Book Reviews

Robert D. Van Valin, Jr. & Randy LaPolla, *Syntax: Structure, Meaning and Function.* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, xxviii + 713 pages, ISBN 0-521-49565-2 (hardback), £50.00, US$ 74.95; ISBN 0-521-49915-1 (paperback), £17.95, US$ 29.95.

Syntax: Structure, Meaning and Function, henceforth *Syntax,* is a comprehensive and impressive statement of a theory of syntax. The authors acknowledge certain components of the theory as being derived from other theories and the work of various individuals, but it is most obviously a development of Role and Reference Grammar. The theory as it appears here is not actually referred to as Role and Reference Grammar, indeed it is not baptized with any particular name at all. In its fundamental orientation, concepts, and notation, however, *Syntax* clearly continues the tradition of Van Valin & Foley (1980), Foley & Van Valin (1984), and Van Valin (1993). Indeed, quite a lot of the discussion, examples, and figures of Van Valin (1993) reappears in only a slightly changed form, and sometimes even in an unchanged form, in *Syntax.* The book is offered as a textbook for both introductory and advanced courses in syntax and I shall consider its appropriateness as such after reviewing other features of the book.

The exposition of the theory requires nine solid chapters. A relatively brief Chapter 1, "The goals of linguistic theory", considers some alternative approaches to the study of language, with the present theory being described by the authors as taking a "communication-and-cognition" perspective. The reader is also advised that *Syntax* is intended both as an explanatory theory of syntax, as well as being a descriptive framework which can be used by linguists writing grammars. Chapters 2 through 7 present a full account of the syntax and semantics of simple sentences. The chapter titles indicate the path by which this account

proceeds: "Syntactic structure, I: simple clauses and noun phrases", "Semantic representation, I: verbs and arguments", "Semantic representation, II: macroroles, the lexicon and noun phrases", "Information structure", "Grammatical relations", "Linking syntax and semantics in simple sentences". Chapters 8 and 9 extend the discussion to many kinds of complex sentences: "Syntactic structure, II: complex sentences and noun phrases" and "Linking syntax and semantics in complex sentences". A short but interesting epilog, "The goals of linguistic theory revisited", completes the presentation by reflecting on issues relating to language acquisition. The highly professional and thorough approach evident throughout *Syntax* is seen also in the substantial References section, an Index of Languages, and a Subject Index.

Without attempting to document all the conceptual and methodological details of *Syntax*, there are certain key features of the theory which should be mentioned. One of the most striking is the relentless cross-linguistic orientation. This is not a theory which pays only lip service to the idea that cross-linguistic data is desirable. The cross-linguistic data is placed firmly and squarely at the centre of what we are asked to consider. (I counted 102 entries in the Index of Languages, with Dyirbal, Enga, English, French, Georgian, German, Icelandic, Italian, Jakaltek, Japanese, Lakhota, Malagasy, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Sama, Tepehua, and Turkish being the most extensively discussed.) From this point of view, *Syntax* is not unlike Givón (1984, 1990), though there is considerably more discussion and a more sophisticated linguistic interpretation of the data in *Syntax* than what one finds in Givón's two-volume work. Also, and importantly, the cross-linguistic orientation of *Syntax* goes beyond merely illustrating theoretical ideas by reference to various languages. Rather, the cross-linguistic orientation provides the motivation for, and not just the illustration of, the theory. This is in accordance with a requirement of typological adequacy (p. 8), attributed to Simon Dik, whereby the linguistic theory which one constructs should be applicable to all languages without "forcing" a language to fit the theory. So, for example, neither syntactic subject nor VP is seen as a universal category of grammar, and neither of these concepts plays a role in theory or description. The strong cross-linguistic perspective should be an attraction for those linguists whose interest in linguistics arises from a fascination with the magnificent diversity of the world's languages.

Another aspect of *Syntax* which goes hand in hand with its strongly empirical approach is the insistence upon clear, statable, and to a large extent operationalized procedures for arriving at analyses. More so than in some other theories, *Syntax* provides—and insists upon—certain

procedures in order to arrive at aspects of the analyses. Consider, for example, the question of semantic representation. A notation inspired by symbolic logic is employed for this purpose, but it is arrived at in a particular and well-defined way. The analyst applies up to six tests to determine, first of all, which of six or so verb classes the verb in the clause belongs to: state, activity, achievement, accomplishment, active accomplishment, causative. (There are some changes in the tests employed by *Syntax*, compared with Van Valin (1993: 34–35).) Once the verb class has been determined, the analyst then consults a kind of look-up table (p. 109) which gives the schematic logical structure appropriate for the core of the clause. (Again, there are some possibly confusing changes here compared with Van Valin (1993: 36): the logical structure assigned to achievement verbs in Van Valin (1993) is the structure for accomplishment verbs in *Syntax*, and the logical structure of accomplishment verbs in Van Valin (1993) appears with causative verbs in *Syntax*!) While there are limits to the insights which can be gained by operationalized procedures in linguistics, the approach yields solid and defensible results. Also, it seems the only feasible approach to take when one has adopted such a broadly cross-linguistic perspective, where the analyst can not possibly have native-speaker intuitions for all the data being analyzed.

Another impressive feature of the book is the rich diagrammatic representation of the analyses. The diagrams of Role and Reference Grammar—nicely exemplified by the tri-axial diagram associated with *What did Pat give Robin yesterday?* used on the cover of Van Valin (ed.) (1993)—have always struck me as elegant and informative. It is surprising just how much morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information is conveyed in them. *Syntax* makes extensive use of Role and Reference Grammar-type diagrams—all carefully drawn and aesthetically composed—which definitely enhance the quality of the book (and provide some welcome relief from the strain of reading about 700 pages of text).

One distinction which is fundamental in *Syntax* is that between "arguments", which belong to the "core" of the clausal syntax, and "adjuncts", which sit outside the core in the "periphery". A distinction like this is familiar from most theories of syntax, albeit under different names. A very common diagnostic used to distinguish arguments and adjuncts in some approaches is the omissibility test: if the phrase can be omitted and still leave a complete (though shorter) sentence, then that phrase is an adjunct. This does not appear to be a criterion authorized in *Syntax* which relies instead on counting the number of semantic arguments in the logical representation and/or determining that the phrase is a time or setting of an event. An interesting consequence of this is the analysis of a phrase such as *to the store* in *Paul ran to the store*. By the omissibility

test, the prepositional phrase here is an adjunct. But in *Syntax* (p. 160), the logical representation of this clause involves an "active accomplishment" verb which must have the logical structure in (1):

(1)　**do′** (Paul, [**run′** (Paul)]) & BECOME **be-at′** (store, Paul)

Since there are two semantic arguments in this representation, "Paul" and "store", both *Paul* and *at the store* will be core arguments in the syntactic representation. (In a clause like this, *at the store* is called an "argument-adjunct"—a term not used in Van Valin (1993).) The *Syntax* division between core and periphery is clear enough when one follows the *Syntax* procedures, but one should be wary of equating this division with similar ones in other theories.

It would be unrealistic to expect any reviewer to agree with every single position adopted by the authors of such an extended discussion of syntax and there were some places where I felt a little uncomfortable with the discussion. The treatment of the preposition *to* in the clause *Kim gave the book to Lee* is one such case. The *to Lee* phrase is said to be required by the logical representation associated with *give*. Therefore, it is argued (pp. 52–53, 161), the preposition *to* here has no independent logical representation. For some linguists, the uses of *to* in *Kim gave the book to Lee, Kim ran to the store, from three o'clock to four o'clock*, etc. represent meaningful and related uses of *to* and they would claim that this polysemy should be part of an account of this preposition. There is not even a nod of acknowledgement in the direction of the Cognitive Linguistic movement with its extensive exploration of polysemy, especially prepositional polysemy. A way of treating such prepositional polysemy in the Role and Reference Grammar approach is suggested in Jolly (1993: 282–283) in an extremely brief discussion but this is not developed at all in *Syntax*.

One point in the discussion which caused some confusion when I first read it was the reference to the "subject" in relation to a set of Dyirbal sentences (pp. 142–143). The authors claim that "in Dyirbal the undergoer is the syntactic subject in the active voice" (p. 143). Thus, "the tree" in a Dyirbal sentence like "the man.ERGATIVE cut down the tree.ABSOLUTIVE" functions as the syntactic "subject". At this point in the book, the topic of grammatical relations has not been properly introduced and one would be relying upon English language intuitions about "subject" and "object". Consequently, one would be inclined to take "the man.ERGATIVE" as the subject-like phrase rather than "the tree.ABSOLUTIVE". *Syntax*, as we discover in the later chapter on Grammatical Relations does not see "subject" as a universally valid category of syntax and its use on p. 143 is meant only as a way of helping a naive reader through the data, but I found it

confusing rather than helpful at that point. (The absolutive phrase in Dyirbal, as is explained on pp. 276–278, is to be analyzed as the "syntactic pivot" and the "syntactic controller", key concepts in the syntactic analysis armory.)

The preceding criticisms should be seen as minor quibbles in the context of a book which has been written and produced to such high standards. It is a book which has developed out of ideas from various competing schools of thought, in addition, of course, to building upon the basis of previous work in Role and Reference Grammar. *Syntax* manages to integrate all the ideas into one whole, successfully in my opinion, and the result is an extremely rich, highly elaborated theory. At the same time, it serves as a practical, usable manual for doing syntactic analysis of the world's languages, not just English.

Let me return now to the question of using *Syntax* as an introductory or advanced textbook in syntax. Perhaps it is only fair to mention here that I have a difficulty with the Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics series, as a series of textbooks, in terms of how appropriate these books are in the context of my own teaching in an undergraduate linguistics pro-gramme. The truth is that there is hardly a book in the Cambridge Textbook in Linguistics series which is written at a level and in a style which the majority of my undergraduate students would be comfortable with. *Syntax* continues these high (!) standards. It is written without really making any concessions to the beginner: the intimidating length of the book, for a start, is not something one can easily ignore if it is being aimed at introductory students; its density in terms of how much infor-mation is conveyed per page; the pace at which the reader must move through the ideas; an uncompromisingly advanced style of writing; the extensive use made of footnotes. The authors (p. xxi) list the parts of the book recommended for an introduction to syntactic theory and these include parts (or sometimes all) of the nine chapters. I do wonder whether this is the ideal way to write an introduction to the field or to entice students into a new area. Even if one is expected to read just the "intro-ductory" sections of *Syntax*, one cannot ignore the conceptual and physical weightiness of the whole book, which could well be discouraging for all but the most intense student. Included in those sections recommended for introductory courses are comparisons with other theories, e.g., the com-parison of *Aspects, Barriers*, and Minimalism on p. 244 and the discussion of Lexical Mapping Theory on p. 248. Comparisons like these assume a familiarity with the field and strike me as entirely inappropriate as part of an introduction to syntax. As a textbook for an advanced course in syntax, it would be quite feasible, even a good choice. After all, as the authors (p. xix) explain, the book began as transcripts of lectures which

were used in courses, successfully I am sure, at different universities. The exercises at the end of each chapter are extensive, interesting, and challenging, and they are a strong feature of the book, but here, too, I feel they are more appropriate for an advanced rather than a beginning student.

Summing up, then, *Syntax* is a richly detailed statement about the syntax of human languages which deserves respect and attention. It contains within its covers wonderfully stimulating and provocative samples of the world's languages, ingenious descriptive devices and notations, and a carefully integrated theory. As for its claim to being a textbook for either introductory or advanced courses in theoretical syntax, I regret that I am not quite as confident about its suitability as I would like to be. On a positive note, I would say that if previous offerings in the Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics series have hit the right note with your students in the past, then this one will too.

Massey University   JOHN NEWMAN

Correspondence address: School of Language Studies, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand; e-mail: J.Newman@massey.ac.nz

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This is a collection of papers given at the 1995 annual meeting of the Institut für deutsche Sprache (IdS), which, according to the opening remarks by