Features

Features are a central concept in linguistic analysis. They are the basic building blocks of linguistic units, such as words. For many linguists they offer the most revealing way to explore the nature of language. Familiar features are Number (singular, plural, dual, . . .), Person (1st, 2nd, 3rd) and Tense (present, past, . . .). Features have a major role in contemporary linguistics, from the most abstract theorizing to the most applied computational applications, yet little is firmly established about their status. They are used, but are little discussed and poorly understood. In this unique work, Greville G. Corbett brings together two lines of research: how features vary between languages and how they work. As a result, the book is of great value across the broad range of perspectives of those who are interested in language.

GREVILLE G. CORBETT is Distinguished Professor of Linguistics at the University of Surrey, where he leads the Surrey Morphology Group. His previous works on the typology of features include *Gender* (1991), *Number* (2000) and *Agreement* (2006).

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For Judith, David, Ian and Peter

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Preface

Understanding the complexity of natural language is one of the great intellectual challenges. As linguists we try to do this through a variety of approaches and theories. For all our differences, one thing that most linguists share is the use of features. Features allow us to identify common properties; we propose a feature **NUMBER**, with the values SINGULAR and PLURAL, as we find in forms like *lake* ~ *lakes*, *loaf* ~ *loaves*, *woman* ~ *women*. Using a feature like this captures the intuition that *lake* and *lakes* are forms of the same word, while on the other hand the plurals (*lakes*, *loaves* and *women*) are also in some sense the same. Though plural number is realized differently on each, they behave identically for agreement, since they all take a plural determiner (*these* rather than *this)*. Other examples of features include **GENDER** (with values such as MASCULINE, FEMININE . . .) and **PERSON** (FIRST, SECOND, THIRD). These are examples of morphosyntactic features. Features may also be semantic, such as **ANIMACY** (ranging over HUMAN, OTHER ANIMATE, INANIMATE), syntactic (for **PART OF SPEECH** categories such as verb or noun), morphological (for inflectional class) or phonological (specifying, for instance, the height or backness of a vowel).

Features, then, are our means of capturing what is consistent across linguistic entities within a language; they also help us to identify what is consistent across languages. Various languages have a **NUMBER** feature rather similar to that of English, while in others this feature shows interesting differences. Features have proved invaluable for analysis and description, and they have a major role in contemporary linguistics, from the most abstract theorizing to the most applied computational work. As we rely increasingly on features, it is important to review our assumptions and check our progress in understanding them. In particular, there is a tradition in a part of the discipline to be careful about the formal properties of features, being scrupulous about the mechanisms according to which they work within given theories. Another set of linguists have worked hard to understand the substantive semantics of features, to establish what features and values there can be, and what they mean. Sometimes the first group, those working on the formal side of features, have not realized the richness of the data offered by natural languages. Conversely, those in the second group, the typologists, have not always been sufficiently concerned about the formal consequences of the patterns they have identified. This volume has the ambitious aim of bringing these two traditions together: formal accuracy meets a range of interesting data, to help us move closer to an adequate theory of linguistic

features and to the complex linguistic phenomena which we try to model using features.

The reader might expect to pick up a handbook of linguistics which would give a list of features and of their values, such as **NUMBER** (with the values SINGULAR, PLURAL, DUAL, TRIAL, PAUCAL, GREATER PAUCAL, GREATER PLURAL), **TENSE** (PRESENT, PAST, FUTURE, PLUPERFECT . . .), and so on. There is as yet no such list: we are like chemists without a list of the elements, or physicists with no account of particles. This volume goes part way towards the goal of listing and understanding the features.

I want to thank my colleagues and friends, who have contributed substantially. Bernard Comrie and Gerald Gazdar read the final draft with great care; both suggested numerous improvements, from clarifying the ideas and strengthening the line of argument to stylistic polishing. Special thanks to all of the following, who also read the book in draft and gave highly valuable comments: Jenny Audring, Matthew Baerman, Patricia Cabredo-Hofherr, Marina Chumakina, Sebastian Fedden, Andrew Hippisley, Sasha Krasovitsky, Edith Moravcsik, Tania Paciaroni, Enrique Palancar, Anna Thornton and Claire Turner. Many others have helped with discussion, comments, objections, an example or a reference; they all deserve my thanks, while bearing no responsibility for what became of their contribution: Jim Blevins, Olivier Bonami, Gilles Boyé, Dunstan Brown, Christopher Culy, Michael Daniel, Dan Flickinger, David Gil, Nikolaus Himmelmann, Anna Kibort, Ewan Klein, Jonas Kuhn, Robert Levine, Alison Long, Igor Mel´čuk, David Pesetsky, Ivan Sag, Neil Smith, Andrew Spencer, Greg Stump, Gert Webelhuth and Claudia Wegener. I thank all in the Surrey Morphology Group, and our visitors, for providing the right environment for this research, and especially Penny Everson and Lisa Mack, for careful help with preparing the typescript.

I have tried out material from the book in various lectures and seminars and am grateful for all the comments and discussion which resulted; I'm particularly grateful to the interested and responsive audiences at the following lecture courses and institutes: the Typology Seminar Series, Vilnius (September 2006); the PhD Program in Linguistics lecture series at the University of the Basque Country, Vitoria-Gasteiz, (February 2007); the Galileo Lectures at the Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa (March 2007); the Australian Linguistic Institute, Sydney (July 2008); the 65th Linguistic Institute of the Linguistic Society of America, Berkeley (July 2009) and the DGfS-CNRS Summer School on Linguistic Typology, Leipzig (August 2010). My thanks too, to audiences at individual lectures or seminars at: Albuquerque, Amsterdam, Belgrade, Berkeley, Berlin, Bologna, Boulder, Brighton, Buffalo, Budapest, Chicago, Eastern Michigan, Graz, Harvard, Illinois, Ithaca, Kentucky, Kings College London, Kraków, Leiden, Leipzig, Lyon, Nijmegen, Novi Sad, Osijek, Oslo, Osnabrück, Padang, Paris, Regensburg, Roehampton, Stanford, Stony Brook, Tsaghkadzor, University College London, Vienna, York, Zadar and Zagreb. Several papers, mainly resulting from these talks, are superseded by this book; these partial 'ingredients' are listed here

since they typically include additional supporting material which some may still find of use: §2.1.3 and the Appendix take material from Corbett (2010e); §3.4 is based on Corbett & Baerman (2006), I thank Matthew Baerman for letting me use it here; §4.1.3 takes a part of Corbett (2007c); §4.3 is based on part of Corbett (2010a); §4.4: takes some prose from Corbett (2007d); §5.1 is partly in Corbett (2009c); §§5.7–5.8 appear in Corbett (2012); Chapters 6 and 7 draw on Corbett (2011b) and (2008) respectively; §8.3 develops an idea in Corbett (1991: 128) and takes in material from Chumakina, Kibort & Corbett (2007: 148–63), I thank Marina Chumakina and Anna Kibort for letting me use it here; finally, §8.4 takes material from Corbett (2005d). After many rewrites, these ingredients along with many others have been combined into a dish which is very different from the original mix.

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules (www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php); I have modified others' abbreviations to match the Leipzig Glossing Rules where possible, and have added items not in the Leipzig list.

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
3´	obviative
3H	third person, higher object
3L	third person, lower object
3R	long distance reflexive
I, II, III . . .	genders I, II, III . . .
ABS	absolutive
ACC	accusative
AGR	agreement
ALL	allative ('onto', 'to')
ANIM	animate
AOR	aorist
ART	article
AUX	auxiliary
cat	category
CAUS	causative (CAUS1 is the 'single' causative)
CNTR	contrastive
COM	comitative
COP	copula
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
DECL	declarative
DEF	definite
DEM	demonstrative
DER	derivational marker
DIM	diminutive
DIR	direct, direct stem
DIST	distal

DS	different subject
DP	determiner phrase
DU	dual
EMPH	emphatic
ERG	ergative
EXCL	exclusive
F	feminine
FOC	focus
FUT	future
GEN	genitive
GEN2	second genitive
GNR	generic
HAB	habitual
HON	honorific, polite
IMP	imperative
IN	'in' localization
INAN	inanimate
INCL	inclusive
IND	indicative
INDF	indefinite
INESS	inessive ('in')
INF	infinitive
INS	instrumental
INTR	intransitive
IPFV	imperfective
LAT	lative
LOC	locative
LOC2	second locative
M	masculine
M.PERS	masculine personal
N	neuter
NEG	negation, negative
NOM	nominative
NON_	non-
NP	noun phrase
NUM	number
OBJ	object
OBL	oblique, oblique stem
OBV	obviative
OPT	optative
PASS	passive
PERS	personal
PFV	perfective
PL	plural

POSS	possessive
PRF	perfect
PROG	progressive
PROH	prohibitive
PRON	pronoun
PROX	proximate
PRS	present
PRV	preverb
PST	past
PTCL	particle
PTCP	participle
Q	question particle/marker
REFL	reflexive
REL	relative
RLS	realis
SBJ	subject
SEQ	sequential
SG	singular
SUB	'sub' localization
SUBORD	subordinative
TR	transitive
VEG	vegetable (gender)
VOC	vocative
WIT	witnessed
-	affix boundary
=	clitic boundary
~	reduplication
>	'acting on'