

Paradigms

Empirical Approaches to Language Typology 9

Editors

Georg Bossong
Bernard Comrie

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Paradigms

The Economy of Inflection

edited by

Frans Plank

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Contributors

Andrew Carstairs—McCarthy, Department of English, University of Canterbury, Christchurch 1, New Zealand.

Catherine V. Chvany, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA.

Robert Coleman, Emmanuel College, Cambridge CB2 3AP, England.

Bernard Comrie, Department of Linguistics, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-1693, USA.

Gerrit J. Dimmendaal, Afrikaanse Taalkunde, Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden, Postbus 9515, NL-2300 RA Leiden, The Netherlands.

Jadranka Gvozdanović, Slavisch Seminarium, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Spuistraat 210, NL-1012 VT Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Jeffrey Heath, Program in Linguistics, University of Michigan, 1076 Frieze Building, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA.

Aleksandr E. Kibrik, Kafedra strukturnoj i prikladnoj lingvistiki, Filologičesky fakultet, Moskovskij Universitet, Moskva, USSR.

Silvia Luraghi, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, USA.

Katherine McCreight, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA.

Frans Plank, Philosophische Fakultät, Universität Konstanz, Postfach 5560, D-7750 Konstanz 1, Federal Republic of Germany.

Arnold M. Zwicky, Department of Linguistics, Ohio State University, 1841 Millikin Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1229, USA.

Preface

Recent years have seen several individual attempts to shed new light on inflectional paradigms, or also to recall and reappraise relevant insights of the past. This volume is a collective effort to document the kind of (non-partisan) work currently being done in this area, and thus to consolidate the renaissance of one of the most venerable notions in morphology. What we especially hope to encourage is a more intensive search for *generalisations* about the structure of paradigms, in the various kinds of languages which have any, which in the past has been hampered by an inclination to regard paradigms, those perennially popular representational devices, as repositories of the particular (almost like dictionaries).

This collection grew out of a workshop I organised at the Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea, held at Freiburg im Breisgau, 13–15 July 1988. The twelve papers presented on this occasion, dealing with various aspects of the structure of paradigms, proved too heterogeneous to be usefully assembled in a single volume. It seemed preferable to focus on a more limited range of questions, and ones that would generally be considered to be fundamental for Comparative Paradigmatics. In light of the emphasis of much ongoing research and of a strong tradition in morphological typology, I suggested that patterns of the dearth and the profusion of inflections, i. e. of deviations from the ideal norm of “one meaning – one form”, to which languages called “agglutinative” represent the closest actual approximations, should be the leitmotif of prospective contributions. What was sought, thus, were language-particular and comparative, synchronic and diachronic, descriptive and explanatory accounts of patterns of formal non-distinctness in paradigms and of coexisting paradigms (declensions and conjugations) and subparadigms, reflecting on the implications of such patterns for the structure of paradigms and their representation.

Earlier versions of Carstairs', Coleman's, and Plank's papers had been prepared for the workshop at Freiburg. The other contributions were solicited afterwards and were completed during 1989, some earlier, some later. Revolutions, removals, and other vicissitudes of academic life prevented a few further prospective contributions from materialising in time.

Thanks are due to Bernard Comrie for expert and prompt comments on the entire manuscript, and to Wolfgang Schellinger for help with the proofs.

Paradigms in the form of lists are almost certain to miss out on important interconnections between the items listed. So are collections of articles, and here, for technical reasons, the arrangement is inevitably sequential. It is up to the reader to make the extra connections.

