TYPOLOGY OF AGREEMENT SYSTEMS, Prikaz knjige Ranka Matasovića AN AREAL TYPOLOGY OF AGREEMENT SYSTEMS

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TYPOLOGY OF AGREEMENT SYSTEMS

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AN AREAL TYPOLOGY OF AGREEMENT SYSTEMS

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Theoretical and practical approaches to agreement in various languages can be found in the grammar books of the languages in question, and in numerous scientific and expert papers. Papers that compare agreement in two related languages, or within a particular language family, also deal with this topic. However, there are not many papers that offer a model for determining the agreement properties of all the languages that is based on clear theoretical foundations and a systematic methodology.

Ranko Matasović's *An Areal Typology of Agreement Systems* is precisely one such book. It was published in 2018 by the Cambridge University Press, a renowned publisher of scientific works. The book is the result of ten years of research.

The book is divided into two parts: *Theoretical Prerequisites* and *Empirical Results*. It contains several lists (*List of Figures, List of Maps, List of Tables* and *List of Abbrevia-*

tions), indices (*Language Index* and *Subject Index*), a rich list of references consisting of some 400 bibliographic units (*References*), while the *Appendix: Languages in the Database* will be particularly useful for the readers.

But in order to assess the usefulness of this additional element, that is, in order to see how to use this excellent table, we must start from the beginning.

In the chapter titled *What is Agreement?* the author presents new theoretical perspectives on the essence and nature of agreement. His goal is to try to redefine a seemingly well-known linguistic phenomenon. He departs from Corbett's approach to agreement in which it is seen as "systematic covariance between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another" (Greville Corbett, *Agreement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), but he is also open to other approaches, among others to

the one that singles out case agreement as a special category in relation to the gender, number and person agreement.

Matasović's view of *agreement* (or *concord*, as it also used to be called) falls within the framework of the above cited Corbett's definition, but he defines it in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions. He states: "It is assumed in this book that a language either has or does not have syntactic patterns that can be subsumed under the notion of agreement" (p. 18).

Agreement includes a number of syntactic patterns, and the author, in addition to defining the concept, also lists these patterns which are later used as the basis for the empirical part of the book "(a) agreement in person/number; (b) agreement in person/number(/gender); (c) case agreement in the NP; (d) in person(/number) agreement in the NP" (p. 19).

Although he finds reasons to view *government* as a special type of agreement, he still sees the need for a clear distinction between agreement and government. Without this, it would be impossible to make any generalisations in the practical part of the research, because, as will be revealed, not all languages have both types of dependence – some have only one and not the other, and vice-versa.

In fact, it turns out that there is also global asymmetry in the distribution of certain categories and rules of agreement.

The author has set himself an enormous task – to determine which areal, typological and genetic rules make up agreement. This places his research in the domain of areal typology, "the linguistic discipline that seeks to discover areal patterns in the distribution of linguistic features in the world's languages" (p. 3).

After this first chapter, which is of great theoretical importance, comes the chapter titled *Domains of Agreement and Categories Involved*. It starts from the generally accepted stance that the most common agreement pattern within the domain of clause is verbal agreement, but the author finds that examples from different languages reveal that this is not a universal rule.

Therefore, he finds that "the two chief domains of agreement are NP and the clause. In both domains, agreement takes place between the head and its dependents. The head is the element which determines the type of construction in question" (p. 20).

Starting from these two domains, Matasović defines the starting point for his theoretical and empirical research: "In the clause, *verbal agreement* is the pattern in which the verb is – under syntacti-

cally or phonologically specifiable conditions – obligatorily modified by morpheme (affix and clitic) expressing the agreeing category. /.../ *Nominal agreement* is the pattern in which all or some adnominal modifiers within the NP are – under syntactically or phonologically specifiable conditions – obligatorily modified by a dependent morpheme (affix and clitic) expressing the agreeing category" (p. 21).

The categories of person, number and gender are linked to verbal agreement, while the categories of gender, number and case are linked to nominal agreement.

The sections in which he presents different categories (p. 25–41) do not include one on cases. Matasović discusses the cross-linguistically most common patterns in which agreement is observed – the categories of person, number and gender, which is expected because the analysis then turns to various languages, many of which do not have all the categories that are involved in agreement (e.g. many languages lack the category of case which is present in, for example, Croatian). Naturally, the author does not neglect the category of case or any other categories either in the theoretical or in the practical part of his research, and in his book, he refers to them as "other smaller categories" (p. 37–41).

By putting emphasis on certain categories, the author signals which categories are present in world languages to such an extent that they constitute the basic traits of agreement. On the other hand, the distribution of some other categories is more limited.

However, as the book progresses, the category of case appears more and more, and in the table in the *Appendix* the author logically adds the category of case. When it comes to nominal agreement, this column in the table contains a lot of 'NO' answers. However, the category of case has proven to be relevant for a great number of languages and has joined the first two categories in nominal agreement: gender and number.

In the chapter *Problems with Agreement* the author identifies a number of phenomena that are or are not, or are to a limited extent, part of the agreement relations. He also establishes the methodological principles that enable comparison of the results. He states: "It is necessary to determine in advance which types of constructions will be counted as instantiating agreement for any areal typology to make sense" (p. 10).

In the next chapter, *Grammatical, Ambiguous and Anaphoric Agreement*, the author discusses verbal and adnominal agreement as com-

parable phenomena. He also analyses Anna Siewerska's typology from 1999 and 2004.

In the chapter titled *Marginal Agreement* the author is attempting to identify marginal rules of agreement in all the languages his analysis includes. He also discusses whether such rules, even though they are marginal, could have an impact on the statistical generalisation for a particular area.

This concludes the first, theoretical part of the book and opens the empirical – *Empirical Results*. The chapter titled *The Sample of Languages* brings methodological explanations that are necessary for the analyses that follow: *The Construction of the Samples* and *The Design of the Database*.

The author divides the world into five macro-areas: "1. Eurasia, 2. Africa and the Middle East, 3. North America, 4. South America and 5. Australia and Oceania" (p. 77). He explains how he collected his materials and how he decided on the 300 languages in a world in which currently around 6000 languages are used, i.e. how he decided on around 5 percent of the world's linguistic diversity, and why he has decided to include these 300 languages. He points to sources such as *Ethnologue* and *Glottolog*.

The goal of such a detailed overview was to determine a general typology of the agreement system, and this is why the author decided to include such a great number of languages – the greater the number of the languages included, the higher the likelihood that general rules will be determined and that specific traits than only some groups of languages or individual languages possess will be identified.

Since the analysis includes 300 languages, it is understandable that all the big languages are included, but also numerous small languages, which means that both those languages that have millions of speakers and those that have only tens of thousands are included. It also means that those languages that are being learned by people all over the world, and those whose names most people have never heard of are included, but also that languages the grammar of which, including the agreement rules, has been described in detail, are included just like some for which it was much more difficult to find the relevant information (and, as a result, the author has decided to leave out some information in the comparative table in the Appendix).

Areal and Genetic Patterns in Agreement Systems is the central and the largest part of the book. The chapter is subdivided into sections, and each section deals with the distribution of agreement patterns in

one macro-area. The analyses are accompanied by maps that display languages with particular agreement patterns. The author also includes several maps that show differences among the macro-areas. For example, one map shows that there are few languages with case agreement, while another one shows that there are many languages with adnominal agreement.

In this chapter "it was shown that certain agreement patterns are areally biased, in the sense that they are more common in some parts of the word and that pure chance cannot be responsible for the observed areal distribution of these features" (p. 123).

On the basis of his analysis, in the chapter titled *Typological Correlations in Agreement Systems,* Matasović determines correlations between different rules of agreement in different languages and presents statistical data that support his claims. He pays special attention to the following relations: adnominal and verbal agreement; grammatical verbal agreement and adnominal agreement; person agreement in the NP and in the verb. Finally, he also shows the correlations between agreement and word order. This relation is not simple to explain, because word order is seldom absolutely free or absolutely rigid, and in different languages

there are different levels of freedom. He also looks at the SVO/OVS or AN/NA languages and agreement patterns in them, but even though such correlations "might be supposed on theoretical ground, no such correlation is manifested in our data" (p. 135).

In the final chapter titled *Diachronic Patterns in the Development of Agreement,* as an expert on historical and comparative grammar, Matasović offers a number of historical hypotheses that could explain why the geographical distribution of certain agreement patterns appears to be unexpected. On the basis of the insight into the historical state of affairs, he discusses, for example, probable paths in the development of adnominal agreement. Here we would like to stress the development of agreement systems. Naturally, a language may also develop in the opposite direction, i.e. it may display loss of agreement.

At the end of this chapter, Matasović concludes: "we can say that the key of our understanding of how the current distribution of different agreement patterns arose lies in the different diachronic paths by which different types of agreement tend to be acquired or lost" (p. 152).

The conclusion, which sums up the findings, is followed by the already mentioned *Appendix: Lan-*

guages in the Database – which shows the presence, that is, the absence of certain agreement rules in the 300 world languages that are analysed in this book.

The languages are presented in the table in the alphabetical order, their ISO code is given, and they are placed within their language family and areas. The table also contains markings YES and NO for the three agreement rules for nominal agreement (AA-G, AA-N, AA-C) and the three agreement rules for verbal agreement (VA-P, VA-N, VA-G), and the last column contains references.

Actually, the book contains a reduced table, because the original one contains several other columns which have not been included due to technical reasons. However, the information contained in them can be found in the narrative analysis.

In the table, the Croatian language (p. 158) is placed into the Indo-European family and the Eurasia area, and out of the six analysed patterns it has five: nominal agreement in the categories of gender, number and case, and verbal agreement in the categories of person and number. The only one that is missing is verbal agreement in the category of gender. In the other two Slavic languages included in this analysis (Polish and Russian) this rule is also marked with YES, so it is not clear why this is not the case with Croatian, and since

there are no references, this cannot be checked.

Let us now move to the conclusion of this review of *An Areal Typology of Agreement Systems*. On the basis of the theoretical foundations and his chosen methodology, Matasović has determined the agreement patterns in each of the chosen languages. This enables us to compare the data and draw conclusions about each language and its place among the world languages.

With respect to the categories of person, gender, number and case he has proven that the languages of the world can be mapped and that significant differences can be found among them, even among those that belong to the same language family.

Among the results presented here, one should be singled out: the limitations of nominal agreement are greater than those of the verbal, and nominal agreement is realized if verbal agreement is realized (but not vice-versa) (p. 153).

It has also been determined that case agreement is limited by area and that it is linked to certain language families. As we have already seen, there are differences even within language families. What is relevant for the Croatian language is that differences can be observed within the Indo-European family.

The author concludes that he has set himself a purely descriptive task:

"It attempted to draw a map of how one interesting linguistic phenomenon is distributed among the world's languages" (p. 153). This goal has been accomplished – this book offers the linguistic community a reliable map of the cross-linguistic distribution of different agreement systems.

The author also leaves some questions open. Actually, this is the most interesting part from the scientific perspective. Knowing all the answers is no motivation for further work, but not having all the answers means opening up space for new research.

Ranko Matasović's book *An Areal Typology of Agreement Systems* is required reading for any linguist who wants to study not just interlinguistic, but also intralinguistic morphosyntactic relations.

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