

On two recent publications on areal linguistics

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DAHL Östen & Maria KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM (eds.), *Circum-Baltic Languages*. Volume 1: *Past and Present*, Benjamins, Amsterdam 2001, pp. xii + 359 + 43 of index (ISBN 90 272 3057 9).

DAHL Östen & Maria KOPTJEVSKAJA-TAMM (eds.), *Circum-Baltic Languages*. Volume 2: *Grammar and Typology*, Benjamins, Amsterdam 2001, pp. xx + 398, + 43 of index (ISBN 90 272 3059 5).

RAMAT Paolo & Thomas STOLZ (eds.), *Mediterranean languages. Papers from the MEDTYP workshop, Tirrenia, June 2000*, Brockmeyer, Bochum 2002, pp. xv + 295 (ISBN 3 8196 0643 2).

It would be fair to say that interest in the phenomenon of linguistic areas ('areal linguistics' or 'areal typology') has been on the rise during the past decade. Whereas earlier, the cases of the Balkans and Southwest Asia were classic but rather isolated textbook examples of language convergence, during the 1990s new discussions of linguistic areas appeared, focusing on Mesoamerica, East Asia, Siberia, the Ethiopian Highlands, and Anatolia, among others, and the notion of linguistic convergence has begun to occupy a centre stage position in discussions surrounding the classification of Amazonian, Australian, and Papuan languages. In the specifically European context, convergence entered the typological discussion in connection with the EUROTYP project of the early 1990s and the formulation of observations on the geographical clustering of typological features. The two collections under review are the best representatives of this latter development, engaging contributors among both EUROTYP veterans and other typologists with expertise in one or more of the relevant languages.

The Circum-Baltic collection (edited by Östen Dahl and Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm) takes a parallel approach to what it defines as two separate agendas: Areal linguistics, which is the study of individual languages in an area, as well as of the historical connections

among them; and typology in an areal context, which is the study of grammatical phenomena within a particular area. This is reflected in the separation of the two volumes of the collection. Volume 1 deals with the languages of the area. It begins with surveys of the principal languages – Lithuanian and Latvian (both Laimode Balode and Axel Holvoet), Swedish (Anne-Charlotte Rendahl), Russian (Valeriy »ekmonas), and the Finnic languages (Johanna Laakso) – focusing in particular on dialect variation. Two historical studies follow: One on the origin of the Scandinavian languages (Östen Dahl), the other on Baltic influence on Finnic languages (Lars-Gunnar Larsson). The third section, devoted to ‘Contact phenomena in minor Circum-Baltic languages’, departs from the format of the other language-specific chapters, in that the issues dealt with are more specific and more selective, general background about the languages is not always provided, the pre-theoretical approach that is typical of the first section is not always maintained, and we find various degrees of exhaustiveness even in relation to the discussion of contact phenomena. The intention is obviously to give consideration within the collection to lesser-known and smaller languages of the region: Karelian (Finnic), Karaim (Turkic), Yiddish (West Germanic), Romani (Indo-Aryan), and the Northwest Central Russian dialect.

The most exhaustive and informative of the ‘minor language’ contributions is Neil G. Jacobs’ chapter on Yiddish. In surveying the history and dialect geography of the language it follows the format of the ‘major language’ descriptions more closely than the other papers in this section, while at the same time introducing the specific features of North East Yiddish, with an emphasis on those shared with neighbouring Baltic languages. A nuanced discussion of contact influences is found in Aleksandr Yu. Rusakov’s contribution on North Russian Romani. Though it fails to provide any general structural background on Romani and its dialects, it analyses in detail the changes to the verbal system as a result of contact with Russian, and attempts to differentiate between ‘adapted’ and ‘unadapted’ use of Russian-derived forms (though the discussion of codeswitching seems largely redundant in the present context). Stefan M. Pugh’s discussion of Karelian only provides a glimpse of its contact profile, mentioning Russian influence in the lexicon, the spread of palatalisation, and the use of Russian aspectual prefixes with Finnic stems. Éva Ágnes Csató’s paper on Karaim similarly avoids a systematic analysis of borrowed lexicon (e.g. conjunctions and discourse markers are mentioned together with content words), as well as any overall characterisation of the borrowed prepositions that are mentioned (and

which disrupt the Turkic pattern of postpositioning), but illustrates contact-induced changes to word order patterns in the basic verb phrase and the position of complements. Valeriy »ekmonas's chapter on the Pskov-Novgorod dialect of Russian considers just a selection of phonological phenomena: the distributions of ě/c, / , and b/p.

Volume 2 opens with a selection of case studies of individual grammatical phenomena – some devoted to individual languages, others are contrastive analyses of two languages or language groups: Impersonals and passives (Axel Holvoet), nominative objects (Vytautas Ambrazas), verb particles (Bernhard Wälchli as well as Helle Metslang), case systems (Baiba Matuzāle-Kangere and Kersti Boiko) and genitive positions (Simon Christen). These are followed by surveys of three phenomena in a global Circum-Baltic context. Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm examines partitives and shows that case-marking, rather than juxtaposition, of the substance ('a bit of cake'), is retained mainly in the eastern languages of the area, though it was once present throughout the area. Leon Stassen discusses properties of non-verbal predications, showing that predicate adjectives and nominals in the non-Germanic languages of the area may be encoded in either the nominative or a non-nominative case. And Thomas Stolz traces the historical spread of comitative-instrumental syncretism across the more western languages of the area.

The highlight of the collection is the monograph-length contribution by Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Bernhard Wälchli summarising the areal-typological approach to the Circum-Baltic languages (pp. 615-750). After a brief historical discussion, grammatical categories are dealt with one by one and in detail. The discussion includes maps, and a table overview of the phenomena, the languages involved in each, possible sources and the areal as well as global-European typological status of the construction – the latter piece of information enabling to distinguish even within a bird's eye view between those phenomena that are more characteristic of the area under discussion, and more common constructions. The Circum-Baltic area is certainly not a notion that can be upheld or refuted with reference to any specific grammatical sub-system, and the range of phenomena considered in this chapter covers such categories as suprasegmental phonology (initial stress, polytonicity), morphological cases, alternations in subject/object marking, non-verbal predication, comitatives, comparatives, passives, numerals, word order, evidentiality, particle-initial questions, and more. In areal-geographical terms, the region is typically divided by isoglosses forming western and eastern zones. The Baltic and Finnic languages are in the middle, sharing features in

both directions, while there are very few if any features that are shared among the Germanic and Slavic languages of the area. This is nicely illustrative of the reality of linguistic areas: a cluster of isoglosses that cross language boundaries. The collection offers a model for an integrated discussion of a linguistic area: It provides background on the languages, their structures, and their contact histories, as well as exemplification of individual phenomena shared by individual languages or groups within the area, and finally, on that basis, it gives consideration to larger-space isoglosses that are contained in the area or parts of it.

Contrasting with the exhaustive survey presented in the Circum-Baltic collection, the Mediterranean collection edited by Paolo Ramat and Thomas Stolz emphasises the exploratory nature of areal typology, in both general methodology and the interpretation of specific data. Only few of the contributors dare venture as far as stating a case for convergence across the region: Livio Gaeta and Silvia Luraghi point out shared features in noun phrase structure, arguing that most of the Mediterranean languages tend to have a two-gender system and to lack case inflection, which contrasts with the three genders and a complex system found to the north of the region. (Turkish of course is an exception altogether, and the Balkan languages might be considered a transition zone, with a simplified case system – though Romani in the Balkans, and Domari in the eastern Mediterranean, both classic examples of convergent languages, each have multiple cases). Nicola Grandi argues for a diffusion of Latin and Greek forms across the region, resulting in similarities in the use of augmentative suffixes.

Most other authors take a somewhat distanced approach to the issue of ‘areality’ in the region. Ignazio Putzu’s approach for instance is purely circumstantial, arguing that the Mediterranean area is known to have been the scene of cultural contacts and mixtures, hence the fact that most languages of the area possess a definite article *may* be due to areal diffusion. Other contributors are more overtly sceptical: Marina Benedetti and Davide Ricca comment on the structure of deixis, saying that “no clear features have been identified involving the whole Mediterranean” (p. 30); Johan van der Auwera et al. conclude their discussion of volitional constructions saying that “we are bound to be dealing with independent processes yielding similar results in contiguous areas” (p. 9); and Ekkehard König and Lestizia Vezzosi examine intensifiers and reflexive anaphors and conclude that “there are no striking similarities, convergence or shared features among the languages of the Mediterranean area” (p. 205).

Stefania Giannini and Stefania Scaglione propose a procedure for calculating 'areality coefficient' and demonstrate that, while a score of 42 and 26 is obtained respectively for the postposition of the article and infinitive loss in the Balkans, the score obtained for the invariable relativiser across the Mediterranean languages is a modest 10. Thomas Stolz, finally, reminds us that the infinitive avoidance isoglosses has not just a Balkan, but also an immediately adjoining Near Eastern zone, and addresses the difficulties of proving the immediate areal relevance of such large-spread isoglosses.

Alongside these contributions, which address the question of whether or not the Mediterranean *is* a convergence area, we find a series of chapters with a different agenda, namely to discuss typological phenomena, *exemplifying* them through data from one or more languages of the region. This characterises the papers by Albert Borg and Manwel Mifsud on Maltese object marking, by Ahmed Brahim on reflexives (French, Italian, Arabic, Berber, Turkish), by Joseph Brincut on the adaptation of Romance verbs in Maltese, and by Bernard Comrie on relativisation (Italian, Greek, Maltese, Hebrew, Catalan). Other papers that fall within this category are the contribution by Gianguido Manzelli, Paolo Ramat and Elisa Roma, who present a survey of the relations between the constructions *I am hungry*, *I have a book*, and *I am right* in a large sample of Mediterranean languages (showing a close affinity among the Romance languages of the western Mediterranean), and Giacomo Ferrari's discussion of procedures for computational-typological analysis involving Italian, Greek, Turkish and Maltese. A 'guest' paper, as it were, is presented by Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm on the Circum-Baltic languages (though with no attempt to draw any parallels with the Mediterranean area).

The question that is more directly provoked by the Mediterranean collection, but also arises through the Circum-Baltic papers, is: what defines a region as a linguistic area? Both collections avoid a linguistic definition of an area, and rely instead on the appreciation of the area as an historical space that has been characterised by cultural contacts of various kinds. The relevance of the linguistic features (and especially the quantification of shared features) is thus set aside from the actual definition of the area. Instead, the investigation of features becomes a purely empirical agenda, split into a grammatical-typological question (to describe structures found within the area), and an areal-geographical question (to describe which isoglosses, if any, are contained within the area, or contain the area, and how they are distributed).

This leads to two problems. First, there is a risk of trivialising

linguistic areas somewhat, by identifying just any historical-cultural space as a potential linguistic area, regardless of any particular density of shared isoglosses or a proven diffusion of linguistic forms (convergence). Second, both collections concentrate on the description and enumeration of shared features, with some attention to their geographical spread, but next to no attention is given to the mechanisms through which they spread across languages. Surely, the key to understanding a linguistic area must be an understanding of the mechanisms through which structural patterns are replicated in the context of discourse in a multilingual setting. An integrated model is yet to be proposed to enable us to explore more systematically the connection between convergence (also called transfer, interference, code-copying, replication, fusion) at the utterance level, and the distribution of isoglosses that cross language boundaries to form linguistic areas in the first place. Without such a model, areal linguistics might find itself focusing primarily on individual structures, distributed more or less accidentally among individual languages, which in turn are spoken in an area that is pre-defined – though not pre-defined by any linguistic criteria.

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