

Bernd Kortmann: *Adverbial Subordination: A Typology and History of Adverbial Subordinators Based on European Languages.* (Empirical Approaches to Language Typology 18.) Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1997, xxiv + 425 pp., ISBN 3-11-015114-6, DM248,--

Reviewed by Pieter A. M. Seuren, Department of General Linguistics and Dialectology, Nijmegen University, The Netherlands

This book is a product of the EC-financed project EURO TYP, which seeks to establish the existence, type, and character of possible areal universals for all and only the languages spoken in Europe, regardless of

their genetic affiliation. If the project is successful, the existence of a European Sprachbund will have to be accepted. Given the many intuitive indications that the languages of Europe do indeed have a set of common features distinguishing them from non-European languages, the EUROTYP project has a certain a priori attractiveness which clearly justifies the effort.

Kortmann's book is an attempt at giving the EUROTYP hypothesis substance from the point of view of grammaticalized means of adverbial subordination. To this end the author collected a representative corpus of adverbial subordinating expressions from 50 living and three extinct European languages, out of a total the author reckons to amount to some 137 (living and extinct) languages (p. 39). The book has a synchronic as well as a diachronic dimension. Both are of a typological nature, as the author's main purpose is to establish European universals, or "Euroversals". It consists of four parts. Part I (chapters 1 to 4) is general and introductory, dealing with questions of scope, aims, theory, methodology, and data. Part II (chapters 5 to 9) deals with the grammatical definition of adverbial subordinators (ch. 5), the "equilibrium of form and meaning" (ch. 6), the "semantic space of adverbial relations" (ch. 7), areal and genetic patterns (ch. 8), and Euroversals (ch. 9). Part III consists of just chapter 10, which is, by way of case study, devoted entirely to the history of adverbial subordinators in English. Part IV, finally, likewise consists of one chapter, chapter 11, which deals with "major results and implications for future research".

The book is a strictly typological study. It is typology which provides all of the theoretical frame within which the work has been carried out and presented. The author's insistence that the book is more than a mere description is based on the wider theoretical frame provided by the typological nature of the book. As such it provides an impressive array of data, well-ordered and certainly suggestive of the "Euroversal" tendencies presented by the author. There are, however, some reservations of a methodological and theoretical nature, which are bound to weaken the claims that are put forward. First, as also noted by the author, in order to distinguish what is typically European from what is typically non-European, equal attention should be paid to the European and the non-European languages. This has not been done: the data are drawn almost exclusively from the European languages, and "control" data from non-European languages are extremely scarce, far too incidental to carry conviction.

Then, the grammatical and even more the semantic foundations are weak. The semantic notions presented are highly impressionistic, and seriously fail to do justice to well-established developments and results in

semantics and philosophy of language. The author apparently shares the widespread yet erroneous and unscientific notion that semantic facts can be dealt with satisfactorily in an impressionistic and intuitive fashion. In this respect the book fits in well with the majority of typological studies, where facile appeals are made to vague and unfalsifiable notions like iconicity, functionality, or “semantic equilibrium”. Much emphasis is placed on Zipf’s (1935) principle of least effort, despite the fact that no useful applications of this principle are found in semantic theory. There are also, here and there, somewhat half-hearted Humboldtian or Whorfian appeals to the intellectual and/or cultural development of a nation or group of nations to account for the development of certain forms of adverbial subordination. In sum, it is clear that the author is out of his depth when he treads on theoretical or formal ground. It turns out to be very hard, in practice, to reconcile a sound data-oriented approach with a sound theoretical orientation. This is a great pity, in this as well as in other typological studies, since well-founded, principled, and empirically falsifiable grammatical and semantic notions are indispensable for the proper distinction of the categories whose occurrence is studied in linguistic typology.

Despite these weaknesses, however, one must say that the book contains a wealth of very useful information on the important and empirically complex question of the reality of a European Sprachbund. Even if it falls short of providing definite proof, no-one seriously engaging in this cluster of issues can afford to ignore this study.