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Matthew Baerman, Greville G. Corbett, Dunstan Brown & Andrew Hippisley (eds.), *Deponency and morphological mismatches* (Proceedings of the British Academy 145). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. xv + 260 pages, ISBN 978-0-19-726410-2, £ 50.

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The modern museum of natural history originated in part from the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century “cabinet of curiosities”, a collection of stuffed animals, strangely-shaped stones, fossils, and various other types of objects deemed exotic, curious, or extraordinary in some way. It was the challenge such curios presented to prevalent classificatory schemas that made them collectable, but it was only when the framework and vocabulary for describing the natural world had been refashioned so as to make these curios no longer curious, that comparative anatomy, mineralogy, or palaeontology could be said to have achieved the status of a science (cf. Rorty 1982).

Linguistics has its own cabinet of curiosities. Since Antiquity, scholars of language have taken note of forms that appear unusual or irregular when compared to the behaviour of “normal” verbs and nouns. One of the first linguistic curios to be described in these terms is the Latin deponent verb, typically said to be passive in form but active in meaning (an oft-cited example is *sequor* ‘I follow’, which behaves in many respects like a transitive active verb despite the 1st person singular passive ending *-or*). The hybridity represented by the Latin deponent became the basis of a research project at the University of Surrey on “deponency”, used as a cover term for morphological form-function mismatches, and a workshop in early 2006, at which preliminary versions of the papers in the volume were presented. The goals, according to the announcement of the workshop, were to assess the incidence of morphological mismatches crosslinguistically, and how these phenomena are to be represented in a formal model of morphology. By aiming to expand the collection of curiosities, and then bringing them into the purview of a general theory, deponency research would seem to have much to offer the science of language.

The volume comprises twelve chapters, of which the first three are principally concerned with the classification or typology of mismatches. Matthew Baerman (“Morphological typology of deponency”, pp. 1–19) and Greville G. Corbett (“Deponency, syncretism and what lies between”, pp. 21–43) are members of the Surrey Morphology Group; Andrew Spencer (“Extending deponency: Implications for morphological mismatches”, pp. 45–70) represents a more sceptical, even dissenting point of view concerning the relevance of deponency as such to linguistic theory. The classificatory schemes for deponents and similar phenomena proposed by each of the first three authors take as their starting point “normal” or “canonical” relations between form and mean-

ing. As Baerman acknowledges, this raises the issue of what constitutes “normal” behaviour when “exceptions” represent a significant proportion of cases (pp. 5–7). But it also raises the matter of how the meaning of the forms under analysis is determined. As it turns out, few authors in the collection offer rigorous criteria for assigning semantic features to deponent forms, relying instead on glosses, dictionary definitions, or their own impressions and intuitions. Among the parameters for characterizing deponency proposed by Baerman is the generality of the mismatch within a lexical class, and whether the “normal” function of the morphology remains available. For Corbett, canonicity, as far as morphology is concerned, is exemplified by the symmetrical all-cells-filled-with-distinct-forms paradigm, with maximal morphophonological regularity. Deviations from this ideal can occur at the level of cells within the paradigm (syncretism, suppletion, and the like), or be specific to particular lexemes (deponency in the narrower sense, but also heteroclisis, homonymy, and some lesser-known types of irregularity). It is worth noting that instances have been found of almost every possibility Corbett’s taxonomy allows, as well as some that are difficult to classify, such as a noun from the Dagheshanian language Tsez that has identical singular and plural forms in all cases. Spencer’s taxonomy of “unexpected morphology” takes into account the domain of the phenomenon (within or between lexical classes), the portion of the paradigm involved (isolates cells, “slabs” [groups of cells], or the paradigm as a whole), generality (isolated lexemes, or an entire class), and defectivity of the paradigm. This approach allows him to consider interclass hybrids such as Russian nouns that decline like adjectives, and genitive case forms that agree with the nouns they modify (“Suffixaufnahme”). In Spencer’s classification scheme, like Corbett’s, pretty much every logically-possible type of mismatch is attested. But whereas Corbett regards the uncovering of hitherto unrecognized types of morphological irregularity as a matter “of interest not only to morphologists and typologists but also to psycholinguists” (p. 41), Spencer expresses doubt that any typology of mismatches “could be expected to place limits on what might be found”, and that the currently-known batch is a consequence of the vagaries of historical change, and feasible pathways of grammaticalisation (p. 68).

Chapters 4 through 6 touch on the Latin deponent and those forms from other Indo-European languages with which it has often been compared: the *media tantum* of Greek and Sanskrit. Despite the similarities in their data sets, each author or group of authors arrives at a somewhat different conclusion. The divergences hinge primarily on how they handle meaning. Gregory T. Stump (“A non-canonical pattern of deponency and its implications”, pp. 71–95) offers an interesting distinction between form-deponents (“wrong” surface form for their morphosyntactic properties) and property-deponents (“wrong” morphosyntactic properties for their meaning). These would appear to be two perspectives

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on the same phenomenon, as in the case of Latin deponency, but Stump believes that at least some instances of mismatch must be one or the other (pp. 71–74). He argues that the Sanskrit *media tantum* is specifically “property-deponent”, in that it has the morphosyntactic properties of the middle voice without necessarily having middle semantics (p. 88). The Sanskrit active voice is “semantically empty” (p. 82), according to Stump, having no specific semantic characteristics of its own, whereas middle voice forms have distinctively middle meanings only in the case of verbs that also appear in the active voice. Nikolas Lavidas & Dimitra Papangeli (“Deponency in the diachrony of Greek”, pp. 97–126) track the history of *media tantum* (also *passiva tantum*) verbs with accusative objects from ancient to modern Greek. They discuss the wide semantic range covered by these verbs, cases of near-synonymy with active verbs, and shifts over time of deponents into the active class or vice versa, as evidence that deponents “are due to rules of morphology rather than semantics” (pp. 103–104). In the following paper, Zheng Xu, Mark Aronoff, & Frank Anshen (“Deponency in Latin”, pp. 127–143) attempt to match the definitions of the 543 deponents listed in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* with the syntactico-semantic classes of English verbs compiled by Beth Levin. What they learn from this exercise is that the synchronic function of deponent morphology in Latin was to signal “non-canonical active verbs” (p. 142), in the sense that they tend not to denote the imposition of physical change upon the object. Xu et al. hypothesize that since Latin inherited a subclass of morphologically-passive verbs with active meaning, “speakers had to find some Saussurean value for it within the system of the language” (p. 143).

There follows a contribution by Andrew Hippisley (“Declarative deponency: A Network Morphology account of morphological mismatches”, pp. 145–173), in which sample instances of deponency (Latin deponents, some Archi nouns with irregular declensions) are presented in the formal “lexical knowledge representation language” DATR. In this framework, deponency properties are generated by overrides of default form-function links. There is however no discussion of how historically (or psycholinguistically?) perspicuous these default-and-override accounts are, nor where the model predicts that mismatches would be likely to occur.

Chapters 8 through 11 are case studies intended both to expand our knowledge of deponency and similar phenomena, as well as engage with the issue of how they might arise in a given context. Jonathan David Bobaljik (“The limits of deponency: A Chukotko-centric perspective”, pp. 175–201) starts out with the sceptical question “do deponent paradigms constitute a natural class?”, which he proposes to answer in the negative. Bobaljik examines the so-called “spurious antipassive” of the Siberian language Chukchi, which consists in the inclusion of formally antipassive verb forms in the conjugation of transitive verbs, for certain combinations of 1st person objects and 2nd or 3rd per-

son subjects (p. 183).<sup>1</sup> What makes these antipassives spurious is their case-assignment pattern, which is the same as for ordinary transitive verbs with ergative-absolutive alignment. Bobaljik analyses the Chukchi spurious antipassive in Minimalist terms, which presumes considerable familiarity with the specialized jargon of this framework (pp. 185–192). He concludes that the spurious antipassive arises from “general devices, none of which is specifically tailored to derive deponency”, among which are filters on combinations of subject and object apparently specific to certain types of ergative languages (p. 192, Note 19). Like Spencer, Bobaljik concludes that deponents do not compose a natural class of linguistic phenomena, although he favours a synchronic account rather than the confluence of grammaticalisation pathways and historical accident invoked by Spencer.

The rough beasts alluded to in the title of Jeff Good’s chapter (“Slouching towards deponency: A family of mismatches in the Bantu verb stem”, pp. 203–230) are derivational (rather than inflectional) phonology-morphology mismatches. Good discusses verbs from Bantu languages that have the phonological shape of passives or causatives, but which are not associated with unmarked stems from the same roots (p. 205). Also presented are instances of meaningless formatives apparently inserted to comply with morphophonological templates, an indication that “the morphophonology of the Bantu verb stem sometimes seems to have ‘a mind of its own’ ” (p. 216).

Ricardo Bermúdez-Otero (“Spanish pseudoplurals: Phonological cues in the acquisition of a syntax/morphology mismatch”, pp. 231–269) makes a similar claim, although in more specifically psycholinguistic terms. He brings up the important issue of learnability: how do young language-learners acquire the correct interpretation of forms with morphological shapes that do not fit their meaning or syntactic behaviour? Bermúdez-Otero looks at a class of Spanish nouns ending in /s/, such as the proper name *Carlos*, which he qualifies as “pseudoplurals”, in that the final /s/ of such nouns is in fact the same morpheme as in true Spanish plurals like *niños* ‘boys, children’ (pp. 235–236). Since the derived forms that motivate the pseudoplural parsing, such as the augmentative *Carlote*, are extremely infrequent in text corpora, Bermúdez-Otero attributes the learnability of pseudoplurals to a hierarchy of parsing preferences (p. 256). His intricate arguments for the latter, like those motivating morphologically-distinct subgroups of /s/-final nouns, are consistent with empirical data on word frequencies, but they depend crucially on the assumption that the final /s/ of *Carlos* and similar nouns is interpreted by native speakers as a plural marker. But is that the only reasonable interpretation? English speakers com-

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1. Somewhat confusingly, Bobaljik uses the abbreviation “SAP” for “spurious antipassive” throughout his chapter, whereas in Nicholas Evans’s paper the same acronym is employed with its more common meaning of “speech-act participant”, i.e., 1st or 2nd person.

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monly add /s/ to nicknames (*Caits* < *Caitlin*, *Yags* < [hockey player Jaromir] *Jagr*) or affectionate terms of address (*Snuggles*, *Cuddles*). Even if this nickname/hypocoristic/ludic /s/ originally came from the plural suffix, it has taken on a life of its own in English (Mühlhäusler 1983, Southern 2005: 171–178). In view of the fact that most of Bermúdez-Otero’s alleged pseudoplurals are proper names, it would be worth exploring whether something akin to English nickname /s/ is beginning to emerge in Spanish.

In the last paper of this group, Nicholas Evans (“Pseudo-argument affixes in Iwaidja and Ilgar: A case of deponent subject and object agreement”, pp. 271–296) treats subject and object prefixes with non-argument functions (derivational/lexical or empty) in the related Northern Australian languages Iwaidja and Ilgar as a type of deponency. For some verbs, the semantic range of the argument once cross-indexed by the affixes in question can be reconstructed, in view of the “correlation in real world between event-types and entities stereotypically involved in them” (pp. 292–295). As Evans notes, similar types of empty arguments, either in the form of agreement affixes or expletive pronouns, occur in many other languages (including English, e.g., *it* in *it snows* or *beat it!*).

The volume concludes with a contribution by Peter H. Matthews (“How safe are our analyses?”, pp. 297–315), a distinguished elder statesman in the field of linguistic morphology. He provides a useful overview of how the grammarians of Antiquity understood Latin deponents, but also expresses further scepticism about the significance of a general theory of deponency, and the one-size-fits-all concept of canonicity some other contributors appear to assume (pp. 312–313).

On the whole, I was favourably impressed by the volume under review, both for the remarkable range of linguistic phenomena that were presented, as well as by the editors’ willingness to invite contributors who expressed opinions divergent from theirs. What I thought was lacking in the dozen contributions to *Deponency and morphological mismatches* was any in-depth discussion of the paradigm, not as an idealized form-function grid for assessing the deviancy of deponents and their ilk, but rather as an emergent grammatical property in the diachronic trajectory of languages. Georgian and the other Kartvelian languages, for example, present an abundance of deponent-like phenomena. Textbooks and grammars typically present the conjugation of Georgian verbs in neatly parallel columns of forms grouped by stem class and tense/aspect/mode, but a historically more accurate depiction would resemble a coalescing planetary system. Some clusters of verb forms had already condensed into solid paradigms at the time of the oldest Georgian texts, whereas others did not form until the historical period, and yet others appear to be still in the process of coming together through the morphological equivalent of mutual gravitational attraction. This last group of verbs are characterized by several types of “mis-

match” between form and syntactic properties. Semantically active comitative passives (meaning ‘do X with somebody’) recruit their present perfects from the transitive conjugation, whereas the reverse tendency seems to be underway in the case of indirect transitives (the direct or indirect objects of which have the syntactic privileges of subjects), which are incorporating passive present perfects into their paradigms (Tuite 1996). Using Stump’s terminology, it could be said that “property-deponents” are converting other verb types into “form-deponents” by attracting them into their paradigms. Another sort of paradigmatisation occurs at the level of the verbal system as a whole, when mismatches become productive and serve as a pattern for the creation of new forms. Georgian deponent passives show signs of productivity, as did their Latin counterparts in Late Antiquity (Flobert 1975, Tuite 2007).

There is also the fascinating matter of whether the social dynamics of speech communities has any correlation with the overall paradigmaticity of language varieties, a topic to which deponency research can doubtless make a significant contribution. In a series of studies based on fieldwork in New Guinea, William Thurston (1989) drew an insightful distinction between the processes of “exoterogeny” and “esoterogeny” in language evolution. The former term denotes the opening of a language to non-native speakers, which in extreme circumstances can lead to the grammatical simplification and regularization characteristic of vehicular languages and pidgins. Esoterogeny, by contrast, is the CLOSING of a language to non-natives, which Thurston attributes to a strategy of barrier maintenance between the in-group and outsiders. Even in communities where there is little evidence that speakers intentionally opacify their language in order to “block the possibility of being understood by outsiders” (Thurston 1989: 558), the lower degree of linguistic variation that tends to characterize relatively isolated small-scale traditional societies will foster the accumulation of morphological irregularity (Andersen 1988: 61, Wray & Grace 2007). Returning to Kartvelian one last time, the Svan language, spoken by about 40,000 people in the highlands of western Georgia, provides an instructive contrast to Georgian, which has a hundred times as many speakers and a long tradition of use as a literary, administrative, and liturgical language. Those who encounter Svan for the first time will detect many of the features of an “esoteric” language – high level of allomorphy, surface morphophonemics far less transparent than that of Georgian – but will also notice a lesser degree of paradigmaticity than in the other Kartvelian languages. For both nouns and verbs, the linguist will find forms whose relation to other forms based on the same root will be difficult to classify as inflectional or derivational, or perhaps in transition between the two.<sup>2</sup> Looked at from the vantage point of many, perhaps most of the 6,000+ languages spoken today, it would appear that it is the

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2. The Svan counterparts to Georgian (and Latin) deponent verbs are a case in point. Formally

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neatly symmetrical canonical paradigm which belongs in a cabinet of curiosities (as Corbett himself admits, p. 22) rather than such creatures as the spurious antipassive and the pseudo-causative.

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passive verbs with active syntactic frames are if anything even more common in Svan than in Georgian, and probably represent an open lexical subclass. What is particularly interesting is that one group of deponents is being integrated into the paradigm of active verbs, with imperfective-future meaning, for example the formally passive *i-č'm-un-i* 'will be mowing (hay)', cp. *a-č'm-e* 'mows (hay)' (Ch'umburidze 1986: 167, Tuite 1997: 29–30).