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ALESSANDRA GIORGI's 'Reflections on the *optimal solution*: On the syntactic representation of indexicality' discusses sequence-of-tense phenomena, illustrating both the syntax of indexicality and a question for minimalists: are various languages different but equally optimal solutions to the same interface demands? In Italian, so-called 'double access' readings are not possible with complementizer deletion. In some other languages, a corresponding contrast is marked with a past/imperfective distinction. But Giorgi proposes that morphological variation 'is only a superficial clue' (416) to the real determinants, which lie at the semantic interface. Defense comes via penetrating discussion of long-distance anaphors in Italian and Chinese, leading to the suggestion that at least in this case, all languages are optimal given 'the appropriate level of abstraction' (416).

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Historical linguistics and the comparative study of African languages. By GERRIT J. DIMMENDAAL. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011. Pp. xviii, 421. ISBN 9789027211781. \$158 (Hb).

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As indicated by the title, this important new work attempts to wed the traditional field of historical linguistics with the comparative study of African languages. This is a particularly welcome effort by one of the world's most distinguished scholars in African linguistics. Although most of Gerrit Dimmendaal's research has centered around Nilotic and adjacent areas of East Africa, much of which he cites, D makes a serious effort to treat other areas and linguistic groups from throughout the continent. The result is an impressive reference work that students and scholars alike will want to own and consult. D's coverage of issues is extensive, as he addresses not only linguistic reconstruction and language classification, but also issues that arise in the study of language in context. As a result one gets a feel not only for the forms and where they come from, but also for how they are actually used in various African communities. The over thirty pages of references (373–406) further attest to the serious scholarship that went into the production of this work.

Although there have been recent books introducing African linguistics (Heine & Nurse 2000, Mutaka & Tamanji 2000, Childs 2003), areal linguistics (Heine & Nurse 2008), and language history (Blench 2006), D's goal in writing this book is quite unique. As he states in the preface, his original intention was to produce a historical linguistics textbook drawing mostly from African languages, wishing especially to target 'many students in African countries [who] do not have access to more recent developments in historical-comparative linguistics or to the literature published on language families in their home countries' (ix).

What this book in part represents, then, is an experiment: as opposed to the standard texts based on Indo-European, the question is whether one can successfully teach historical linguistics drawing primarily from African languages (or similarly for other language areas, for example, Australia and the Pacific; Crowley & Bower 2010). D goes on to say, however, that the ultimate publication strays from his original intention:

The initial plan was to write an introduction to comparative linguistics with special focus on Africa. Due to the fact that the original manuscript had to be reduced considerably, the end result was a much more dense presentation of information on different topics, which also requires more extensive basic knowledge of linguistics. As a result, the text probably is no longer suitable as an introduction for undergraduates. Instead, it has become a textbook for more advanced students of linguistics and colleagues working

on language families outside of Africa with an interest in a state of the art in African linguistics as seen by the present author. (x)

D thus often refers to the book as 'a monograph on the comparative study of African languages' (245). This pinpoints two problems, which we note in our review. The first is that this is not one book, but two: in Part 1 (Chs. 1–7) it starts out as an introductory textbook in historical linguistics, but it gradually transforms in Parts 2 and 3 (Chs. 8–16) into D's view of how African languages bear on comparative and historical issues, including controversial ones. Beyond the early chapters on the comparative method that cite well-accepted concepts and Indo-European examples, the later topics are increasingly qualified by the phrase 'in the present author's view'. This duality produces certain organizational as well as conceptual problems, which students and other readers will have to disentangle.

The second problem concerns the content itself. At various points in reading the book, we came away with the feeling that it needed more serious editing and proofreading. Although most of the infelicities that occur should be quite easy to correct, the organizational issues will likely require some revision, should D (and the publisher) consider a second edition.

As indicated, the volume consists of three parts. Part 1, 'The comparative method' (Chs. 1–7), is concerned with methodology and the mechanisms of linguistic change as they affect sound systems, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Part 2, 'The linguistic manifestation of contact' (Chs. 8–12), treats the role of language contact and its historical effects, for example, in producing pidgins and creoles, mixed languages, and language shift. Part 3, 'Studying language change in a wider context' (Chs. 13–16), situates language change within typology, genetics, geography, history, evolution, and culture. D's conception of historical linguistics is thus quite broad.

Let us first consider this work as a textbook, particularly Part 1 (1–176), which constitutes slightly less than half of the book. The seven chapters are: 'Explaining similarities' (Ch. 1), 'Explaining sound change' (Ch. 2), 'Classification and subclassification techniques' (Ch. 3), 'Morphosyntactic changes' (Ch. 4), 'Semantic change' (Ch. 5), 'Internal reconstruction' (Ch. 6), and 'Language-internal variation' (Ch. 7). Except for Ch. 3, which seems misplaced (with duplications in Chs. 12 and 14), these chapters proceed as one might expect of an introductory textbook in historical linguistics. However, textbooks differ in their emphases on two needs. The first is the need to provide a knowledge base—for example, what is known about linguistic change. The second is the 'how-to' function, whereby the student is taught the methodologies and walked through the ways in which they can be applied. Most of the textbook aspect of D's book is of the first type. Although he does present the steps involved in applying the comparative method (13), the chapter on internal reconstruction is not heavy on didactics and is quite short (141–51). What D does show is that it is possible to do historical linguistics with the various methodologies and phenomena exemplified from African languages.

The successes of Part 1 are, however, limited by certain recurrent problems. The first concerns structure. Although D provides a one-to-two-page introduction before each of the three parts, and a paragraph introduction, preceded by a mini table of contents, before all but Ch. 5, the chapters suffer from not having enough subsections. For example, section 6.1, 'The historical relevance of synchronic morphophonemic alternations', consists of seven and a half pages of successive examples from Swahili, Pãri, Dutch, Hausa, Greek, Proto-Indo-European laryngeals, Bari, Turkana, and Hausa again, without any clear indication of where the discussion is going. Since important concepts (which might have served as subsections) are only presented in bold in the text, the reader has no guide other than to follow D's prose, which often precedes the crucial example illustrating the point. This leads to a second problem concerning questions of priority: D defines terms such as *synonymy* and *homonymy* (115–17), which can be assumed to be known by the reader, but not *evidentiality* (128, 209), *logophorics* (209, 329), or *ergativity* (245, 330). At the other extreme, obscure and perhaps unnecessary technical terms such as *anaptyxis* (42, 43, 48), *paragoge* (42, 43), and *synecdoche* (120, 139, 251) are bolded and defined in the text.

In a textbook, precision is especially important. Readers will, however, have trouble figuring out what Swahili *maziwa* 'breast' is not cognate with (20), where the context 'between vowels' is in the Susu or Kpelle lenition examples (24), or what the taboo is in Kambaata (111). Elsewhere

D miswrites: 'before nasals' meaning 'before nasal+consonant complexes' (18), 'the head of the syllable' meaning 'the onset' (41), 'structure preservation' meaning 'contrast preservation' (47), and 'there may be multiple origins for specific sound changes' meaning 'specific sounds'. Instead of giving an appropriate example, D misidentifies the simplification of single labiovelar consonants (*kp, *gb > p, b) as 'cluster reduction' (26) and elsewhere misassigns Shona, Venda, and N. Sotho to the Nguni subgroup of Southern Bantu (65). While we found few real typographical errors, several appear in the table of Proto-Bantu high vowels (21), which make it totally useless to those who do not already know what it is about. Other such examples reinforce that a more critical proofreading should have been exercised.

Chapters beyond Part 1 become gradually less textbook- and more monograph-like and original, often presenting D's personal views on cutting-edge issues. Part 2 (177–280) consists of five chapters: 'Borrowing' (Ch. 8), 'Pidginisation and creolisation' (Ch. 9), 'Syncretic languages' (Ch. 10), 'Language contraction and language shift' (Ch. 11), and 'Language contact phenomena and genetic classification' (Ch. 12). Part 3 (281–372) consists of four chapters: 'Language typology and reconstruction' (Ch. 13), 'Remote relationships and genetic diversity on the African continent' (Ch. 14), 'Language and history' (Ch. 15), and 'Some ecological properties of language development' (Ch. 16). As seen from these titles, a real strength of the second half of the book is D's view that you cannot understand linguistic change without considering history, sociolinguistics, contact, geography, and areal typology:

the present author is very much in favour of integrating 'conceptual' components of language into the historical-comparative study of languages, as more interesting results, in terms of explanatory adequacy, are obtained by taking into account semantics and pragmatics as well as culture and cognition, rather than excluding these from 'core linguistics'. (282)

If Part 1 largely fills out a template of textbook historical linguistics, Parts 2 and 3 elaborate more on what African-based phenomena have contributed, and can further contribute, to our understanding of language from a comparative and historical perspective. For example, D's discussion of Sango, Fanagalo, Nubi, and additional Bantu- and Arabic-based pidgins and creoles is an effective counterpoint to the typical Caribbean postcolonial focus. Concerning mixed or 'syncretic' languages, D approves Mous's (2003) interpretation of the well-known case of Mbugu, which consists of two registers (one Bantu, one Bantu with Cushitic and Nilotic lexicon), but rejects Nicolai's (1990) hypothesis that certain varieties of Songhai emerged as a creolized mixture of Berber and Mande. It is good that D includes the role that special-purpose languages play in language change, a new line of research (Storch 2011).

As mentioned, D presents more of his own ideas in these chapters, including the following with respect to syncretic languages and classification:

Rather than claiming that these languages defy genetic classification, a position taken by Thomason and Kaufman (1988), Bakker (2003), or Matras and Bakker (2003), it is claimed here that they can be and should be classified, because there is always a matrix language involved. (276)

Apart from mixing up the genetic and typological classifications of languages, in the present author's view, scholars sometimes seem to mix up, what Manessy (1990) has called, the *gènèse* (genesis) and the *généalogie* (genealogy) of languages. The first concept relates to all the processes which contributed to the 'constitution' or present structure of a language, whereas the second relates to inherited structures. (268)

D argues that any classification that ignores the genealogical contribution to the development of languages is 'essentially a-historical in nature' (274).

Resolving such issues would require more space than can be allotted in such a broad work. What this book does extremely well is offer an updated reassessment of Greenberg's (1963) classification of African languages, based on subsequent research, including D's own. Whereas Greenberg proposed four phyla (Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, Afro-Asiatic, and Khoisan), D provides a table (328) and an appendix (407–8) of over twenty families and isolates. Former subgroups of Niger-Congo become separate families (Mande, Dogon, Ijaw, Ubangian), while Khoisan is split into three plus an isolate (Hadza). Similarly, the former Songhai and Koman sub-

groups of Nilo-Saharan become separate families and Gumuz an isolate. Only Afro-Asiatic stays intact. Although some will disagree with one or another of D's proposals, separating Ubangian from Niger-Congo being perhaps the most controversial, all scholars appear now to accept more than four phyla. As the volume provides the best summary of recent thinking, it is likely to become a standard reference for African language classification.

To sum up, this is an important book with much to offer to students, Africanists, and linguists in general. To make it into an actual textbook would require a more pedagogical approach including exercises. Instead, if a second edition is considered, we would like to suggest that it be entirely refocused on African languages, with modest expansion: for example, adding overlooked comparative and historical work such as that on Grassfields Bantu (Hyman & Tadjadjeu 1976, Bouquiaux 1980, Elias et al. 1984). This means dropping much or all of the Indo-European examples and obscure terminology, but more importantly basing the discussions in Part 1 entirely around the historical development of the specific African phenomena one would expect to find in a general work of this sort, for example, ATR harmony, tone, clicks, noun classes, verb extensions, serial verbs, logophorics, and the grammaticalization paths that have so widely figured in African languages (e.g. Heine & Reh 1984, Heine et al. 1991). It is striking that none of the above occur in the subject index (the language index is more extensive), making it extremely difficult to locate the numerous mentions, for example, of ATR (47–49, 92, 107–8, 143, 171–72, 196, 210–11, 289, 317). With such a change, the second edition, perhaps retitled *The historical and comparative study of African languages*, would be a more coherent monograph of even greater value.

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The contrastive hierarchy in phonology. By B. ELAN DRESHER. (Cambridge studies in linguistics 121.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xii, 280. ISBN 9780521182355. \$49.99.

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The concept ‘contrast’ is one of the most fundamental notions of phonology. This book focuses on two aspects of contrast: the ideas that only contrastive features are part of phonology, and that contrast is expressed by a language-specific hierarchy of features. Besides exploring theoretical hypotheses, the book extensively traces the development of ideas from Sapir to the present, and stands as the most significant work of scholarship on contrast in modern phonology. Indeed, the majority of the book concerns development of ideas leading to the author’s theory, rather than isolated promulgation of that theory. The first sentence of the book establishes the guiding logic, quoting de Saussure: ‘In a language there are only differences ...’, but modifying this by giving some status to phonetics, saying that ‘a phoneme is identified not only by its positive characteristics ... but also by what it is not—that is, by the sounds that it contrasts with’ (1). Under the approach of this book, the fact of being a linguistically distinct unit is the primary fact to be accounted for, and phonetic properties suggest particular features such as [nasal]. This distinguishes Dresher’s theory from the traditional generative emphasis on phonetic description of language sound where contrast is epiphenomenal.

Given the complexity of the topic, it is unsurprising that certain aspects are not investigated much. D’s treatment presupposes a determination of what the distinctive sounds (phonemes) of a language are, and accounts for how features are specified in phonemes. A reader in search of a definitive statement of the conditions for phoneme versus allophone status must resolve that matter elsewhere. D states, ‘In all the examples that follow I will assume that we know what the contrasts are at this most basic level’ (2). The central analytic question in this theory is which dimension for differentiating sounds is relevant, which means for a language having /i u/ determining whether these sounds contrast in terms of [back], [round], or both. D’s central thesis is that phonetics alone does not determine the phonological analysis of sounds; thus, the phonetic qualities of /i e a o u/ in Czech and Slovak are the same, but the fact that Slovak also has /ä/ motivates different analyses of /a/ in the languages. Moreover, languages with the same contrastive vowel inventory—Czech and Russian—can have different featural treatments of that inventory.

The theory centers on the SUCCESSIVE DIVISION ALGORITHM (SDA), which uses feature ordering found especially in work by Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle. In each language, features are assigned in a language-particular order, termed a CONTRASTIVE HIERARCHY. The SDA assumes that the set of ‘all sounds are allophones of a single undifferentiated phoneme’, but ‘if the set is found to consist of more than one contrasting member’ (16), then following the feature order of the language, the feature divides the set into as many subsets as possible. This is repeated until every set has only one contrastive member. This computes a system of feature values for the phonemes, given a hierarchy and knowledge of which sounds are phonemes. In a language with the bilabial stop inventory /p b m/, if [voiced] is higher in the hierarchy than [nasal], then /p b m/ have analysis 1a, but if [nasal] is higher than [voiced], they have analysis 1b.