FRANS VAN COETSEM. The Vocalism of the Germanic Parent Language. Systemic Evolution and Sociohistorical Context. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994. Pp. 230.

Reviewed by HANS F. NIELSEN

In this study Frans van Coetsem (FvC) aims at reconstructing and describing the evolution of the vowel system of the Germanic Parent Language (GPL), i.e. Pre- and Proto-Germanic, up to around the beginning of our era when Germanic first split up into divergent dialects. FvC's reason for not wishing to deal with GPL phonology in general is that there is no longer any consensus of opinion among Indo-Europeanists regarding the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) obstruent system, which – according to some fairly recent hypotheses – was characterized by glottalized stops.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part I (25-73) FvC sets up a relative chronology for the systemic changes believed to have occurred in the development of the GPL vowel system. He places the reduction of the maximal syllable length from three to two morae (cf. Gothic *winds* 'wind' (n.) < PIE *$\ast \bar{u}\bar{e}nt$-) in the Pre-Gmc. period, assigns the $\check{a}$ and $\check{o}$ mergers and the shift of the PIE syllabic liquids and nasals into *ur, ul, um, un* to Early Proto-Gmc. and the umlaut- and consonant-conditioned raising and lowering changes to Late Proto-Gmc. As for the Germanic 'accent modification', FvC believes that the PIE ('nondominant') pitch accent became a ('dominant') stress accent in Germanic prior to the fixation of the mobile PIE accent on the initial syllable of the word (52-4). FvC bases his relative chronology on considerations pertaining to feeding and bleeding relationships (for instance, the *a - o* merger into *a* preceded *a*-umlaut seeing that no *o* resulting from *a*-umlaut of *u* was affected by the merger), areal-linguistic expansion (cf. the fact that mora reduction took place in all Indo-European language families except for Indo-Iranian), chain reaction and typology (cf. the effect of accent modification on the umlaut- and consonant-conditioned raising and lowering changes and the further (analytic) reductive tendencies in unaccented position). For establishing his periodization (boundaries) FvC uses the criteria of impact and language-specificness. The $\check{a}$ - $\check{o}$ mergers and the umlaut- and consonant-conditioned raising (of *e* to *i*) had a tremendous impact because they demarcated what (since 1956) FvC has called the *e - a* period, a period during which verbs with *a* in their present forms systematized themselves in the same way as strong verbs with *e-*

presents (cf. below). As for language-specificness, the $\breve{a}$ - $\breve{o}$ mergers and the shift of syllabic liquids and nasals into *ur, ul, um, un* show specifically Germanic realizations, and are therefore assigned to (Early) Proto-Gmc. – unlike mora reduction which is relegated to Pre-Gmc., cf. above.

In Part II (75-132) FvC focuses on the gradual evolution of the GPL vowel system from its PIE ancestry to the time of the dialectal fragmentation of Gmc. The Pre-Gmc. mora reduction had little impact on the vowel system, which emerged as a five-item triangular system with correlation between long and short monophthongs. The subsequent $\breve{a}$-$\breve{o}$ mergers have come out as $\breve{a}$ and $\bar{o}$ in the attested Gmc. dialects, and would therefore seem to testify to a correlation break between the short and long vowels. In FvC's view, however, these mergers did not immediately lead to a correlation break in the GPL. Instead, FvC envisages a quadrangular system following in the wake of the mergers with correlation between the merger products $\mathring{a}$ and $\bar{\mathring{a}}$ (79), a system that prevailed throughout the *e-a* period (cf. above), i.e. Early Proto-Gmc. The mergers themselves are accounted for in terms of low functionality and language contact (80-81). With the new stress accent and its subsequent fixation on the first syllable, the scene was set for an increased rate of change. The umlaut- and consonant-conditioned raising and lowering changes occurring after the accent modification provided the trigger for reintroducing a triangular pattern in the short vowel system, where *a*-umlaut produced [o] as a lowered variant of *u* (84). Superficially, it would seem that the lowering of *u* and *i* and the raising of *e* took place *after* the split of Late Proto-Gmc. into North-West Gmc. and Gothic, seeing that the conditions for these changes were different in the two branches. To FvC it is significant that the changes affect the the same vowels in precisely the same manner everywhere, and he introduces the (very interesting) concept of *reconditioning* to explain why the raising and lowering processes in Gothic came to occur in environments different from those of North-West Gmc. (87-91). Thus FvC sticks to bracketing umlaut- and consonant-conditioned raising and lowering as Late Proto-Gmc. changes, describing (with a reference to Labov 1972:180) reconditioning as 'a recycling and regularizing phenomenon for coping with a changed situation'. As for the long vowel system, this entered Late Proto-Gmc. as a quadrangular pattern. However, during Late Proto-Gmc. a new vowel, $\bar{e}^2$, was introduced into the system as a lowering product of the diphthong *ei* (98-113). The new vowel pushed $\bar{e}^1$ into a more open

position [æ]. In North-West Gmc. (113-14) $\bar{e}^1$ developed into $\bar{a}$ and $\bar{\mathring{a}}$ into $\bar{o}$, finalizing the correlation break ensuing from the $\breve{a}$-$\breve{o}$ mergers; in the short system, *a* had evolved in Late Proto-Gmc. times from $\mathring{a}$ and *o* from [o] *u*. In Gothic, $\bar{\mathring{a}}$ also became $\bar{o}$, whereas $\bar{e}^1$ and $\bar{e}^2$ merged in $\bar{e}$. This is not the place to go into FvC's discussion of the difficult and highly controversial problem of $\bar{e}^2$. Let it suffice to say that FvC sees $\bar{e}^2$ as a reflex of *ei* only in its systemic origin as an umlaut alternant (105-11), not in its later lexical additions such as reduplicating preterites, loan words, etc. (99-102). Finally, FvC takes a close look at the vocalic morphophonology of the GPL, to be more precise, at the ablaut alternations (121-9) that originated in PIE, but which in the GPL strong verbs were 'uniformized and reorganized' (122). The most spectacular development was, of course, that after the $\breve{a}$-$\breve{o}$ mergers, in the *e-a* period, verbs with $\mathring{a}$ (> *a*, cf. above) vocalism in the present organized themselves along the same lines as the strong verbs with *e* in the present tense. Some of the *a*-present verbs had reduplicating preterites ('Class 7') whereas others had long $\bar{\mathring{a}}$ ('Class 6'). It might be mentioned that in some cases the *e*-verbs were influenced by the *a*-group, e.g. the long pret. pl. of 'Class 4', Gothic *nēmum* 'we took', which must have been preceded by **numum* as a pret.-pres. pl. form such as Gothic *skulum* 'we shall' reminds us. The inspiration for a long vowel in the pret. pl. of 'Class 4' probably came from 'Class 6' (Early Proto-Gmc. $\bar{\mathring{a}}$). As FvC is able to demonstrate, the verbal ablaut system changed gradually during the GPL, and the seven classes traditionally set up for categorizing the strong verbs fail to give full credit to 'the multidimensional structure' underlying the system (127-8).

In the third and final part of the book (133-88), FvC aims at outlining the social and historical background to the GPL developments discussed in Parts I and II. From an archaeological viewpoint the development of the GPL must have taken place contemporaneously with the Bronze Age (from ca. 1500 to ca. 500 B.C.) and the Iron Age (from ca. 500 B.C) in northern Europe. The Bronze Age was a time characterized by continuity and stability, a state of affairs compatible with the linguistically relatively uneventful periods of Pre-Gmc. and Early Proto-Gmc. when, respectively, mora reduction and the $\breve{a}$-$\breve{o}$ mergers developed. From 500 B.C. (or just before) 'a southbound population expansion' (141) took place from southern Scandinavia and northern Germany, very likely because of deteriorating climatic conditions (143). The social upheavals of the Iron Age could conveniently be seen as the social counterparts of the

far-reaching language changes of Late Proto-Gmc., which in addition to accent modification and the raising and lowering changes also included the Gmc. consonant shift – usually thought to have taken place around 500 B.C. (140-41). As far as external linguistic influence is concerned, FvC points out that there are no grounds for assuming that the GPL was exposed to any drastic manner of language contact (157). Rehearsing some of the usual linguistic evidence, he sticks to the traditional view that Balto-Slavic was the eastern neigbour of Gmc. and that during the Bronze Age Italic-speaking tribes were the southern neighbours of the GPL until, during the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, these were replaced by speakers of Celtic (162-6). Finally, FvC has to admit that despite the assumed correlation between social setting and language evolution a number of questions must remain unanswered: we do not know, e.g., why the GPL, in comparison with Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, emerged as a simple and regular language or whether interaction between society and language was responsible (180); nor do we know what precisely triggered accent modification, the single most significant event (or as FvC puts it, 'the turning point') in the evolution of a specific GPL (187-8).

The volume is concluded by an Appendix (189-95), which, to a considerable extent, is concerned with the Gmc. fricativization of the PIE nonvoiced stops, and with intra- and extra-linguistic evidence for dating this change. Occurring in all word positions, the Gmc. fricatives *f, þ, X* must have developed before the accent modification, i.e. in Early Proto-Gmc., whereas the voicing ensuing from Verner's Law was accent dependent and thus belonged to Late Proto-Gmc. (191). The Dutch rendering of Celtic **tanara-* as *Dender*, a river-name in East Flanders, would seem to bear out not only Gmc. settlement in this formerly Celtic area around 500 B.C., but also the fact that the word was borrowed with a *t-* which underwent fricativization (*t- > þ- (> d-)*, cf. Latin *trēs*, Gothic *þreis*, (Dutch *drie*)), a shift dated to roughly the same time.

Above, I have attempted to give as full a summary of FvC's book as space has permitted me, in order to show the holistic nature of FvC's views on the development of the Germanic Parent Language. FvC does not reduce the reconstruction of Proto-Germanic to a mere collection of sound correspondences, etc., but looks upon the reconstructed language as a real one with language changes, periodization and systemic evolution and with a population speaking

the GPL in specific social and historical environments. What especially impresses me is that FvC has stuck to his long-held basic ideas concerning the development of the GPL (cf. e.g. Van Coetsem 1956 and 1970), and along the way been able to improve, modify and refine them in the light of new methodology (e.g. generative phonology and sociolinguistics).

Frans van Coetsem's book deals with many difficult problems in early Germanic language history, and will therefore hold more appeal for the specialist than for the beginner. But as always, FvC's scholarly perceptiveness and clarity make his work a distinct pleasure to read. I have therefore no difficulty in forgiving him for frequently quoting scholars like Martinet, Meillet and Fourquet in French, for listing Schwarz 1956 among the group of scholars advocating the North-West Gmc. theory (20) – Kuhn 1955 would have been appropriate to include here instead –, nor for the various misprints that occur throughout the book, e.g. *sugnificantly* (68), *occurried* (71), *Mańczak (1882, 1884, 1987b)* (144), *Ureland 1991* (154), *lenght* (180) – in addition to no less than three errors in the bibliographical entry of Van Coetsem 1956!

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