Introduction

Theoretical studies of Latvian grammar have a great deal to offer to current linguistics. Although traditionally Lithuanian has been the most widely studied Baltic language in diachronic and synchronic linguistics alike, Latvian has a number of distinctive features that can prove valuable both for historical and perhaps even more so for synchronic language research. Therefore, at the very least, contemporary typological, areal, and language contact studies involving Baltic languages should account for data from Latvian. Typologically, Latvian grammar is a classic Indo-European (Baltic) system with well-developed inflection and derivation. However, it also bears certain similarities to the Finno-Ugric languages, which can be reasonably explained by its areal and historical background. This applies, for example, to the mood system and its connections with modality and evidentiality in Latvian, also to the correlation between aspect and quantity as manifested in verbal and nominal (case) forms. The relations between debitive mood, certain constructions with reflexive verbs, and voice in Latvian are intriguing examples of unusual morphosyntactic features.

Accordingly, the book focuses on the following topics: case system and declension (with emphasis on the polyfunctionality of case forms), gender, conjugation, tense and personal forms, aspect, mood, modality and evidentiality, reflexive verbs, and voice. The examples included in this book have been taken from the *Balanced Corpus of Modern Latvian* (*Līdzsvarots mūsdienu latviešu valodas tekstu korpuss*, available at *www.korpuss.lv*), *www.google.lv*, mass media, and fiction texts (see the List of language sources) without regard to relative frequency ratios. These examples are glossed in accordance with *The Leipzig Glossing Rules* with the exception of larger text fragments where only forms under analysis have been glossed.

This book is structured to reflect the thematic focus outlined above – the first chapter describes forms of nouns and their uses, the second chapter deals with verb conjugation, tense, and personal forms, the third chapter discusses verbal aspect, the fourth – the mood system, the fifth – modality and evidentiality, the sixth – voice, while the final seventh chapter addresses reflexive verbs. The main emphasis is placed on describing and analysing the types of facts that at least in the author's experience never fail to arouse scientific curiosity amongst scholars both in Latvia and abroad and that require concentrated yet comprehensive coverage if further contrastive or indeed any other research is to be attempted based on them. Thus, this book is not designed as a systematic grammar or a contrastive study. These are the tasks that future studies and monographs can choose to undertake hopefully using this book as a good starting point.

The tradition of scientific description of grammar in Latvian linguistics was originally deeply rooted in neogrammarianism (for example, Bielenstein 1864; Endzelīns 1922, 1951; Endzelīns & Mīlenbachs 1934 [1907], 1939 [1907]) and since the middle of the 20th century also in the ideas of the Prague structuralist school. While the *Grammar of Standard Latvian* (*Mūsdienu latviešu literārās valodas*

gramatika) (1959–1962) was still largely consistent with the neogrammarian view, the linguists Arturs Ozols, Emīlija Soida, and Jūlijs Kārkliņš working at the University of Latvia at the time had already started bringing about a radical shift in the study of morphology, word-formation, and syntax from the empirical and in many respects out-dated approach of neogrammarians to the principles of the Prague school. This meant a fundamental change of perspective in the analysis of language systems from diachronic to synchronic, which required both adjusting the traditional long-established linguistic terminology and concepts and introducing entirely new research methods and terminology. Although structuralism was one of the most modern methodologies of its time it was also one of the very few that were available to linguists behind the Iron Curtain up until the end of the 20th century. This perhaps explains why having borrowed certain isolated principles from diachronic linguistics along the way structuralism has survived in Latvian linguistics alongside empirical descriptivism into the 21st century. Only since the 1990s as a result of changes in the geopolitical situation has it become possible for researchers, linguists included, to become acquainted with the methods that had been around for a long time elsewhere in the world and to put them to use. In the field of linguistics this is true for typological, functionalist, sociolinguistic, cognitive, and pragmatic methodologies that have since been applied to the studies of Latvian, for example, by Fennell (1995a), Nau (1998), Holvoet (2001, 2007), Berg-Olsen (1999, 2005). Nevertheless these ideas have been relatively slow to penetrate the descriptions of the grammatical system of Latvian and a number of studies dealing with the morphology of Latvian published in the 21st century (for example, Kalme & Smiltniece 2001; Nītiņa 2001; Paegle 2003) are still very much in the tradition of earlier decades in that they are mainly confined to cataloguing language facts.

A Typological Perspective on Latvian Grammar is an attempt to place these facts in a broader perspective with the help of, among other things, certain functionalist and typological principles. This book is based on the author's extensive research into Latvian morphology and morphosyntax, as well as on observations and conclusions made while teaching the morphology and morphophonology of Latvian and general linguistics at the University of Latvia.

Probably everyone who has had a chance to teach linguistics at the university level has experienced the genuine surprise students often express when they realise that their native language is very similar to numerous other languages in many respects while being at the same time so profoundly different. Perhaps it was this surprise that became the keynote for the tone of this book – to show that Latvian has much in common with other languages (both genetically related and unrelated) and that it also has a number of peculiarities or distinctive features that make it special and extremely interesting to study.

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