Book Reviews

Ferdinand von Mengden, *Cardinal numerals: Old English from a cross-linguistic perspective* (Topics in English Linguistics 67). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2010. xiii + 329 pages, ISBN 978-3-11-022034-6, EUR 99.95, USD 140.

Reviewed by HARALD HAMMARSTRÖM, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen and Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology

Ferdinand von Mengden's substantial book on cardinal numerals in Old English is of interest for typologists in three ways: (i) as an extensive description of the cardinal numeral system in one specific language; (ii) as a contribution to a general theory of how to analyse linguistic numeral systems, namely, how to define "base" and how to understand word-class properties of numerals; (iii) as an illustration of how general knowledge of the typology of numeral systems may contribute to the diachronic understanding of numerals in one specific language. The author puts roughly equal emphasis on the "specific to general"-part, i.e., how facts and considerations from Old English develop our understanding of numerals in general, and on the "general to specific"-part, i.e., how the general appearance of numerals guides inference and analysis of the case of Old English.

The first chapter ("Linguistic numeral systems", pp. 12–71) concerns the definition of numerals and how to analyse them. Drawing on earlier work in comparative linguistics and formal semantics, the author situates cardinal numerals as a sub-class of quantifiers that are used in natural language to denote a finite number of members of a set. The discussion around this is of limited value since the author mixes different kinds of motivations in his comments on earlier work and in his own. For example, in von Mengden's view, numeral systems in natural languages are finite and have an upper limit value (pp. 23–24). This may be legitimate, but what is the motivation? Is this a definitional property motivated by some overarching theoretical consideration? An arbitrary definitional division (i.e., a naming convention)? A property that follows logically from theoretical models of language? An empirical fact about many

Linguistic Typology 16 (2012), 321–324
DOI 10.1515/lingty-2012-0010
1430–0532/2012/016-0321
©Walter de Gruyter

Brought to you by | Max-Planck-Gesellschaft - WIB6417
Authenticated | 192.87.79.51
Download Date | 6/26/13 9:22 AM

(all?) languages? The author appeals to a little bit of everything instead of pitting one motivation against the other.

Once numerals are defined, the author wishes to divide the expressions denoting exact numbers into the two classes, "systemic" and "non-systemic". The intuition is that expressions like *dozen*, *two fifties*, or *as many as the legs of my cat* are not real numerals. Von Mengden then proceeds in a manner often seen in crosslinguistic comparisons, namely to provide a definition refined from previous attempts to tackle examples of from a variety of languages. The resulting definition has a wider, but not complete, crosslinguistic applicability, at least with a commentary on the if's, but's, and maybe's of the accumulated list of examples from various languages. In this case, systemic numerals are defined as those which occur in the conventionalized counting sequence, can be combined to form more complex numerals, and are the morphological bases for the formation of other types of numerals (ordinals, multiplicatives, etc.). With some discussion, these criteria serve to delineate the sought after class in contemporary English, Old English, and a number of other reasonably well-known languages, but it is clear that there will be languages where either the criteria cannot easily be applied or where the application results in a very counter-intuitive outcome (e.g., that the most common expression for 'one' is not a systemic numeral). Instead of refining the definition further to be applicable to yet further languages, I would suggest that a more appropriate way to guarantee crosslinguistic applicability is to only use concepts that necessarily apply to all languages, e.g., semantics, morphemes. In the case of systemic numerals, I suspect that what von Mengden is really after can be reformulated in terms of morphemes and whether an expression is conventionalized or not, both of which necessarily apply to (Hockett's definition of) language.

Similarly, once systemic numerals have been defined, von Mengden ventures to define "base" (p. 33) as"[i]n any formation pattern of a numeral system, bases are those elements with which the smallest continuously recurring sequence of numerals is combine". Unfortunately, the key concept "smallest continuously recurring ordered subsequence" is never given a definition, but is instead illustrated by a number of examples. These examples make some things clear about what is captured by the phrase, but it is not possible to mechanically apply the definition to a morpheme-divided list of number words in a language. Crucially, either "smallest" and "continuously recurring", read literally, do not yield what the examples suggest, or require already knowing the "base" to interpret the definition as per the examples.

In the given framework, the Old English numerals are described in good detail, with corpus examples and etymologies (Chapters 2 through 4, pp. 72–247). For hypothetical historical inferences and to assess etymological plausibility the author invokes the principle that what is typologically more common is more likely. This is an improvement over some previous authors. However,

Brought to you by | Max-Planck-Gesellschaft - WIB6417
Authenticated | 192.87.79.51
Download Date | 6/26/13 9:22 AM

in many instances, von Mengden appeals to crosslinguistic rarity/commonness without any explicit basis, and if explicit, von Mengden relies too heavily on Greenberg (1978) to the extent that "not attested" is often used as equivalent to "not found in Greenberg (1978)".

The high point of the chapter describing the Old English system is the thorough discussion of the facts surrounding the curious Old English and other old Germanic formation of 70 through 120, which are formed as *hund* 7×10, *hund* 8×10, *hund* 9×10, *hund* 10×10, *hund* 11×10, *hund* 12×10, where *hund* is the same morpheme as that reflected in English *hundred* (originally complex, with Germanic **raþ* 'reckoning, number'). For good reasons, von Mengden characterizes this pattern as a typologically rare case of overcounting, rather than anything less or more radical (such as Germanic **hunda-* originally denoting the "long hundred", i.e., six-score, rather than the decimal hundred). Overcounting is the term used for the situation where the multiplier is numerically larger than the multiplicand, here witnessed by 11×10 and 12×10. Languages typically do not allow overcounting and have a separate lexeme at the turning point, e.g., 100 for 10×10. He rightly discredits some ideas about the reason and origin of this curiousity, yielding the state-of-the-art that we do not really know how and why (if there is a reason) it appeared. Curiously, von Mengden does not exhaustively map the phenomenon in Germanic as a whole (Goodare 1993, Ulff-Møller 1991).

Finally, in Chapter 5 ("The word class 'cardinal numeral' ", pp. 248–286), von Mengden addresses the question(s) of word-class properties of numerals. First, the status of numerals internally in Old English is discussed, where von Mengden points out, with ample illustration, that not all numerals need to have the same morphosyntactic properties, and that even if numerals share properties with nouns and/or adjectives, there may be finer distinctions that single them out as subclasses of either category. These observations are hardly new, and no over-arching theory of word classes to give them new value is presented. Second, he takes up the observation that numerals, as they progress from low values to high values, tend to progress from morphosyntactically adjective-like when low to morphosyntactically noun-like when high. Instead of putting this claim on a more crosslinguistically solid footing with the usage of an appropriate theory of word classes (cf. Evans 2000), von Mengden attempts to use it for the definition of a word class "numerals" in a logically questionable way, as summed up in "if we can identify PATTERNS of variation within one class, the variation may even be seen as a potentially defining property of that class" (p. 261). It is not clear, what, if any, is the empirical content of von Mengden's observations on numerals-adjective-noun word-class interaction in Old English or crosslinguistically.

In sum, von Mengden's book contains many valuable items of fact and inference regarding numerals in Old English and generally, as well as some that

Brought to you by | Max-Planck-Gesellschaft - WIB6417
Authenticated | 192.87.79.51
Download Date | 6/26/13 9:22 AM

do not survive the theoretical and empirical challenges of cross-language comparison.

Correspondence address: Centre for Language Studies, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, Postbus 9103, 6500 HD Nijmegen, The Netherlands; e-mail: h.hammarstrom@let.ru.nl

References

Evans, Nicholas. 2000. Word classes in the world's languages. In Geert Booij, Christian Lehmann & Joachim Mugdan (eds.), *Morphology: A handbook on inflection and word formation*, Vol. 1, 708–732. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Goodare, Julian. 1993. The long hundred in medieval and early modern Scotland. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 123. 395–418.

Greenberg, Joseph H. 1978. Generalizations about numeral systems. In Joseph H. Greenberg, Charles A. Ferguson & Edith A. Moravcsik (ed.), *Universals of language*, Vol. 3: *Word structure*, 249–295. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Ulff-Møller, Jens. 1991. The higher numerals in early Nordic texts, and the duodecimal system of calculation. In *The Audience of the Sagas: The Eighth International Saga Conference, August 11–17, 1991, Gothenburg University*, Vol. 2, 323–330. Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet.

Shobhana L. Chelliah & Willem J. de Reuse, *Handbook of descriptive linguistic fieldwork* Dordrecht: Springer, 2011. xix + 492 pages, ISBN 978-90-481-9025-6, EUR 139.05.

Reviewed by ELENA BASHIR, University of Chicago

1. Introduction

Recent interest in descriptive linguistics began to increase during the 1960s, while scholarly work on language documentation has skyrocketed since the early 1990s. Growing awareness of the urgency of documenting endangered languages makes the contemporary relevance and importance of this book ever more evident. Chelliah & de Reuse's book represents a coherent vision of the fields of language description and documentation, written by two experienced fieldworkers working closely together and in consultation with many colleagues engaged in field research. It is a multiply Janus-faced book, looking both to the past and to the future. It gives an account of the history of linguistic fieldwork (Chapter 3) and cites personal experiences of various field researchers, as well as providing guidance for future fieldwork with a view to the question of how future scholars will be able to use work being produced

Linguistic Typology 16 (2012), 324–332
DOI 10.1515/lingty-2012-0011
1430–0532/2012/016-0324
©Walter de Gruyter

Brought to you by | Max-Planck-Gesellschaft - WIB6417
Authenticated | 192.87.79.51
Download Date | 6/26/13 9:22 AM