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Zygmunt Frajzyngier and Erin Shay. *Explaining language structure through systems interaction*. (Typological Studies in Language 55). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins 2003. xviii + 307 pp. (ISBN 90 272 2963 5 (EUR), 1 58811 436 8 (US))

Reviewed by Scott DeLancey (University of Oregon)

In this extremely interesting book (hereafter ELS), the authors present a resolutely inductive, empiricist framework for understanding language structure and function. The way of thinking about language which is presented here may well be novel to many contemporary students of linguistics, though it has conspicuous roots in European and American structural linguistics. The essential claim of ELS is that morphosyntax and semantics can be exhaustively described and analyzed in terms of the interaction of formal coding means such as linear order and morphological marking with functional domains such as tense/aspect and reference coding. The result is an empiricist theoretical and descriptive framework which eschews abstract explanatory constructs such as Universal Grammar in any of its various flavors, a priori theories of communicative function such as are implicit in much functionalist work (e.g. Givón 2001), or processes of metaphorical interpretation appealed to by Cognitive Grammar. It can be argued that the authors take their empiricism too far, but it is a very valuable exercise to demonstrate just how much of linguistic structure can be satisfactorily explained with so few a priori assumptions.

Chapter 1, “Introduction: Theoretical and methodological foundations” introduces the approach, and the brief Chapter 12, “Conclusions, implications, and open questions” is just what it sounds like. Coding means are stipulated rather than defined: “all coding means belong to one of the following formal domains ...

lexicon; inflectional and derivational morphology, linear order, and phonology” (11). Notably absent from this list are formal properties such as control or hierarchical structure, presumably (though this is not explicitly argued) because they are not concretely present in the actual speech signal in the way that word choice, word form, and word order are. The coding means are, by their nature, universal, but no universal assumptions can be made about the uses to which they will be put; the linking of particular coding means with particular functional domains is entirely language-specific.

“Functional domain” is explicitly defined as a set of constructions (“expressions”) which “have a specific pragmatic, semantic, or syntactic function in common” (26). Functional domains must be defined on a language-by-language basis; although F&S do not explicitly reject the idea that there might turn out to be some functional domains which are coded in all languages, they do explicitly reject the practice, common to linguistic analysts of all theoretical persuasions, of approaching a language armed with a predefined set of communicative functions which are assumed to be universally present.

Presented as an essential premise of the approach is the notion of “functional transparency”, which requires that “every utterance must have a transparent function within the discourse; and ... every constituent must have a transparent function within the utterance” (4). For the function of a form to be “transparent” means that the hearer can identify its role in expressing some functional domain, i.e. can understand why it is present in the utterance. This seems vague — what determines whether a hearer can identify the function of an element? — but this is not really a problem; though the authors devote considerable space in the introductory chapter to the principle of functional transparency, it does not generally play a major role in the argumentation in subsequent chapters.

In this chapter also F&S describe their underlying concept of language. Huck and Goldsmith (1995) present a useful opposition between **mediational** approaches to syntax, which view the essential problem of linguistics as accounting for the relation between form and meaning, and **distributional** approaches in which the essential goal of syntax is to “explain the patterning and distribution of the formal elements of language” (1995:7). F&S’s approach is uncompromisingly distributionalist; they do not recognize any concept of semantics which is distinct from the set of distinctions actually encoded in a particular language, and are explicitly unsympathetic to any attempt to invoke “cognitive” parameters in explaining syntactic structure. In this book, “language is viewed as a means of *creating* meaning” (3, emphasis added); later we are reminded that “The foundation of the proposed approach is that meaning does not exist outside of the linguistic forms that code it” (211).

Chapters 2–8 illustrate the applicability of the limited set of coding means. Chapter 2, “Interaction of the lexicon with other coding means”, motivates the existence of “parts of speech”, which are rooted neither in innate Universal Grammar nor in putative universal cognitive structures, but represent language-specific solutions to language-specific problems. The categories “verb” and “noun” derive from the essential predicate-argument structure of the proposition; nevertheless even these categories are not necessarily universal (42).

Chapter 3, “Coding through linear order”, argues that, for constituent order to be usable as a coding means, there must be an element within the utterance with respect to which order is defined. This is typically the verb, which entails that, for a language to use linear order as a means for coding grammatical information — grammatical relations in English, for example — the verb must always be identifiable. This leads to a very elegant interpretation of the bizarre verb agreement system of modern English: past tense verbs are easily identifiable as such, verbs with 1st or 2nd person subjects are identifiable from the fact that they directly follow a nominative pronoun; verbs with 3rd person plural subjects are identifiable because they follow an NP with its head inflected for plural — thus the typologically anomalous 3rd sg. present suffix *-s* occurs in just those clauses in which the verb cannot be easily identified through any of these other means.

In this chapter we get to see some of the implications of the authors’ empiricist approach. Pp. 71–4 deal with the functions coded by pre- and postverbal NP position in English — coding means which are evident on inspection. But the terms **subject** and **object** are not mentioned until p. 86, where they are dismissed as contributing nothing more to our explanatory arsenal than is provided by linear order alone. This will undoubtedly strike many readers as perverse — look at all of the phenomena which cluster around that preverbal argument in English, and tell me that it’s all epiphenomenal! But it is, in fact, an extremely salutary experiment. We need to regularly check the necessity of our various theoretical constructs by looking to see how lost we are — or are not — if we abandon them. Skeptical readers are encouraged to work through F&S’s argument and think seriously about what work abstractions like subject and object actually do for us, that cannot be more economically done without them.

Chapter 4, “Coding through nominal inflection”, makes a persuasive case that case-marking on nominals is intrinsically meaningful, as opposed to being automatically (and thus redundantly) triggered by a governing verb or adposition. The argument developed in this chapter is the basis for important analyses later in the book.

Chapter 5, “Interaction of phonology with other coding means”, describes the communicative function of sandhi phenomena, phonological reduction, and exotica such as Celtic consonant mutation. Most of the analyses here will seem

familiar, at least in outline, to most linguists; the main contribution of this chapter is as a demonstration of the authors' claim that phonology (at least in these manifestations) must be considered simply as part of language's arsenal of coding means, rather than as a distinct and independent component. (The analysis of consonant mutation in Welsh which concludes this chapter is a very interesting contribution to that much-discussed topic).

Chapter 6, "Agreement, or coding on other constituents", argues that "agreement" marking on verbs, like case marking on nouns, is an independent coding means; the most obvious evidence for this is the many languages in which "agreement" on the verb is sufficient reference to its arguments, so that an inflected verb can function as a clause by itself, with no external NP's for it to "agree" with. In the introductory chapter, F&S acknowledge that "it remains an open question" whether a form, i.e. part of a coding system, can ever be "a redundant consequence of the deployment of some other means" (11–12); this chapter is devoted to refuting the usual evidence for such dependence, and argues against the idea of "agreement", in which some formal feature of one word is interpreted as an automatic reflex of some fact about another.

Chapter 7, "Interaction of nominal classification with other coding means", argues that grammatical nominal classification, such as gender in Indo-European languages, is not a reflection of an innate cognitive tendency to classify things, but rather serves to help specify anaphoric reference in the organization of discourse. This is certainly one of the authors' less controversial suggestions, but the chapter is well worth reading, especially for its insightful discussion of the functions of articles in western European languages.

Chapter 8, "Matrix clause coding", deals with so-called raising constructions in which "the subject of the embedded clause is coded in the matrix clause" (p. 184). As in Chapter 4, case marking, and alternations in case marking, are taken to be intrinsically meaningful, not simply automatic reflections of the syntactic structure where the NP appears. This chapter almost deserves a review in itself; taken together with Chapter 4 on case marking, we have a functional interpretation of surface case which is consistent, coherent, and makes sense of all the relevant data in a way that no widely-accepted theory is able to do.

Chapters 9–11 illustrate the overall approach by applying it to particular typological/syntactic problems. Chapter 9, "Determining the function of a linguistic form: The indirectly affected argument and the external possessor", further applies the interpretation of nominal case marking from Chapter 4 to the phenomenon of "external possessor" constructions, concluding that the dative marking on notional possessors in constructions like *Ich habe ihr die Haare geschnitten* 'I cut her hair' does not code the possessor relation, but "indirect affectedness", the sense of possession which other scholars have identified as the "meaning" of the

construction being in fact only a pragmatic inference. (See Huffman 1997 for a very similar argument). Chapter 10, “Systems interaction in the coding of locative predication”, discusses the coding of predicate locatives, which can involve the recognition of a distinct lexical category of locative expressions in the spirit of Chapter 2. Chapter 11, “Systems interaction in the coding of reference”, illustrates how F&S’s approach can be applied to discourse-level functional domains such as previous mention and definiteness.

F&S do a very good job of constructing a theoretical framework and presenting it through the analysis of relevant data. They do not make any serious effort at relating their ideas to the rest of the field, past and present. Much of F&S’s approach recalls older Structuralist arguments, e.g. the distinctly Saussurean demonstration on pp. 7–8 that the meaning of a form in a language is dependent upon what other forms it contrasts with, but the authors nowhere give any indication that they see their work as grounded in anything earlier. Likewise lacking is any discussion of how the proposals in ELS relate to anything else in contemporary linguistics. There are, in fact, ideas current in the literature which are very close in both spirit and practice to what is presented here. For example, research in the “Columbia School” framework (Huffman 2001) makes very similar assumptions, and produces very similar analyses; indeed, Huffman 1997 is effectively an extended case study illustrating the claims of F&S’s chapter on case marking, and Reid 1991 provides support for their interpretation of verb agreement.

Similarly little attention is given to potentially competing approaches. The authors offhandedly dismiss what they apparently see as the a priori semantics-driven approaches of Jackendoff, Wierzbicka, and Van Valin and LaPolla (p. 211), but with no real discussion of what these authors actually claim or actually do. The authors’ approach to lexical categories is contrasted with Croft’s in two sentences (pp. 17–18) and with that of Hopper and Thompson in a paragraph on p. 38, with some Polish data whose relevance is not really clear. It would help many readers to understand F&S’s contribution, and its value, if the authors had provided more discussion of how their approach relates to other earlier and contemporary work — both points of agreement with other frameworks, and more explicit explication of the fundamental points of disagreement.

ELS is highly recommended for typologists and syntacticians. Formalists, functionalists, and typologists will all find much to disagree with, but in most cases this will be an educational experience. A mildly polemical section of Chapter 1, titled “Toward a new methodology in typology”, insists that typologists should avoid a priori assumptions about how coding means and functional domains are likely to be associated, or about which functional domains are likely to be grammaticalized in language — forbidding the prevalent functional-typological approach, illustrated for example in Givón 2001, of assuming a set of given functional domains

and looking for cross-linguistically recurring devices for encoding them. Rather, each language must be individually analyzed before any cross-linguistic generalizations can be made. (This “new” methodology recalls the American Structuralist approach seen in some grammars written as dissertations in the U.S. during the 1940’s and 50’s, where the categories of a language are labeled with numbers rather than functional labels to avoid contaminating the analysis with assumptions imported from more familiar languages).

However, despite the tone of this section, F&S do not really intend to abolish typology as we know it. They acknowledge that, in principle:

If different coding means, such as linear order, case marking, and adpositions, carry the same functions across languages, then it is legitimate and appropriate to compare those means. (188)

And at many points in the book they discuss evidence from different languages which seem to show parallel coding-function pairings — for example, the chapter on “external possession” constructions takes for granted that the authors’ analysis of the EP construction in Polish is automatically relevant to similar constructions in German and other languages. The authors’ actual point is that cross-linguistic comparison needs to be done responsibly. This is, alas, a lesson which many of us could stand to review periodically, and a reading of ELS would be a good start.

The strengths of ELS lie in its fundamental principles, and in the series of impressive analyses which serve to illustrate the application of these principles. The call for a new empiricism in theory and typology is both healthy and timely. This volume is a constructive contribution rather than a polemic, but the authors’ commitment to an inductive, individual language-centered view, and their lack of sympathy for the universalism which they perceive as characteristic of both formal and functional approaches is evident throughout. The unapologetic disdain for explanation in terms of universal principles, whether of grammatical structure or of communicative function, will probably be the hardest part of this book for many readers to swallow; nevertheless, among the merits of ELS, its greatest value is as an example of the health benefits of uncompromising inductivism. Most linguists will not be ready to completely adopt F&S’s strict distributionalism, but it is good to be reminded how flabby much of our methodology still is — and it should be very instructive, to open-minded linguists of all stripes, to see how much can be done with so little in the way of theoretical machinery. And even the linguist who finds the theoretical landscape presented here to be frighteningly sparse, will find the book worthwhile for the actual analyses of particular constructions in particular languages, which are generally solid and enlightening, and often quite novel and striking. ELS is well worth reading simply for its explication of English

verb agreement, Polish dative “possessors”, Welsh consonant mutation, and other phenomena.

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Michael Hoey. *Lexical priming: A new theory of words and language*.
 London/New York: Routledge 2005. xiv + 202 pp. (ISBN-10: 0 415 32863 2
 / ISBN-13: 978 0 415 32863 0)

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Michael Hoey’s latest volume brings a major expansion of his previous work on lexis, text and their mutual relationship (Hoey 1983, 1991, 2001), offering a theory of language use constructed from a lexically-driven angle. The framework, developed over a period of several years, originated with the author’s dissatisfaction with the apparent inadequacy of the existing theories in handling corpus-informed lexical evidence. In writing this book, Hoey also attempts to build a more plausible and comprehensive link between corpus-driven methods of observation and broader linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural phenomena. He thus addresses some of Butler’s (2004) comments concerning the general validity of corpus-driven work. The term ‘corpus-driven’ is used deliberately here: of the two polar schools in corpus linguistics — the ‘Sinclairian’ one prioritising bottom-up studies of plain-text corpora, versus the category-based tradition of ‘enriching’ text collections with layers of annotation (cf. Hunston 2002) — Hoey’s approach represents the former.

In their introduction to the volume *System and corpus*, Thompson and Hunston (2006) characterise corpus-driven descriptions as ‘thin’, revisionist and unsystematic, contrasting them sharply with the ‘thick’, ‘grand designs’ of functionalists. Similarly, Butler (2004), whilst acknowledging the innovativeness of many data-driven observations, points out their scattered character and, at times, exceedingly revisionist claims. Against this background, *Lexical priming*, itself inspired

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