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Number is the most underestimated of the grammatical categories. It is deceptively simple yet the number system which philosophers, logicians and many linguists take as the norm – namely an obligatory distinction between singular and plural (as in *cat* versus *cats*) – is only one of a wide range of possibilities to be found in languages around the world. Some languages, for instance, make more distinctions than English, having three, four or even five different values. Adopting a wide-ranging perspective, Greville Corbett draws on some 250 languages to analyse the possible systems of number. He reveals that the means for signalling number are remarkably diverse and are put to a surprising range of special additional uses. By surveying some of the riches of the world's linguistic resources this book makes a major contribution to the typology of categories and demonstrates that languages are much more varied than is generally recognised.

GREVILLE G. CORBETT is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Surrey. He is author of *Gender* (1991), also in the Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics series, and co-editor of *Heads in Grammatical Theory* (1993) and *The Slavonic Languages* (1993).

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*For Judith, David, Ian and Peter*

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## PREFACE

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*Preface*

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And now a Jakobson story. Haugen (1975: 326) recalls that Jakobson told him that Tesnière’s book on number *Les formes du duel en slovène*, published in Paris in 1925, was made a best-seller by potential readers who assumed it was about duelling in Slovenia. The present book may not be snapped up by a public mistakenly eager for the latest contribution to number theory. But if a few stray mathematicians read it, I hope they will find that the linguistic number systems analysed here show the elegance and complexity they are accustomed to in their area of enquiry.



## ABBREVIATIONS

ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
AG	agreement marker
AGT	agent
AOR	aoist
ART	article
ASSOC	associative
AUG	augmented
AUX	auxiliary
BENEF	benefactive
CAUS	causative
CERT	certain
COND	conditional
DAT	dative
DIM	diminutive
DIR	directional
DU	dual
EFF	effector
ERG	ergative
EXCL	exclusive
FEM	feminine
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
IMMED	immediate
IMP	imperative
IMPERFV	imperfective
INCL	inclusive
INDEF	indefinite
INDIC	indicative
INST	instrumental

*List of abbreviations*

INTRAN	intransitive
IRR	irrealis
LOC	locative
MASC	masculine
NEG	negative
NEUT	neuter
NOM	nominative
NOW	'now' discourse clitic
OBJ	object
OBL	oblique
PARTIC	participle
PASS	passive
PAT	patient
PERFV	perfective
PERSE	personal experience
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRES	present
PRET	preterite
PROX	proximate
PRV	preverb
PST	past
Q	question
QM	quantity marker
REDUP	reduplication
REFL	reflexive
REL	relative pronoun
SBST	substantivizer
SG	singular
SUBJ	subject
1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
I	gender I
II	gender II
III	gender III
IV	gender IV