where Corbett deals with the way the possible patterns of involvement in the number system are constrained by the so called Animacy Hierarchy, which goes from speaker rightwards through addressee, 3rd person, kin, human, animate, to inanimate.

Corbett draws on Smith-Stark's suggestion that plurality 'splits' a language if 'it is a significant opposition for certain categories but irrelevant for others' (657). The different positions on the hierarchy correspond to the different points at which various languages make the split. For some languages, the division is between human versus non-human, which in a simplified way means that in those languages only nouns referring to human beings have plurals; in other languages, there is a split between animates and inanimates. The situation is less clear for the remaining positions: kin (and rational) and pronouns. In the case of pronouns, it seems there are good grounds for saying that all personal pronouns can be distinguished from nouns in terms of their number behaviour; besides, as there is regularly a difference in the behaviour of third person pronouns, as opposed to other persons, we might expect to find that reflected in number marking, a prediction for which some evidence can be found.

A number of important conclusions are derived from the use of this hierarchy, such as the claim that lexical items may be irregular in terms of number marking with respect to the Animacy Hierarchy and regular in terms of agreement, but not vice versa. The Animacy Hierarchy also constrains the likelihood of number differentiation, which decreases 'monotonically' as we move rightwards along it, that is, we never find languages for which number *may* be distinguished at a high point on the hierarchy and *must* be distinguished lower down. The hierarchy helps us understand further patterns in number marking: the use of morphological means at the top of the hierarchy while the use of number words is found lower down; in languages where the system of number marking is a morphological one, but there is irregularity within it, we are likely to find irregularity with the items high on the hierarchy. Resolution of agreement in conjoined noun phrases (Givón 1970) is also favoured by the animacy of the agreement controller, among other factors.

The use of this hierarchy, more generally known in English in connection with gender or case, is satisfactorily justified when applied to number. However, Corbett goes still further on his use of it by integrating the analyses of number values and the Animacy Hierarchy (chapter 5). The main question is how the distribution of nominals is constrained in languages where number has more structure than a simple singular-plural opposition. What the evidence reveals is that each successive number value following the plural may have up to the same range as the previous choice. If it does not match the preceding one, it may have less extended range, or facultative use in place of obligatory use.

The third hierarchy is found in chapter six, when Corbett analyses the factors influencing the choice of agreement in the case of corporate nouns in English. Among them, he considers the variety of English involved and the target type, an attributive modifier, a predicate, a relative pronoun or a personal pronoun, which ordered from left to right constitute what he calls the Agreement Hierarchy.

It is also necessary to highlight the theoretical implications of Corbett's work concerning the status of number as an inflectional category. For example, the interaction of number with the Animacy Hierarchy throws light on this regard. While inflectional categories are usually assumed to be available for all candidate stems in a given language, for many languages number is so for some, but not all, nominals (Assumption 2). The inflectional nature of number is also questioned when dealing with verbal number (chapter 8), by which Corbett means number related to the semantics of the verb, and not merely marked on it. Verbal number differs from nominal number in two main ways: first, relatively few verbs show verbal number distinctions; second, the question of the specific verbs involved is much less clear than for nominal number. Besides, Corbett points out that the number of participants appropriate for using the 'plural' form would differ from verb to verb, which suggests it is a part of the lexical meaning of the verb, and the relation of the verb to its subject or object with respect to verbal number is one of semantic compatibility (and not agreement).

The main emphasis of the book is on synchrony, though diachrony is considered as well. In the concluding chapter ninth, Corbett considers the historical development of number systems, first the way in which they develop and grow and then the ways in which they decline. As regards the rise of number, in accord with the prediction from work on grammaticalization, the expected source of number systems are number words, which in turn come from nouns denoting collectives, pronouns and demonstratives. Number words may then develop into bound morphology, and eventually into very complex systems. A different predic-

tion refers to which nominals will be involved: number systems will develop at the top of the Animacy Hierarchy, and spread down to varying degrees. This fact explains why morphological irregularity is found with the items high on the hierarchy since lower nominals have had a shorter period in which to develop irregularities. The Animacy Hierarchy can thus be said to be useful for diachronic purposes as well, by contributing to corroborate the development of inflectional systems. Finally, systems could develop from the optional to the obligatory use of number, i.e. from the 'general/ singular versus plural' type to the 'singular versus plural' type.

A recurrent demand Corbett makes throughout the book is being clear about terms and comparing like with like, particularly by setting the distinction between semantics and form, number values and means of expressing them.

In this regard, when dealing with verbal number (chapter 8) Corbett has to face the lack of standardized terminology or some misuse, like that of the term 'suppletion', which has led to verbal number being treated as nominal number when it is marked by the use of quite different lexical items. As opposed to nominal number, those forms are not inflectionally related. Once again, when considering the types of mismatch on the feature specification of controller and target (chapter 6), Corbett demonstrates the importance of being clear about terms when analysing systems where the number values of controller and target differ, by drawing a distinction between *controller* & *target* of agreement, and between *features* & *values*. Three different types of languages are found depending on the place where nominal number is primarily expressed: in the noun phrase, in the noun phrase and on the verb, or on the verb (and optionally on the noun). In languages where nominal number is marked both in the noun phrase and on the verb, the relationship between the two types of marking raises interesting questions since the values of the two systems may not match. A different type of mismatch arises when the controller is absent or lacks a feature value, giving rise to default number, which can be singular or plural, the first being used in the overwhelming majority of languages. In other cases,

the mismatch takes place for specific controller types (lexical items, lexically restricted constructions and constructions like conjoined noun phrases), although controller and target have the same systems available. These types of controller allow agreement choices, which, in turn, arise from the mismatch between the semantic and formal properties of the controller. Depending on which of these two properties determines agreement we find syntactic or semantic agreement.

The only reservation about the book is the paucity of evidence at some points, for instance when dealing with the Animacy Hierarchy a last split is timidly suggested between the first and the second persons, with the first person ranked higher. However, in this case as well as when justifying the positions of kinship nouns Corbett's suggestions sound anything but convincing. Further investigation is also necessary in order to corroborate Corbett's suspiciously neat solution regarding the availability of other uses of number, claiming that they are available in situations where the real-world number of the referent can be otherwise established. Corbett is fully aware, as he explicitly declares, of the falsifiability of some of his typologies.

At the end of the book, Corbett has undoubtedly demonstrated the sense of the typological perspective taken. By means of the interlinguistic comparison that the use of hierarchies allows, he is able to provide not only description and explanation of the number category in synchrony, but also diachronic prediction. This work can thus be located within the trend of linguistic investigation generally known as Typological Functional Grammar.

All in all, this book may disappoint the researcher looking for the latest contribution to number theory, its aim being 'opening doors for future research on number rather than closing them', to quote Corbett's own words. However, the book will certainly not disappoint students of linguistics, those researching particular languages or group of languages, field-workers, typologists, morphologists, semanticists and psycholinguists, for whom it will be a valuable source for the amount of research undertaken in the examination of the number category, which can boast of the elegance and complexity of other areas of enquiry.

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