Review of Linguistic Variation Yearbook 2007

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SUMMARY

This is an outstanding collection of papers, united by the topic of variation, but fairly diverse otherwise, covering the subfields of syntax, semantics and language acquisition. With respect to language selection, the volume discusses both Indo-European languages, like English, French and Dutch; and a number of languages that have received less attention in the literature, like Halkomelem, Hmong and San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec. The majority of the authors whose works are included in the book are renowned linguists like, for example, Richard Kayne or Norbert Hornstein, but there are also contributions from younger scientists like Robert Truswell or Oana Lungu. In a word, the volume is an attractive read for specialists with a formal background in theoretical linguistics and a wide variety of research interests.

It opens with an Introduction by the editors, Jeroen Van Craenenbroeck and Johan Rooryck, in which they give a short outline of the collection. The first article that follows it is "Antisymmetry and the Lexicon", by Richard S. Kayne (pp. 1-31). The article may ignite a lot of discussions, since it introduces a novel criterion for distinguishing between open and closed word classes and arrives at the conclusion that verbs and nouns belong to different classes. The distinction rests on the idea that only unvalued features can lead to parametric variation. Since nouns represent the category that can denote, they should enter the derivation with no unvalued features (p. 7) (cf. the criterion of identity in Baker 2003). As a consequence, nouns do not have specifiers. Verbs, on the other hand, do carry unvalued features and, according to the author, are invariably formed by way of conflation a la Hale and Keyser (1993). In other words, 'all verbs are light verbs' (p. 9). Naturally, they make up a closed class. Another distinction between nouns and verbs is that the former "invariably undergo singleton-set formation rather than merging with a phrase-set" (p. 12).
repercussion of this claim is that nouns do not have complements either. The remainder of the article is devoted to showing that the 'that'-clause after 'the fact' is not a complement but rather a relative. The reasoning is extended to the analysis of 'of'-phrases following derived nominals.

"Tense marking in the nominal domain. Implications for grammar architecture", by Artemis Alexiadou (pp. 33-60): This article deals with an interesting phenomenon of temporal morphology in the nominal domain, which occurs, for example, in Somali and Halkomelem, discussed in the paper:

1. Somali
dhibaata-dii Khalij-ku way dhammaatay.
demonstrations-DEF[+past] Gulf-DETm.NOM F.3s ended+past
The Gulf crisis ended.

2. Halkomelem
i'mex te-l si:la-lh.
walk DET-1sg.poss grandfather-past
My late grandfather walked.
(p. 34)

The author argues against the notion of 'temporal tenses', showing that nominals have no expletives or nominative Case and do not allow raising. In addition, clauses having TP (Tense Phrase) should be headed by C (Complementizer) rather than D (Determiner). Tense morphology on Somali nouns is comparable to specificity markers in other languages and performs similar functions. Moreover, it provides extra evidence for splitting DP into definiteness and specificity layers, postulated in analyzing, for example, Scandinavian nominals. Tense morphology on Halkomelem nouns is comparable to such English modifiers as 'former' and does not represent a functional formal feature. This is an interpretable T (Tense) feature, which does not require valuation and thus the presence of TP. The claim that there is no TP in Halkomelem is supported by a) facts listed on p. 51, and b) by identical behaviour of nominal and verbal projections in Salishan languages.

"Copy-reflexive and copy-control constructions. A movement analysis", by Cedric Boeckx, Norbert Hornstein and Jairo Nunes (pp. 61-100): The discussion in this paper is based on syntactic peculiarities of such languages as Hmong and San Lucas Quiavini Zapotec (SLQZ). These languages provide evidence for analysing antecedent-anaphora and control structures from the point of view of movement, which equals copy and merge operations. Reflexive and control sentences in Hmong and SLQZ can be expressed like (3) and (4) below ((1-b) and (2-b), p. 63 in the article):

3. John saw John. (= John saw himself.)
4. John wants John to eat. (= John wants to eat.)

First, the authors show that reflexive structures like (3) above are reflexive indeed, since they display sloppy readings under ellipsis (p. 65) and are the only ones violating Principles B and C ((7) and (8) on p. 66). The reflexive structure is achieved by (A-)movement. The claim is supported by the unacceptability of coordination of copy-reflexives with other nominals (movement from one of the conjuncts is illegitimate, (12), p. 68). The next point in discussion addresses the satisfaction of Case requirements which demands somewhat more complicated machinery, based on Hornstein's (2001) analysis of English.

The second half of the paper deals with problematic cases featuring certain restrictions. For instance, overt copies are not allowed in the case of quantified expressions either in SQLZ ((40), p. 79), or in Hmong ((44), p. 80). Another issue addressed here is why there are so few languages like the two above, where we observe overt multiple copies left behind by movement. The explanation given hinges mostly on the LCA (Linear Correspondence Axiom) by Kayne (1994).

"Sequence of tense in (French) child language", by Hamida Demirdache and Oana Lungu (pp.101-130): This paper is about a parametric variation between English-like languages, on the one hand, and Japanese-like languages, on the other, and the two parameters in child language. The difference between these two types of language is that the former have sequence of tenses (SOT), and the latter do not. Discussing a number of detailed experiments with young French speakers (French is the English-type language) the authors demonstrate that at a certain stage of language acquisition child grammar is radically different from adult grammar of French in the area of sequence of tenses. The main approach to treating sequence of tenses is adopted from Kratzer (1998) and is called zero-tense morphology. In its turn Kratzer's theory is based on a referential theory of tenses (Partee 1984). From this position, the embedded tense is a zero-tense that gets bound by the matrix tense ((11), p. 107). In SOT languages the temporal features of a zero-tense are determined by PF (Phonetic Form)
agreement between the embedded tense and its antecedent; in non-SOT languages
the temporal features of a zero-tense are the default/unmarked features ((12), p. 107). In SOT languages sequence of tenses holds both in relative and complement clauses. The following readings are possible: a) backward-shifted interpretation when the SIT-T (Situation Time) of the embedded clause precedes the SIT-T of the matrix clause ((2-a), p. 103); b) forward-shifted interpretation when the SIT-T in the past of the embedded event follows the SIT-T in the past of the matrix clause ((2-b), p. 103); c) simultaneous reading of past under past when the SIT-T of the embedded clause coincides with the SIT-T of the matrix clause ((3), p. 104); d) Double Access (DA) reading when the SIT-T of the embedded clause in the present can be interpreted as either coinciding with the SIT-T of the matrix clause or with the UT-T (Utterance Time); and e) Indexical non-simultaneous interpretation when the SIT-T of the embedded clause coincides with the UT-T.

In the series of experiments with children a number of different situations were offered (pp. 110-113). The first experiment included altogether four constructions: 1) a relative clause with double access (DA), 2) a relative clause with a simultaneous reading, 3) a SOT construction with DA, 4) and a SOT construction with a simultaneous reading.

Surprisingly, the children accepted present on the simultaneous construals (when an indexical construal is enforced in the target grammar) and pure simultaneous construals of present tensed complement clauses (when a DA construal is enforced in the adult grammar) (pp. 128-129)

One of the conclusions made on the basis of the experiments is that children acquiring an SOT language go through a stage of multiple grammars; and judging by the results of similar experiments with Japanese children, this is also true of children acquiring a non-SOT language.

"Prepositional stranding, passivisation, and extraction from adjuncts in Germanic", by Robert Truswell (pp. 131-178): The author proposes a parameter which neatly splits the Germanic languages into clear groups according to whether they allow P-stranding i) at all; ii) under A- or A'-movement; iii) under A'-movement only; or iv) under A-movement only. He claims that there are no languages of type (iv). So, one of the main questions of the article is what is the relation between pseudopassivization and A'-movement, since the former cannot exist unless the latter is an option too. One more structure enters the picture here: Bare Present Participial Adjuncts (BPPAs), extraction from which has a very similar crosslinguistic distribution to P-stranding. Despite being a token of A'-movement, extraction from BPPAs patterns with pseudopassivization.

Discussing the intricacies of P-stranding the author gives an overview of two existing approaches to prepositional stranding, one offered in Hornstein and Weinberg (1981) (Reanalysis Theory) and the other in Abels (2003) (Escape Hatch Theory). Neither of them fully satisfies the author.

The reanalysis theory states that V (verb) and right-hand material within it, for example P (Preposition), form a complex verb V*, also called a semantic word, and other material is the complement of this complex verb, so it is quite mobile. One of its predictions is that extraction from extraposed PPs (Prepositional Phrases) is not allowed. The author, however, finds the contrasts illustrating the prediction ((16), (17), (18), p. 139) very subtle for native judgment. In addition, the reanalysis theory is not restricted enough.

The escape hatch analysis is based on the head constraint. The author uses its modified version (Abels 2003). PP is claimed to be a bounding node, and extracted material should pass through a so-called 'escape hatch' on the periphery of the projection (for example, [Spec, P] (Specifier, Preposition)). Abels (2003) postulates that heads of PPs are phases establishing Agree relations in their c-command domain and intervening for the establishment of such Agree relations by higher heads ((31), p. 145). So, languages differ as to whether P is a phase or not. In the former case the complement of P cannot move and so P cannot strand. The second parameter in Abels’s theory is whether P obligatorily assigns Case to its complement, or optionally. Despite all its virtues, this approach, however, cannot explain the problem of a relation between A'-movement and P-stranding, demonstrated by the co-existence of BPPAs and pseudopassivization.

The author offers his own solution to this problem, based on Abels’s theory. It lies in the (uninterpretable) feature suppression mechanism. In pseudopassivization the ability of P to assign Case is suppressed, and in extraction from BPPAs the suppressed feature is the phasehood of the participial head. The solution is not unproblematic either, but additional questions (or rather prospects) are formulated towards the conclusion.
"Variation in the expression of universal quantification and free choice. The case of Hausa koo-wh expressions", by Malte Zimmermann (pp.179-232): This article is devoted to the semantic variation of morphologically complex expressions simultaneously containing a wh-element and a disjunctive element that the author calls WH-DISJ. These elements have different interpretations in different languages. For example, in Hausa (the language under discussion) they have an interpretation of distributive operators with a universal force, on the one hand (koo-mee = koo+what 'everything', 'anyone', p. 180) and a Free Choice reading similar to English 'any'. In Japanese and Malayalam, in their turn, WH-DISJ expressions receive an existential interpretation. Semantic differences lead to differences in the syntactic distribution of these expressions.

While describing the quantificational system of Hausa, the author subdivides its types into lexical quantification (a quantificational operator is introduced into the semantic representation of NP as part of its lexical meaning) and syntactic quantification (a quantificational operator is not introduced as part of NP; it assigns the NP its quantificational force by binding the variable introduced by the Noun Phrase (Heim 1982).

In their universal reading koo-wh expressions in Hausa are similar to English 'each/every'. A number of questions arise in this respect, e.g. what is the source of the universal force of koo-wh expressions or why analogous expressions are interpreted differently (existentially) in other languages. Here the importance of the second possible readings of koo-wh in Hausa becomes apparent.

The Free Choice Item (FCI) reading is available in intensional or modal contexts, but the universal interpretation is not excluded from such contexts either. So, there are no strict contexts with strictly one interpretation of koo-wh expressions, which is taken to be an argument against treating them as lexically ambiguous (pp. 203-204). The author also rejects treating them as indeterminate pronouns (pp. 204-205). She concludes that the observable surface interpretations of these expressions can be derived from their basic universal reading.

The article makes two attempts at a unified syntactic and semantic analysis of WH-DISJ expressions across languages. The first account suggests treating the disjunction marker as the Boolean join-operator. The universal force in Hausa arises from the local composition of the join-operator and the set of alternatives provided by the WH-element. In languages like Japanese or Malayalam the disjunction marker operates at the clausal level at LF and combines with the WH-element contained in the clause as well. For a number of reasons (pp. 212-215), however, this kind of analysis for Japanese and Malayalam (and Kannada) is rejected in favour of the indeterminate pronoun analysis.

Further in the article the indeterminate pronoun analysis is tried for Hausa to account for the free choice interpretation of the koo-wh expressions. The unified approach fails here too for the reasons explained on pp. 224-227. Koo-wh expressions are proposed to be generalized quantifiers, like in the previous approach.

The author concludes that "WH-DISJ expressions are interpreted by different interpretive mechanisms in different languages, in spite of their parallel morpho-syntactic structure” (p. 215).

"Collective numeral constructions in Dutch. Remarkable plurals, regular syntax and silent nouns", by Norbert Corver and Huib Kranendonk (pp. 233-268): This article deals with the following constructions in Dutch:

5. a) Wij tweeën geven vandaag een lezing.
   We two-en give today a talk
   'The two of us give a talk today'. ((3), (4), p. 234)

   The suffix -en usually marks plurality of a noun, as in een boek 'one book' - twee boeken 'two books'. However, in the examples above -en does not express plurality of the numerals twee 'two' or negen 'nine'. In addition, the 'normal' plural form of 'nine' looks like negens ((5-b), p. 235).
The analysis the authors propose for this phenomenon employs the notion of silent nouns developed by Kayne (e.g., 2007). The silent noun in the constructions under discussion is PERSOON 'person' and the suffix -en attaches to it rather than to a numeral. On pp. 239-240 the evidence for silent nouns in Dutch is given, then the examples with a non-silent grammatical noun 'persoon' are offered (p. 241):

7. Jan gaf mij informatie over [Anna's persoon].
Jan gave me information about Anna's person
'Jan gave me information about Anna.'

The authors conclude that silent grammatical nouns require a licensor, and according to Kayne (2003) there should be some sort of antecedent "which makes it possible to recover the (semantic) contents of the silent noun" (p. 248). The silent grammatical noun PERSOON in Dutch sentences like the above can only appear in the presence of a personal pronoun with the features [+person, +plural, +human] as demonstrated in (54), p. 248 (wij vier PERSOON-en 'we four person-en' = "the four of us" is possible, whereas "vier PERSOON-en 'four person-en' is not). Since the feature [+human] is associated with the strong pronoun in Dutch, the resulting syntactic analysis for wij/ons tween looks like the following:

8. [DP wij/ons] [NumP twee] [NP PERSOON-en] ((65), p. 252)

The construction met z'n tweezen requires more complicated machinery, since it contains the weak pronoun z'n, whose person, number and gender features (phi-features) are unspecified. The only grammatical feature it has is 'possessive'. This possessive pronoun z'n is analysed from the point of view of Predicate Inversion (Den Dikken (1998)). Without going into the intricacies of this analysis applied to z'n, I should mention that what we see neatly reflects the transformations changing the small clause configuration (XP) with the NumP (Number Phrase) as its subject and the dative PP as its predicative phrase into a possessive construction. Thus, the element "z" is the spell-out of the functional head F dominating the XP, and the second element "n" is taken to be a so-called spurious indefinite article, which "typically shows up in contexts of DP-internal predicate movement" (p. 259).

The article ends with a micro-comparative perspective (pp. 261-264), which demonstrates the realizations of wij vieren and met z'n/ons vieren across different Dutch dialects.

EVALUATION

I found the book impressive in the quality of the contributions and in the range of topics discussed under the rubric of linguistic variation. A number of papers were particularly clear and easy to follow, like the ones by Artemis Alexiadou, Norbert Corver & Huib Kranendonk, and especially Robert Truswell.

This is partly true of the article by Richard Kayne as well. The main difficulty for me was his reasoning in favour of the non-complement (relative) character of postnominal material, like in 'the fact that they're here', (p. 12) or 'the removal of the evidence'. (p. 17). The machinery is overcomplicated and some moves seem poorly motivated. However, readers will find this piece original and worthy of lengthy discussions.

The article by Boeckx, Hornstein and Nunes represents a strong argument in the dispute about movement analysis of control structures (see, e.g., Boeckx & Hornstein (2006), Landau (2006) and Davies & Dubinsky (2006)). It is one of the most curious and inspirational papers of the volume with a lot of interesting data. However, readers might have doubts about Case requirements circumvented on p. 70. The curious premise that nominal copies 'can be phonetically realized only if they are Case licensed' (p.71) poses the question how to represent a structure like 'he was killed by himself', where the movement to a Theta-position would violate some locality constraints, in my opinion. It is also stated that if we have an unchecked Case feature, a local movement to a Theta-position is impossible; if we don't, it is necessary. But then I don't see how we account for movement in reflexive structures vs. passive structures.

Another big question is why in the languages under discussion are all the overt copies personal names or name-like expressions? The account (pp. 84-87) along the lines of morphological fusion and removing copies from the visual field of the LCA seemed a bit disappointing, for, intuitively, I expected something simpler and neater, like sentential (quantificational or focus) elements merging high and, of course, not appearing in copies (cf. Sportiche (2005)).

My less theoretical criticism concerns the article by Malte Zimmermann. I think it could be shorter and contain fewer repetitions, that is, the layout seemed a bit unfortunate. After having admitted that languages differ with respect to interpretation of the WH-DISJ expressions on p. 215 the author tries another
analysis which undermines this statement. It was also unclear whether the author considers QR (Quantifier Raising) a possibility (p. 212) or a problematic assumption (p. 209). The paper is, however, one of the most complicated in the collection.

In spite of these imperfections, the book would be a good acquisition for a theoretical linguist's scientific library.

REFERENCES


Boeckx, Cedric and Norbert Hornstein. 2006. The Virtues of Control as Movement. Syntax, 9:2, pp. 118 - 130.


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Eugenia Romanova is a lecturer of linguistic disciplines at the Institute of International Relations, Yekaterinburg, Russia. Her PhD dissertation, written at the University of Tromse, Norway, deals with the syntactic derivation of prefixed verbs in Russian. Her scientific interests lie in the domain of syntax and semantics of aspect and argument structure of Russian verbs.
The Linguistic Variation Yearbook is exclusively devoted to the study of the nature and scope of linguistic variation from the point of view of the minimalist program. In this perspective, the yearbook aims at going beyond the traditional tension between explanatory and descriptive adequacy. It seeks in particular to investigate the nature and scope of linguistic variation. Discover related content. Find related publications, people, projects, datasets and more using interactive charts. View graph of relations. York staff: edit these data.

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