Review

Michael T. Putnam and B. Richard Page (eds): *The Cambridge handbook of Germanic linguistics*

[Cambridge handbooks in language and linguistics]
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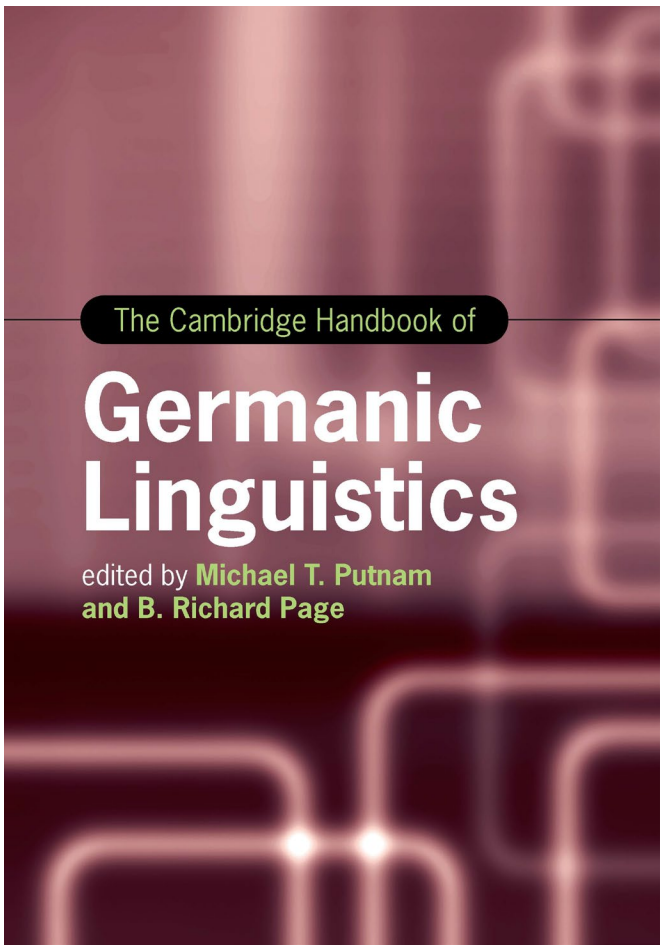

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The Cambridge handbook of Germanic linguistics is the team effort of 40 internationally renowned and experienced linguists, and the result is an impressive achievement. The *Handbook* builds on many existing in-depth studies of the individual Germanic languages, such as English, Dutch, German and North Germanic languages, but it takes a thematic, comparative approach and in doing so also includes nonstandard varieties as well as regional and minority languages, such as Frisian and Low German. The *Handbook* examines different aspects of the Germanic languages, arranged into five sections, namely (1) phonology, (2) morphology and agreement systems, (3) syntax, (4) semantics and pragmatics, and (5) language contact and nonstandard varieties. The focus is on contemporary Germanic languages and synchrony, but various chapters mention relevant diachronic aspects, which is appropriate, since the explanation of linguistic similarities (and differences) is generally to be found in the common origin of the Germanic languages.

The phonology section starts with an overview of phonological processes typically occurring in modern Germanic standard and nonstandard languages, such as assimilation, dissimilation, epenthesis and deletion. The following chapters discuss conspicuous Germanic features such as syllable structure, the role of foot structure, word stress, quantity, the phonetics and phonology of Germanic laryngeals, tone accent, and intonation. For some phenomena the similarities between the various languages are striking, for instance where Marc van Oostendorp concludes that Germanic syllable structure is remarkably stable across the various languages. Other phenomena, such as vowel quantity (described by Page), appear to have been elaborated and (re)interpreted very differently in the separate Germanic languages.

In the morphology section six basic topics are treated: inflectional morphology of verbs and nouns, word formation, grammatical gender, case, and complementizer agreement. In this section it turns out that the modern Germanic languages have all simplified the Proto-Germanic morphology, but to very different degrees. The description of the various morphological systems and the comparison between them is very illuminating, especially in those cases where the authors include Germanic varieties and dialects, and venture an explanation of the phenomena by involving linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

The syntactical section consists of 9 chapters centering on word order variation among modern Germanic languages. These of course form only a selection of the existing syntactical variation, but the most important topics are covered, such as the distinction between basic Verb Object and Object Verb ordering, the placement of finite verbs, binding, and verbal particles. In the section on semantics and pragmatics additional topics related to syntax are discussed, such as modality, tense and aspect, prepositions and particles, polarity and

information structure. From these two sections it becomes abundantly clear that syntactical and pragmatical constructions are governed by different sets of rules from one Germanic language to another.

The last section on language contact and nonstandard varieties is I think the most original part of the book, since it reflects relatively new research and new research methods. The first chapter centres around second language acquisition, focusing on how people acquire and use a second language, notably German and Dutch. The author, Carrie Jackson, places the findings within the larger debate on the question whether adult language learners can acquire nativelike proficiency, and whether L1 and L2 acquisition rely on the same underlying mechanisms or on fundamentally different mechanisms and strategies. The jury is still out on these questions, but surveys as given by Jackson are helpful in gaining a better understanding.

In the second chapter of this section Pia Quist and Bente Svendsen give an overview of new contact-induced urban speech styles in multilingual neighborhoods in Northern European cities. The authors show that these speech styles are characterized by a clustering of syntactical, morphological, phonological, and lexical features, for instance variation of the verb second constraint and variation of grammatical gender. Young people recognize such clustering of features and assess them rather negatively with having low social status, although they are used in informal settings as in-group marker.

The next two chapters (by William Keel and Charlotte Gooskens) describe the West and North Germanic dialect continuum, the linguistic differences between the languages and dialects in the language area, and the consequences of these differences for mutual intelligibility. Since most of the dialects under discussion are mentioned in one or more of the previous contributions, these interesting chapters with revealing maps could perhaps better have been placed at the beginning of the book.

The final three chapters focus on contact varieties of Germanic languages. Johannessen and Putnam describe Germanic heritage languages spoken in North America. They define these languages as the first language of individuals who speak a language at home that is not the dominant language of the larger society, and they observe that the majority of heritage speakers speak moribund vernaculars, and that the languages are no longer passed on to the next generation. The authors discuss structural aspects of heritage languages and show how these can add to our knowledge of how and why languages change, and what impact these empirical findings have on theoretical analyses as language attrition and incomplete acquisition.

Mark Louden sketches the sociolinguistic situation of Germanic languages spoken in minority communities around the world and draws up a typology of

these languages. Speakers of minority languages pass their minority language on to their children, and in doing so they differ from heritage speakers. In spite of this, the majority of the 21 minority languages appear to be endangered. Of the nine languages that are not, six are tied to a particular religious group (Amish Alsatian German, Amish Swiss German, Hutterisch, Pennsylvania Dutch, Plautdietsch and Yiddish), and three (Afrikaans, German in Denmark and Belgium, Swedish in Finland) are officially recognized by the governments of the nations in which they are located and have deep historic roots there.

The final chapter by Roberge concentrates on new languages or radically different language varieties – pidgins, creoles, and bilingual mixed languages – resulting from language contacts between linguistically heterogeneous groups. From the Germanic languages English gave rise to the most of these contact languages, but Dutch and German also played a role.

My final assessment of *The Cambridge handbook of Germanic linguistics* is very positive: the comparative perspective and cross-linguistic comparison is a welcome addition to the arsenal of books about the Germanic language family. The chapters are up-to-date, well-written and offer of wealth of empirical data and theoretical analyses. I have one minor reservation, and this concerns the lack of overarching summaries at the end of each of the five sections. Such summaries would give the readers additional information by assembling the facts, analyses, and conclusions of the individual chapters into a general picture, and by showing how the topics of the individual chapters are interconnected – for instance, inflectional morphology, gender and case are closely intertwined, and changes occurring in one of these have effect on the others. Writing such summaries could perhaps be an instructive student assignment.

In conclusion, I have no doubt that *The Cambridge handbook of Germanic linguistics* will be an invaluable resource for generations of students and scholars. I highly recommend this varied and rich volume to every professional in the field.

About the reviewer

Nicoline van der Sijs is professor and chair of Historical Linguistics of Dutch in the Digital World at Radboud University in Nijmegen (Netherlands) and senior researcher at the Institute for the Dutch Language in Leiden. She studied Slavic languages and literature at the University of Utrecht. She completed her Ph.D. at Leiden University in 2001. She specializes in historical linguistics and etymology, and has written more than 25 books and hundreds of articles on these subjects. She has ample experience with crowdsourcing and (historical) corpus linguistics, and she set up a number of large databases with etymological and dialect information, including the linguistic websites Etymologiebank.nl, the *Uitleenwoordenbank* (http://uitleenwoordenbank.ivdnt.org/) and the *Elektronische*

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