

Reviews

Tatyana G. Slobodchikoff. *The evolution of the Slavic dual: A biolinguistic perspective*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books (an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield), 2019. 212 pp. [*Studies in Slavic, Baltic, and Eastern European Languages and Cultures*.] ISBN 978-1-4985-7924-7 (hardback), 978-1-4985-7925-4 (eBook).

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Indo-European comparative grammar offers many fascinating and complex language phenomena for synchronic and diachronic analysis. The dual number is undoubtedly one of the most puzzling and intensively discussed items among these. Almost all ancient IE languages had a dual in addition to singular and plural. But most of the modern languages have lost their dual in the course of their history; no IE language has gained a new dual. In the book under review, Tatyana G. Slobodchikoff gives a methodologically highly elaborated presentation and excellent analysis of how this grammatical category must have developed in the Slavic language group from a prehistoric stage through to the modern spoken languages, drawing on a large set of IE and non-IE languages for comparison. We see it as both a thrilling scholarly read and an indispensable example of methodology for many other fields of analytic language science.

Starting with a panoramic overview of the grammatical category of dual in a general perspective against a background of typology and universals, the author passes to a selection of sources from the newer history of Slavic languages. She focusses on these and considers them in the light of several insightful theoretical approaches—Humboldt 1827, Jespersen 1965, Plank 1989, Corbett 2000, Cysouw 2009—followed by a thorough step-by-step analysis and explanation of the difficult, apparently unsolvable and paradoxical linguistic problem of why the dual number is conserved in just a few of the contemporary Slavic languages while it has been entirely lost in the rest of them under seemingly identical conditions. Her new account involves a reinterpretation of Chomsky's concept of language as a biological and economic organism (Chomsky 2005, 2008 etc.), constantly changing with the purpose of improving its system of grammatical relations, oppositions, and rules, proceeding

from a given stage to another that appears to speakers to be as consistent and appropriate as possible.

If we analyze the early Slavic system of singular/dual/plural as [+singular –augmented], [–singular –augmented], and [–singular +augmented] respectively (p. 114), the dual turns out to be the most marked. This excess of markedness can simply be eliminated by “impoverishment”, as most of the Slavic languages have done in creating their singular vs. plural systems. Or it can become less marked as a “reanalyzed dual” through the principle of Morphosyntactic Feature Economy, yielding [–singular] [–augmented] expressed by two separate exponents (p. 115ff). Upper and Lower Sorbian add *-j* to their dual forms, and Slovenian adds *dva* ‘two’ to its inherited dual pronouns (e.g., *ona* > *onadva*). Therefore, as excellently demonstrated by Slobodchikoff, the different final results in the respective languages—a full three-number-system (singular, dual, and plural) in pronominal, verbal, and nominal inflexion in Slovenian and Lower and Upper Sorbian, opposed to the reduced two-number-system (singular and plural) of the pronouns, nouns and verbs in Old East Slavic and Kashubian—are due to the same driving wheel of change, the gradual appearance of a syncretism in a group of personal pronouns, as can be traced mainly to the 2nd and 1st person forms for dual and plural number, inherited from the well documented, common former language stages. Against the background of the universal rule of systematization, speakers using the respective idiom are forced to reinterpret the asymmetry of the deficient system, and to either add or remove the critical forms in order to repair it. Thus, the tendency for systematization can be considered as the motivating force of almost any step of change within a language system—with irregularities revealing remnant elements of former stages of a changing whole, at the same time usually causing its “improvement”, the direction and extent of which depend on the interpretation by the speakers.

The methodical fidelity to Chomsky’s principle of biological economy can lead, as excellently shown by the author, to convincing and fruitful results, confirming it as a reliable approach to understand language change. At those few points where this is not possible—because a language is, in fact, not really just an independent system, but rather dependent on quite a large set of social, psychological, political, historical, and even fashion-like external factors—Slobodchikoff is able to offer an elegant, convincing explanation of how the aforementioned motivating difference could have arisen from the decisive fact that the translation of the Bible, occurring at different points of time in the respective languages, met the systems in different stages of susceptibility to influence by foreign grammatical examples.

For its clear, consistent methodology, enriched with significant numbers of convincing and original proposals, this inspiring, well-structured monograph is highly recommendable as a reading on the synchrony and diachrony

of linguistic science as well as a stimulus for research and a helpful manual for linguistics students.

Some misprints should be noted: Page 7, 15, 16 etc.: Doldoserbski and Doldoserbsčina should be Dolnoserbbski and Dolnoserbbsčina. Page 50, Mon-Kher > Mon-Khmer. Page 77, Derdanc > Derganc. Page 94, example (66), the gloss should be 'You two have said.' In example (67), 3. *oni-dva* should be 3. *ona-dva*. Page 99, the 'three persons' should be 'first, second, and third'. Page 121ff., Dalmatian > Dalmatin. Page 123, example (115): "1 Mr 4.8" should be "1 Mz [i.e., Genesis] 4.8." Page 128, example (129): "We two have said." > "You two have said." Page 131, "is the elsewhere items whose context in" > "in the elsewhere items whose context is". Page 142, "Protestantism in Slovenia and Sorbian" should apparently be "...Slovenia and Lusatia" (or "Slovenian and Sorbian"?).

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