

Ermengildo Bidese, James R. Dow & Thomas Stolz (eds.) 2005. *Das Zimbrische zwischen Germanisch und Romanisch*. Bochum, Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer. [Diversitas Linguarum 9]. xiii – 240 p.

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Cimbrian or “Zimbrisch” is a German dialect spoken in linguistic enclaves in Northern Italy. It has been usual among dialectologists to stress the antiquity and the archaic vocabulary and morphology of these vanishing dialects, and so it is refreshing to see linguists finding a more innovative side to the language and using Cimbrian as a “linguistic laboratory” for the study of language contact and language change. The 12 papers published here, mainly by German and Italian scholars, derive from a colloquium held at Bremen University early in 2005, the most important of them being focussed on syntactic and morphosyntactic innovations in Cimbrian as typological change in response to structures of Italian. The brief introduction gives a précis of the articles’ contents, but leaves the reader totally in the dark about what Cimbrian is and where it is spoken. Individual authors do mention details in passing, and a brief survey of the sociolinguistic situation in the various enclaves is actually hidden away on p. 157, but there is no general introduction to the language and no map.

Most contributions are written in German, with one in English and one (Remigio Geiser, “Vomme Gatöttareche dar Paurn zomme Höolighen Gaprèchte – asò òch dorrettatisch de Zimbrische Zunga” [from the babbling of peasants to a holy language – one of the ways the Cimbrian language is being saved], pp. 217 – 234) in standard Cimbrian (even the quotes from German sources are transposed!); citing modern Cimbrian texts from a variety of domains, Geiser optimistically argues that Cimbrian lives on as a standardised language – “von naujame tausinkh jaar!” (p. 233), which roughly translates as ‘and now for the next thousand years’. Sadly, as the reader may have noted in passing on p. 72, Cimbrian persists today in only three villages, Giazza (Ljetzan), Luserna (Lusern) and Roana (Robaan), here especially in the hamlet of Mezzaselva (Toballe); only in Luserna, we learn on p. 157, is it still used as an everyday vernacular. The article in English is James R. Dow’s “Bruno Schweizer’s *Gesamtgrammatik* as a product of the *Kulturkommission*”, pp. 193 – 205), in which the author reports on his planned digital edition of Schweizer’s unpublished five volume Cimbrian grammar, a compendious and immensely valuable source for any type of study on contemporary Cimbrian, completed in the 1950’s. Schweizer not only produced a historical phonology and morphology, he also elaborated a syntax and a detailed treatise on word-

formation. Many of the other authors in this volume make not inconsiderable use of Schweizer's material, kept at the "Deutscher Sprachatlas" in Marburg/Lahn, and that alone demonstrates how important Schweizer's grammar is.

There are two further contributions, at the end of the book, by non-linguists. Joachim Moroder, an architect, writes on "Formenreichtum und Werkqualität der Steinbaustrukturen in den Lessinischen Alpen" [variety of forms and quality of production of stone structures in the Lessinian alps], pp. 206 – 216), dealing with stone buildings and other structures (walls, wells) in the Cimbrian area, exemplified by seven photos and a drawing. The author is not at all happy with the modern structures which have replaced traditional forms (p. 216). And Giovanni Molinari, "Globalisierung und Zimberntum: endgültiger Untergang oder Wiederbelebungschance?" [globalization and Cimbrianness: irrevocable demise or opportunity for revival?], pp. 235 – 238), is concerned with the field of language politics. He recounts the activities of the "Curatorium Cimbricum Veronese", one of the local groupings which aim to propagate Cimbrian, and whose president he is.

The remaining articles are linguistic studies proper, and can be divided into two groups. First, there are three general surveys under the title "Theoretische Aspekte der Kontaktlinguistik" [Theoretical aspects of contact linguistics]. Klaus Zimmermann ("Interferenz, Transferenz und Sprachmischung: Prolegomena zu einer konstruktivistischen Theorie des Sprachkontakts" [interference, transference and language mixing: prolegomena to a constructivist theory of language contact], pp. 3 – 23) elaborates a whole theory of cognitive linguistics, called neurobiological constructivism, to enhance our view of how language contact works, although he makes no reference to concrete linguistic situations, let alone Cimbrian. Man may indeed be a social creature (p. 7), but apart from a quick look-in by Uriel Weinrich, the American sociolinguistic classics – names like Charles Ferguson, Joshua Fishman, Th. Markey and others, whose insights are here being "keineswegs ersetzt, sondern ergänzt" [by no means replaced, but rather supplemented] (p. 4) – are not well served by this retake on conventional wisdom. Wolfgang Wildgen ("Migration von Sprachen und Kulturen – Überlegungen zur kulturellen Dynamik von symbolischen Formen (besonders im Alpenraum)" [migration of languages and cultures – reflexions on the cultural dynamics of symbolic forms (with particular regard to the Alpine region)], pp. 24 – 42) takes us from homo erectus' migration from Africa around 500.000 B.C., via "Ötzi", to the germanophone enclaves in Italy, finishing with a couple of pages on linguistic side-effects of migration as a cause of language contact. The book finds its focus with Thomas Stolz ("Italienisierung in den alloglotten Sprachen Italiens" [italianisation in Italy's alloglottal languages], pp. 43 – 68), who sets the

tone for the following articles. Investigating superstratum discourse particles such as Italian *allora* and *però* in Cimbrian and other minority “replica” languages, as he calls them – Albanian, Greek and Croatian in Italy and Maltese as a tongue heavily influenced by Italian –, he demonstrates great similarities between all these languages. In explanation he postulates that their speakers have just one set of rules of discourse, that set being the prestige Italian one (p. 59, 65). A comparison with Spanish discourse particles in Amerindian languages underlines the point.

The core of the book – and the really interesting studies for linguists of dialectological and theoretical bent – are the five articles in the sections entitled “Empirisches zum Zimbrischen” [empirical studies on Cimbrian] and “Parallelen aus der Germania” [parallels among Germanic varieties]. Their common theme is syntactic or morphological change in the history of Cimbrian and the rôle of neighbouring Romance therein. Their “empiricism” is based on critical reading of grammatical treatises, and the only scholar to quote her own fieldwork is Agnes Kolmer, whose article is actually in the “Parallelen aus der Germania” section. Ermenegildo Bidese & Alessandra Tomaselli (“Formen der ‘Herausstellung’ und Verlust der V2-Restriktion in der Geschichte der zimbrischen Sprache” [forms of extraction and loss of the V-2 restriction in the history of Cimbrian], pp. 71 – 92) demonstrate how the restriction on the number of constituents before the finite verb has developed in Cimbrian in comparison to Standard German, which only tolerates one constituent in this position. In the earliest Cimbrian text, a 17th century catechism, we find cases with two preverbal constituents, insofar as subject pronouns may appear to the left of the finite verb along with a further constituent, as was indeed the case in Old High German. An 1813 version of the catechism contains marginally more cases with two preverbal constituents, especially in interrogative sentences. Subsequent sources clearly show that this exception was later generalised for all sentence types. Subject-verb inversion as in German is now the exception. But although Cimbrian has thus been drawn closer to the Italian model, it is still by no means identical with this, and clitic pronouns retain features of the old model. These clitics are the subject of Adriana Castagna’s study (“Personalpronomen und Klitika im Zimbrischen” [personal pronoun and clitics in Cimbrian], pp. 93 – 113). She compares their syntactic behaviour to that of nominal arguments, discussing clitic doubling (pleonastic clitics alongside full pronouns or noun phrases) and cataloguing differences between the three Cimbrian varieties. Various restrictions on clitic doubling in Cimbrian are interpreted as clear arguments in favour of Birgit Gerlach’s (2002) general distinction between congruence affixation and clitics (p. 110). A third author concerned with clitics is Agnes Kolmer (“Subjektklitika als Kon-

gruenzmarkierer: Ein Vergleich zwischen bairischen und alemannischen Sprachinseldialekten in Norditalien (Zimbrisch und Walserdeutsch)” [subject clitics as congruence markers: a comparison of Bavarian and Alemannic dialect enclaves in northern Italy (Cimbrian and Walser German)], pp. 164 – 189). She compares subject clitics in Cimbrian and in the so-called “Walser” Alemannic enclaves in the north west of Italy. Despite some similarities, “Walser” subject clitics are shown to adhere much more to the (proto-)type that A. Siewierska (1999) has called “ambiguous” congruence, tending themselves to be used anaphorically without any other overt nominal or pronominal support, than their Cimbrian counterparts, which retain more characteristics of “grammatical agreement markers”. Kolmer also touches on the theme of clitic doubling already discussed in Castagna’s study, and explains it as a result of a calque on the Italian model of subject focussing, while noting that the differences between Walser and Cimbrian indicate that language contact cannot be the only factor involved (p. 182 seq.). Günther Grewendorf & Cecilia Poletto (“Von OV zu VO: ein Vergleich zwischen Zimbrisch und Plodarisch” [from OV to VO: a comparison of Cimbrian with Sappada German], pp. 114 – 128) trace the development from the traditional West Germanic V2 + OV-type, still dominant in the German of the Sappada enclave in Belluno province, to the strongly VO patterns of Cimbrian. Sappada German permits VO-order only with auxiliaries and modal verbs, which the authors – citing the Old English parallel – interpret as the first step away from OV word-order towards VO. Luserna Cimbrian, although largely VO, still contains OV-relics in negation, with quantifier objects and in the behaviour of the clitic pronouns already discussed by other authors. Here too, parallels are drawn with other Germanic varieties. Demonstrably, the authors conclude, the similar sociolinguistic context cannot alone be responsible for all the details of word-order change in these varieties, and the search for syntactic factors is justified. Christel Stolz (“Zur Typologie der Genuszuweisung im Standarddeutschen und Zimbrischen” [on the typology of gender allocation in standard German and Cimbrian], pp. 131 – 163) looks at gender allocation in loan-words from Romance. While in standard German a whole range of factors determine the gender of such words, in Cimbrian, which has a comparable morphological structure, they generally retain the gender of the language of origin (i.e. Italian) – a result of the sociopolitical dominance of Italian in respect to Cimbrian. Incidentally, Umberto Martello’s Cimbrian Dictionary (1975) would have been a further useful source for loans in Roana Cimbrian.

The grammar of Cimbrian is quite clearly much more than a quarry of linguistic fossils. Various dialects of a language will always differ slightly in their position on typological clines, and Cimbrian is particularly interesting in this respects as it has been plucked right out

of the Germanic rut, so to speak, by its Romance neighbours. As this volume shows, from a typological perspective, the grammar of Cimbrian can be used to illuminate the structures of West Germanic and of Romance and to help understand how and to what extent language contact can induce language change.

References

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