

**Anne Storch and Gerrit J. Dimmendaal 2014. *Number – Constructions and Semantics. Case studies from Africa, Amazonia, India and Oceania*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 366 pp., ISBN 978 90 272 5916 5**

Review by Nina Pawlak (Warsaw)

### **Introduction**

- <1> Number as a grammatical category belongs among the essential components of any human language that expresses count distinctions. In descriptive grammars it is mostly illustrated as a two-way number contrast between the singular and the plural that is attributed to nouns, pronouns and adjectives. The marking of number on nouns may be additionally realized in combination with quantifiers and numerals. Other manifestations (including agreement on verbs) are less common and their structural variation is more complex.
- <2> The book under review brings together the results of the research presented during a workshop on number conducted at the University of Cologne in 2011, but it is in fact the result of long-term research on individual languages, mostly fieldwork on poorly described languages. The volume consists of thirteen chapters dealing with different phenomena that fall under the label of ‘number’ in descriptive approaches to particular languages and provides insights into the grammatical status and functions of this category in a comparative perspective. The semantic complexity of number is given special attention in studies on individual languages.
- <3> The Editors (Anne Storch and Gerrit J. Dimmendaal) are leading scholars in African linguistics, with research experience in the field of descriptive linguistics, particularly related to studies on Nilo-Saharan languages. Coding the number in African languages creates a good perspective for investigating this category also in other languages, due to the richness of the linguistic means and complexity of the semantic content recognized so far. The volume provides a look at individual languages or small language groups from Africa (Maasai, Kambata, Dinka, Luwo, Zande, Bañounk, South-Bauchi West), but also from other parts of the world: India (Kharia), Papua (Teiwa, Greater Awyu languages) and Austronesia (Nêlêmwa and Zunga). Below are some of the book's merits drawn from the case studies that are discussed from the perspective of typological studies on languages and in particular studies on number.
- <4> The first chapter with a title in the form of the figuratively stated question “One size fits all?” by Anne Storch and Gerrit J. Dimmendaal discusses different dimensions of singularity and plurality in the grammar and semantic content of the two notions. The discussion focuses on marking number in some African languages (Hausa, Dholuo, Luwo, Maaka) and possible counterparts of their patterns in other world languages. In this introductory chapter, expressing number not only on nouns, but also on verbs and other word classes as well as the expression of information on the nature of counted objects are indicated as key topics in the studies on number.
- <5> The following chapter “Number and noun categorization” by Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald extends the discussion on correlations between number marking and semantic subcategorization of nominal referents. It shows how the number functions as an additional device in a system of classifiers in the languages of north-west Amazonia. Detailed descriptions of the system have been presented for Tariana and the endangered Arawak language, while more general observations are set in the context of neighbouring East Tucanoan languages. The investigation includes an important conclusion that number is prone to areal diffusion in a situation of language contact.

- <6> The next chapters are organized according to particular topics or linguistic means of coding the number in individual languages or language groups. Gerrit Dimmendaal's contribution on "Pluractionality and the distribution of number marking across languages" discusses 'non-canonical' number marking which affects verbs. As for the term "pluractional" coined by Paul Newman for the description of this phenomenon in Chadic (Newman 1990), it seems to be well settled in the descriptive tradition of African studies, but not in other areas of language studies (Pawlak 2009). In this investigation, attention is paid to a reinterpretation of the grammatical status of this type of number marking and its reference to idiomatic constructions. Along with the illustration of pluractional marking on verbs in a number of Nilo-Saharan and other African languages, evidence for the historical interpretation of this type of construction in Maasai, a Nilotic (Nilo-Saharan) language, is provided.
- <7> The article "Figuratively speaking – number in Kharia" by John Peterson discusses the number marking in a South Munda language of eastern-central India. The data demonstrate that number is not only a syntactic category, but it may be connected with types of syntagma and used in referential, predicative and attributive functions – rather than distinguishing traditional parts of speech. However, the functions of deference, associativity, approximation or honorificity, as they are distinguished, are hardly qualified as figureative functions that find their interpretation at a structural level.
- <8> Another study, "Number in Kambaata" by Yvonne Treis deals with number marking on common nouns as manifested in a Cushitic language. The analysis focuses on linguistic means of coding the number which interact with lexical semantics. It is demonstrated how the morphological marking of singulative and plurative forms has developed on the ground of pragmatic purposes. The concluding statement that the whole system is a less canonical inflectional category than case and gender is worth mentioning.
- <9> The contribution by Marian Klamer "The history of numeral classifiers in Teiwa (Papuan)" sheds more light on the hypothesis that number as a part of the system of classifiers is easily transferred in areal contacts. The author presents the development of Teiwa classifiers through a reanalysis of ambiguous structures. The data and their analysis provide evidence for the idea of number neutral nouns which are the basis for clarifying the opposition between singular and plural.
- <10> Isabelle Bril's "Number and numeration in Nêlêmwa and Zuanga (New Caledonia): Ontologies, definiteness and pragmatics" deals both with the number as a noun category and numerals. The implications of the analysis rely on correlating number with definiteness; it is shown that demonstrative determiners are used to mark the distinction between count and mass nouns, whereas the syntax of NP determiner phrases has its significance in coding pragmatic and discourse properties. With reference to the cultural perspective, identifying classifiers whose usage is restricted for counting ceremonial gifts is to be noted.
- <11> A sizable part of the monograph on number is devoted to the representation of African languages. The article "When number meets classification: The linguistic expression of number in Baïnouk languages" by Alexander Cobbinah & Friderike Lüpke presents number with relation to noun class systems in Atlantic languages from Senegal. In Baïnouk languages, there are singular/plural paradigms based on prefixes that coexist with marking plurals by using suffixes. The analysis of the two strategies leads to the conclusion that both prefixed as well as suffixed pluralization has derivational functions. The statement to some extent contradicts the oppositional character of singular and plural values assigned to prefixes in noun class systems.
- <12> A Western Nilotic language is presented in the article "Number in Dinka" by Torben Andersen. The analysis of singular – plural pairs is based on the phonological alternations in the root. It allows for the identification of the old system of number marking in which some nouns had a marked singular and an unmarked plural, whereas other nouns had originally marked plural, some other ones singular and plural. The whole system of number marking is therefore reconstructed as tripartite. The motivation for this differentiation is found in semantics, but for Dinka, the distinction between singular and plural forms is also marked by regular vowel alternations in nouns, e.g. *kwèl*, pl. *kwèel* 'star' (with originally morphologically marked plural); *twòɔŋ*, pl. *tòŋ* 'egg' (with originally morphologically marked singular) and *rák*, pl. *ròk* 'lulu tree' (with originally marked singular and plural). The paper also includes marking plurality in verbs, for which the term 'multiplicative' rather than 'pluractional' is used.

- <13> Another Western Nilotic language is presented to show number marking on nouns and the use of numerals in correlation with the properties of the counted objects. Anne Storch in “Counting chickens in Luwo” demonstrates the grammatical, semantic and pragmatic implications of the number category and the speakers’ cultural perspective in determining the grammatical behavior of nouns with respect to number. The interpretation of number marking on nouns correlates with the tripartite number marking system (here mentioned as singulative-marking, plural-marking and number marker-replacing strategies), but the Luwo data extend the functions of morphological markers that give more specific information about the referent in question. The term ‘nominal aspect’ is used to cover all properties which are relevant for the representation of a noun, including its spatial dimension. The article also provides some evidence on the system of numerals in Luwo and its conceptual basis (e.g. the base for ‘twenty’ is the noun meaning ‘person’).
- <14> West Chadic languages are included in the study of number with Bernard Caron’s contribution “Number in South-Bauchi West languages (Chadic, Nigeria)”. It deals with language form variations between the two subgroups of South-Bauchi West languages with special attention paid to structures coding number (noun plurals, modifiers, plurality in verbal phrase), as well as their relation with some other categories (associative, diminutive, etc.). The study reveals that number may be relevant for clarifying the distinction between the two subgroups in the genetic classification.
- <15> The category of number manifested in the grammar of an Ubangian language is discussed by Helma Pasch in “Number and numerals in Zande”. The presentation includes various aspects of morphological marking which refer to coding the semantic class of the referent as well as respecting pragmatic criteria. “Number mismatch” in some types of constructions is a very interesting instance of operations on personal pronouns that have social rather than linguistic motivations. Similarly, the use of quantifiers and numerals is involved in the information structure of the utterance and confirms their development in expressing systemic relations. The means of morphological marking of the plural in Zande also include pluractional verbs.
- <16> The final chapter “Numerals in Papuan languages of the Greater Awyu family” by Lourens de Vries deals with the body-part based numeral system in Indonesian Papua languages. The linguistic evidence is striking in its complexity and the transparency in the association between number concepts and body-parts in the languages of different subgroups. Though the counting systems are susceptible to areal influences, the lexical and grammatical variation in the genetically-related systems as well as differences in conceptualization patterns (‘head’ or ‘eye’ as central points in the system) confirm their development in close connection with cultural practices.
- <17> *Number – Constructions and Semantics* is a well-structured and perfectly edited book. The language examples are given morphological coding and translations. The contributions include a bibliography of the works cited in each chapter. The book is provided with an author index, language index and subject index. Some small typographic errors have escaped the attention of the proof-reader on p. 196 and p. 329.
- <18> The monograph under review is a unique publication based on solid linguistic material that provides evidence for the linguistic means of number marking. It is an important contribution to typology and comparative linguistics, raising issues connected to historical transformations within structures expressing number. Though it is mostly devoted to the canonical representation of number – the opposition between singular and plural – the language data demonstrate instances of their non-canonical and non-regular usage as well as morphological marking which respects the semantic features of the referents and pragmatic purposes. Various syntactic devices and ‘morphemes that are put not in their proper place’ (as, for example, it is manifested in pluractionals) provide a better understanding of number realized in interaction with other categories.
- <19> The volume contains case studies from different parts of the world (Africa, Amazonia, India and Oceania). The wide representation of African languages in the volume and focus on endangered and less known languages makes the book very unique in terms of the discussed topics. The comparative perspective is worth further investigation with the aim to include other (also European) languages. The

need for such an extension has been noted, for example, in the case of numerals, which have been discussed in some contributions that lack references to other studies related to world languages (cf. Blažek 1999).

<20> The book under review provides descriptions of language patterns that represent typologically different languages. It extends our knowledge on language structure variations, but it also contributes to interpreting the grammar of spoken languages in which linguistic patterns are not established as regular systemic oppositions but are strongly determined by communication purposes and speakers' perspectives.

### **References:**

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