

Konsonantenwandel: Bausteine zu einer Typologie des Lautwandels und ihre Konsequenzen. By Martin Joachim Kümmel. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2007. Pp. lvi + 482.

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This volume seeks to do something important. All standard segmental historical phonologists need to develop a feeling for which kinds of changes are ‘common’ (or ‘likely’, ‘natural’ or ‘possible’) and which are ‘unnatural’ (or ‘impossible’). This feeling is typically developed through a combination of experience, working through the histories of languages, and inherited wisdom, gained through reading textbooks or discussion with others. It’s a rather haphazard basis for science: it would be really helpful if there were a systematic collection of types of changes, as found in the history of the languages of the world, ordered on a phonological basis, from which we could extract generalisations on a firmer basis about which changes happen commonly and what kinds of things are not found at all. This book aims to fill this need, and, as a historical phonologist, I’m grateful for it.

Konsonantenwandel obviously restricts itself to consonantal changes (in fact, to only certain types of consonantal changes, as we’ll see below) so it represents only a step in the direction of a comprehensive record of segmental changes. It also restricts itself in terms of languages (covering over 200 from the Indo-European, Uralic and Semitic families, including a range of dialectal variation from within these languages), but the volume is still a substantial achievement.¹ It also goes further than simply cataloguing and taxonomising changes. In a separate section, Kümmel applies the knowledge gained from such work to a number of problems from the phonological history of attested or reconstructed languages, arguing that we can understand them better in the light of the taxonomic work, because we should only accept analyses of such data that fit in with what we know is possible (or likely) in linguistic change.

There’s little introduction to its aims and methodology in the book itself, but the blurb on the publisher’s website (www.reichert-verlag.de) explains the idea well (all quotations below are in my translation): “In order to establish the [possible]

1. We note also major projects underway now to assemble databases of sound change, notably the C-Trend and UNIDIA databases at Lyon (<http://www.diadm.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/>) and the Handbook of Phonological Change Database at Leipzig (<http://brugmann.eva.mpg.de/trac/HPC/>).

types of change and their probabilities, we need to investigate a sufficiently large amount of data, ideally everything, at least for a subgroup of languages or sounds. This is the only way in which we can find out, for example, how often *s* changes to *h* and if the opposite can happen and *h* can change into *s*". (The answer to the last question is 'no', as expected, but it's nice to have it confirmed on a firm empirical basis.)

The main body of the volume has three sections. Two deal with what Kümmel sees as different basic types of change, and the third considers the specific problems of interpretation and reconstruction. §III.2.A discusses "changes in articulation type" and §III.2.B considers "changes in the place of articulation". The first of these groups together changes which affect segments' manner of articulation or their laryngeal state (e.g., voicing, aspiration, glottalisation), guided by a notion that such changes all affect segments' phonological *strength*. It thus considers, among others, cases of spirantisation, affrication, gemination, degemination, debuccalisation, aspiration, deaspiration, glottalisation and deglottalisation. The latter section largely excludes classic cases of assimilation and dissimilation, focusing instead on spontaneous or less clearly conditioned changes, including developments from labiodental to dental and velar to palatal, for example, and secondary velarisation, depalatalisation and labialisation. In each subsection of these two major sections, all the cases of the particular type of change that Kümmel has found are listed, along with the language in which they occurred and their basic phonological conditioning (if any). §IV reconsiders the problems of history and reconstruction, dealing with several Lydian segments, Lycian-Milyan <z>, Old Persian <ç>, Khotanese obstruents, the Germanic Consonant Shift, Proto-Indo-European stops, dorsals and laryngeals and Proto-Semitic dental and alveolar fricatives.

The change-cataloguing sections are indisputably a substantial contribution to general descriptive historical phonology. They are concise and they certainly provide a large set of data for those searching for cases of particular types of change. Although this step is not taken in the volume, they can (should?) also serve as input for work in theoretical historical phonology. Such work seeks to make absolute claims about what is impossible in change (and about what's possible or likely), by tying data and theory together and making precise predictions in the light of the restrictive principles of an articulated phonological model. While risky, such work can hope to be working towards *explaining* change, if its predictions are correct. There are indications from the data sections of the volume that certain imaginable types of change indeed never do occur, such as, for example, *h* > *s* (discussed above) and some conceivable diachronic relationships between stops and continuants: as well as a general lack of simple fricative > stop changes, it looks like we would be mistaken to simply see stop > fricative as normal, as certain theories have predicted. As well as simply listing types of change, Kümmel comments on

their frequency: thus, spirantisation “is the normal lenition for voiced stops”, but for “series of voiceless plosives, spirantisation normally only occurs when they are aspirated” (p. 55 and 57). The question for theoretical historical phonology is: *why*? If a major criticism is to be made of the volume, it might thus be that the work is not embedded in a background of phonological theory. It’s only fair to recognise that it is a work which aims in the first instance to typologise rather than theorise, but the kind of argumentation in §III really rests on the kinds of assumptions that are found in theoretical historical phonology: it’s only if we aim to be able to predict what’s impossible in change that we can confidently reinterpret long-distance reconstructed data. Furthermore, a theoretised approach can go deeper: there are several cases where Kümmel deems a particular type of change to be “seldom” found or “very unusual”. This is interesting, but tantalising. A model which aims to entirely forbid particular changes on principled grounds would flag up such unusual exceptions as candidates for reconsideration (where they sometimes in fact turn out to be better analysed as a different type of change, after all).

Of course, the book is not without a theory of phonology. There is some engagement with general phonology, but it takes up a rather cursory four pages. The work does make use of distinctive features in the description of changes and, as hinted above, it assumes a theory of phonological strength, in part based on Back (1991). The model of strengthenings and weakenings that is adopted is largely for classificatory purposes, however, as there is no attempt to explain what is ‘weaker’ about the output of a particular change than its input (although a missed opportunity, this is perhaps a good thing, too, given the complicated status of phonological strength and associated notions of lenition, as explored in Honeybone 2008).

The volume is closest to the few other works which seek to survey a large number of similar attested changes with the aim of figuring out the true patterning of such types of change, such as Cser (2003), which considers fewer changes, but in more phonological detail, and (the appendix to) Kirchner (2001) which tries to gather together a large number of cases of lenition. In many ways, *Konsonantenwandel* is reminiscent of Maddieson’s (1984) masterwork, which lists and generalises over the segmental inventories of a vast number of languages (indeed, Kümmel gives segmental inventories for 294 languages in an appendix, to provide some context for the changes). Kümmel avoids the problem with Kirchner’s (2001) list, which is that it is simply not detailed enough in the data that it presents on the processes, so that the impression is given that at least some of them need more careful phonological and philological interpretation. Kümmel’s discussion of the changes generally seems well informed, although occasionally the reader is left wanting more detail: is a particular change really a case of spirantisation or is it actually approximantisation? Is a change that’s listed as occurring in word-initial position really one which affects all occurrences of a segment, but only looks like

it's positionally restricted? At least the volume supplies the data to whet our interest and the references to follow such questions up.

It's not possible in this short review to consider all the analyses presented in §IV, but the argumentation that Kümmel gives will be interesting for specialists in these areas. As an example: the reflection on the Germanic Consonant Shift largely focuses on Vennemann's remarkable 'bifurcation hypothesis' (Vennemann 1984, and elsewhere). Vennemann's proposal is bold, involving a reanalysis of the relevant changes in order to argue for a new phonological history of subgroupings in Germanic, among other things. Kümmel shows it to be perhaps overbold, and he can do this on unusually firm ground. As he explains, one of Vennemann's claims is that "Proto-Germanic ejectives changed into aspirated stops on the one hand, and into affricates on the other. No parallels are known for this ... An affrication of ejective stops is not attested at all, unlike for aspirated plosives..." (p. 298).

So, this volume seeks to do something important for historical phonology — but does it succeed? There's no doubt that every university which takes historical linguistics seriously should have a copy in its library. Its price is even low enough that individual researchers could consider buying it themselves. I'm sure I'll use mine as a source of types of changes which occur frequently, to investigate the precise patterning that accompanies them, and as a source of imaginable changes which seem never to occur in endogenously innovated change (or at least to check the predictions of phonological models that particular types of change should not be found).

It is not an easy read. There are lots of abbreviations and similar short-cuts to cope with, and much of the volume is taken up with prefaces and appendixes. (The discussion really starts on page 13, which actually comes 73 pages into the book.) As well as little in the way of introduction, there is not much in the way of summary: at the end of §III.2.A, for example, which has taken 148 pages, there is only a three page summary. Perhaps this is linked to the lack of theorisation: there are mini descriptive summaries during the discussion of individual types of changes, so there is only little left to generalise over at the end if it's not all to be related to phonological theory. Overall, this impressive volume is more the kind of book that a reader would consult, rather than read from cover to cover. I intend to consult mine frequently.

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