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Review on *The World Atlas of Language Structures**

The *World Atlas of Language Structure (WALS)*, ed. by Martin Haspelmath et al., Oxford: Oxford: University Press 2009, is a huge volume that Eurolinguists will not be able to ignore in their future work. It presents 142 phonological, morphological, syntactical, lexical and paralinguistic features on maps and in accompanying interpretative texts composed by a broad range of linguists. Contributions on morphology and syntax are by far the majority. In addition, there is a CD (with only a few layout shortcomings) that allows users to combine two linguistic features from the WALS and to have their individual maps produced then. Some maps of the atlas cover up to 1,000 languages; the original target minimum was 200 languages per map, but this was not reached in every case—which is astonishing when you read that the editors had provided linguistic experts for every one of the 200 core languages and when you take into account that the missing languages are often languages that are well documented.

In general, the WALS provides readers with a first valuable introduction to a linguistic issue, but readers also have to know what kind of data is included. For some languages, there are very professional, well elaborate dictionaries and grammars, for others there are not. For some languages, there are normative standard varieties, for other languages there are not. With view to European languages, readers have to be aware that what is represented on the maps are the standard varieties in their written form representing the supposedly most neutral form. Some of the authors include a hedging remark on this problem in their comments. But it is nevertheless a pity that non-standard varieties were practically fully neglected, especially since this would in several cases have led to different pictures.

In Chapter 45, “Politeness Distinctions in Pronouns”, for instance, the inclusion of spoken language would reveal that the T/V-distinction has practically died out in Norway (cf. Fretheim 2005: 145) and in several parts of Latin America (cf. Frago Gracia / Figuerra 2003: 138).

In Chapter 49, “Number of Cases”, German would be given as having 3 cases, not 4 cases, since it has become widespread to renounce a synthetic case distinction of nominative and accusative in all declension classes (instead of the original differences between *Friede* ‘peace’ vs. *Frieden* ‘peace-ACC.SG’ and *Präsident* ‘president’ vs. *Präsidenten* ‘president-ACC.SG’, many people have generalized *Frieden* and *Präsident*).

If non-standard varieties had been included, Dryer would not claim on p. 455 that “Double negation is also widespread, except for Europe”, but he would say that double negation is widespread in Europe. And Nichols and Peterson would realize that not only English lacks a 2nd person singular pronoun including a [t] (because it was replaced by the original 2nd

* This text was originally a review written for the journal *WORD* in 2006. As I have not heard anything from the *WORD* editors since then and as the issues seem to have ceased being published, I offer it here. The text has been slightly supplemented by references to the recent article by Kortmann (2009). This review focusses on European languages; a review focussing on languages from other parts of the world was written Mark Donohue for *LINGUIST List* 17.1055 (2006).

person plural), but also several Spanish dialects, particularly in Latin America (where the same process happened).

This lack of inclusion of non-standard and non-written varieties is also viewed very critically by Kortmann (2009, cf. particularly p. 178f., where he points out that English is predominantly a language with a relative particle, not a language with relative pronouns, and that English dialects abound with multiple negation).

Here are some more critical remarks on European languages that I noted at first reading:

In Chapter 24, “Locus of Marking in Possessive Noun Phrases”, Nichols and Bickel distinguish between (1) head marking, (2) dependent marking, (3) double marking and (4) no marking of possessive relationship. Let us take the phrase ‘John’s house’. For Europe, Type 2 and 3 are given as the typical constructions. Type 2 would be represented by G. *Johanns Haus* and Russ. *dom Ivana* (and the same holds for the other Slavic languages, which are not represented on the map). Type 2 is also said to be represented by Hungarian. In fact, though, the neutral construction in Hungarian is Type 1, *János háza* (lit. “János house-his”); a marked construction is Type 3, *Jánosnak háza* (lit. “János-DAT house-his”); type 2 does not exist in Standard Hungarian. For Spanish, type 3 is given as the usual construction, while French is seen as being a type 4 language. As a matter of fact, there is no structural difference between a Spanish *la casa de Juan* and a French *la maison de Jean* (and an English *the house of John*). Since there is exactly one marker, the possible classifications can only be seen as Type 1 or as Type 2. The authors categorize the English *of*-construction (their example phrase is *the price of oil*) as Type 2 (for which there are good phonetic reasons, as pauses are potentially made before and never after *of*). But then the French and the Spanish constructions need to be subsumed here as well. And the same holds for Italian and Dutch, which are not represented on this map.

In Chapter 49, “Number of Cases”, Iggesen adopts Blake’s (1994) definition of case: “Case is a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads. Traditionally the term refers to inflectional marking”. With this definition, English is classified as having 2 cases for nouns. However, it is doubtful whether the *s*-marker can really be seen as a case marker in this definition, considering the fact that as a rule the marker is not attached to the head noun of a phrase, but at the end of the entire noun phrase, e.g. the *Queen of England’s family*, not the **Queen’s of England family*.

In Chapter 53, “Ordinal Numbers”, Stolz and Veselinova see two types of forming the ordinals in Europe: (1) “first, two-th, three-th” and (2) “first, second, three-th”. In Group (1) we find German and Dutch. However, if we have a look at the cardinal ‘3’ and the corresponding ordinal, we see that this is only true from a diachronic point, not from a synchronic point: G. *drei – dritter*, Du. *drie – derde*. This also holds true for many members of the second group: English, Italian, Spanish, Ladin, Hungarian, Russian, for example. And if a separate group “first/one-th, two-th, three-th” is defined for Romani is put in a separate group, then French should not be put in the above-mentioned Group 2, but in a separate group “first, second/two-th, three-th”.

If in Chapter 65, “Perfective/Imperfective Aspect”, Dahl and Veluppilai explicitly include both morphological and periphrastical ways in grammatical marking of perfective/imperfective distinction, then it surprises that they claim English to have no such marking despite the opposition of *I lived there* : *I have lived there* : *I have been living there*. They are also wrong when, in the succeeding chapters, they categorize Portuguese as having no inflectional future tense and no perfect form, since ‘I will eat’ can be rendered as *comerei*, ‘I ate’ as *comi*.

In Chapter 131, “Numeral Bases”, Comrie spots three languages in Europe that have hybrid vigesimal-decimal system. This is right for Basque and Danish. But it is not that simple for Irish. It is true that *fiche* ‘20’ is synchronically not related to *dhá* ‘2’, but it is so synchronically. The form *daichead* ‘40’ on the other hand is indeed ‘2x 20’ diachronically (< *dá fichead*, cf. Vendryes 1987: 87f.), but are people aware of it, synchronically. Moreover, there is also the synonym *ceathracha* ‘40’, which is clearly ‘4x 10’, and *seasca* ‘60’ and *ochtó* ‘80’ are not ‘3x 20’ and ‘4x 20’ but include the bases *se* ‘6’ and *ocht* ‘8’. So does this justify to view Irish as a hybrid vigesimal-decimal system?

In Chapter 132-135, Kay and Maffi report on color terms. Here, they claim that Russian has 6 non-derived basic color terms (for black, white, red, yellow, green, blue) and 11 color terms altogether (plus gray, orange, purple, pink). This ignores the problem that *goluboy* ‘light blue’ and *siniy* ‘dark blue’ are not derived from each other and they both seem basic (cf. also Davies/Corbett 1994).

Despite these points of criticism, though, the WALS offers good rough pictures on the distribution of language structures around the world. For a first and rapid information, the atlas and the texts are of tremendous value. However, if you need thorough information on the presence and absence of linguistic structures, readers should double-check the information and they should also look for studies on spoken and non-standard varieties.

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