

# Introduction

The origins of this book go back to a colloquium on ‘Exploring the syntax-semantics interface’ which took place at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf in May 2012 in honor of the 60th birthday of Robert D. Van Valin, Jr. Most of the papers collected in this volume grew out of talks given at that occasion.<sup>1</sup>

Van Valin is widely known as the principal developer of Role and Reference Grammar (RRG), a linguistic framework that combines insights from cross-linguistic syntactic analysis, lexical semantics and formal pragmatics in a way that makes it equally attractive for theoretical linguists, field linguists and psycholinguists. The range of languages and linguistic phenomena discussed in this volume, and the variety of perspectives taken by the authors in their analyses, nicely reflect both, Van Valin’s systematic but open-minded approach to the study of grammar and language, and his emphasis on taking seriously the typological variation among languages. Several papers aim at extending the coverage and scope of RRG, e. g. by describing in more detail the interaction between syntax and semantics of specific constructions, or by proposing new constructional schemata for pragmatic and discourse-level phenomena. Other papers sharpen and challenge specific assumptions of RRG, e. g., the syntactic status of referential phrases in head-marking languages. Again others discuss more fundamental issues such as the type and the amount of syntactic information in the lexicon.

The book is divided into two parts. The five papers of the first part, entitled ‘The Syntax-Semantics Interface and Linguistic Theory’, address a number of general questions concerning the relation of meaning and its syntactic encoding as part of a theory of grammar, much in line with Van Valin’s overall goal to disentangle the interaction of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The contributions of this part investigate, for instance, the predisposition of lexical items to occur in

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certain syntactic environments and its consequences for the information stored in the lexicon. A closely related issue is the connection between argument realization and lexical representation and, in particular, the common semantic basis of verbs which show a similar valency alternation behavior in the syntax. Further topics discussed in the first part are the representation of discourse-level and code-switching phenomena within the syntactic framework of RRG and possible extensions of the latter.

The second part of the book, 'Case Studies of the Syntax-Semantics Interface', contains seven contributions whose focus is on specific grammatical phenomena in a number of typologically diverse languages. The investigated languages include, among others, Yucatec Maya, Kabardian, Tagalog, Murik-Kopar, Avatime, Whitesands, Yukaghir, and various Indo-European languages. The topics range from the syntactic realization of arguments and degree modification to the structure of noun phrases and the encoding of information structure. Several papers are concerned with issues of argument realization including: morphological operations that affect the valency pattern of a verb by cancelling parts of its semantic structure, as exemplified by the involuntative in the Caucasian language Kabardian; the non-standard argument realization patterns in Murik and Kopar, which show an inverse actor-undergoer ranking; and differential object marking in languages like Tagalog and its consequences for a theory of argument linking. Another common theme shared by several of the papers is to test and, if necessary, to extend and modify the predictions of RRG about how the syntactic position of different kinds of constituents can be explained in terms of semantic and pragmatic properties. Among the cases discussed are the structural positions of argument noun phrases in head-marking languages and of adverbials that express gradation. A related topic addressed are the pragmatic functions associated with dislocated constituents, and their specific syntactic integration across different languages.

## Overview of the contributions

The opening paper 'Linguistic Categories and the Syntax-Semantics Interface: Evaluating Competing Approaches' by **Gisa Rauh** examines how different linguistic theories characterize the relation between syntactic and semantic properties of words in the lexicon and beyond. The author compares Chomsky's

Standard Theory, Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar, and traditional Construction Grammar with Neo-Construction Grammar and RRG. While the former approaches assume that the syntactic and semantic properties of words are specified in their lexical entries, the latter approaches regard the syntactic properties determined to a large extent by the syntagmatic environment of the word in phrases and sentences. Rauh evaluates the plausibility of the interface between the syntactic and semantic categories of words in the selected linguistic theories and concludes that a certain amount of syntactic information in the lexicon seems to be the empirically plausible option and that the counterexamples discussed in the literature often just reflect the inadequacy of traditional part of speech classifications.

The paper ‘Why Verb Meaning Matters to Syntax’ by **Eunkyung Yi** and **Jean-Pierre Koenig** is concerned with the question why verbs that show the same patterning in diathesis alternations tend to be semantically similar to each other. The authors propose the hypothesis that such a semantic clustering is triggered by one or more “semantic anchors”, that is, by one or more frequent verbs that come with certain syntactic frames and lead speakers to use the same frames for semantically similar verbs. They consider two variants of the hypothesis: “global semantic anchoring” in which a single semantic anchor is responsible for the coherent syntactic behavior, and “local semantic anchoring”. The authors provide corpus-based and psycholinguistic evidence that the global semantic anchor hypothesis may be true for the verb *give* and its impact on the spread of the ditransitive frame. In other cases, such as the material object frame of the locative alternation, they suggest that several anchors need to be assumed, each representing a different semantic subclass of the alternating verbs.

**Ricardo Mairal** and **Carlos Perrián-Pascual**’s paper ‘Representing Constructional Schemata in the FunGramKB Grammaticon’ describes the format and integration of constructional schemata in FunGramKB, a multi-purpose natural language processing system. The authors propose to represent constructions by “constructional nodes” in the syntactic representations, thereby extending the layered structure of the clause traditionally assumed in RRG. This approach allows them to codify not only argument structure constructions but also non-propositional elements of meaning that have been of concern in pragmatics and discourse analysis. To this end, the authors distinguish four levels of constructions: argumental, implicational, illocutionary, and discourse constructions. In

their model, the layered structure of the clause is configured as one or more argumental constructions, which are recursively arranged, and is enhanced by nodes for constructional schemata belonging to the other three levels. The paper concludes with a brief description of how a parser can cope with the extended syntactic structures.

In his contribution ‘Multilingualism, Multilectalism and Register Variation in Linguistic Theory – Extending the Diasystematic Approach’, **John Peterson** addresses the challenge that multilingualism and intralingual variation represent for models of language theory. In the light of studies showing that all of a speaker’s languages are simultaneously activated in production and should not be viewed as strictly discrete systems, Peterson develops a model of multilingual speech in which grammatical structures of all types are either language-specific or unspecified for both register and language. He integrates his ideas into RRG and shows how the principles developed in his model can be applied to bilingual speech data and extended to intralingual variation.

The first part of the volume concludes with the paper ‘RRG and the Exploration of Syntactically Based Relativistic Effects’, in which **Caleb Everett** pursues the question whether syntactic variation has an influence on cognition and may cause disparities in non-linguistic thought. Pointing to the fact that RRG and the notion of macro-role transitivity has been fruitfully used to explain test results regarding the differing conceptualisation of situations in unrelated languages, Everett argues that RRG provides an ideal basis for the development of empirical tests with respect to the influence of syntax on non-linguistic thought.

Part two of the volume starts with a paper by **Jürgen Bohnemeyer, Lindsay Butler** and **Florian Jaeger**, entitled ‘Head-marking and Agreement: Evidence from Yucatec Maya’, which critically examines a recent proposal of Van Valin about the syntactic positioning of noun phrases (or reference phrases) in head-marking languages. According to Van Valin’s proposal, syntactically optional reference phrases, which co-refer with the argument marked at the head are to be analyzed as taking a core-external position, that is, they are immediate daughters of the clause. The authors challenge this assumption based on data from Yucatec Maya, which seem to indicate that reference phrases are in fact constituents of the core. They base their analysis on two observations: The first is the apparent core-internal position of a shared reference phrase in a core

cosubordination construction. The second observation is that plural marking in the presence of a reference phrase can be analysed as an agreement phenomenon.

The paper 'Degree Expressions at the Syntax-Semantics Interface' by **Jens Fleischhauer** is concerned with verb gradation. The goal of the paper is to show that different types of verb gradation – degree gradation on the one hand and extent gradation on the other – are realised in different syntactic configurations. Degree gradation is expressed at the nucleus layer, whereas extent gradation is realized at the core layer. The paper extends RRG's approach on adverbs and presents a cross-linguistic analysis of a type of adverbial modification that has received comparatively less attention in RRG but also in other frameworks.

In his paper 'Volition in Grammar and Lexical Representation of Verbs: The Case of Kabardian Involuntative', **Ranko Matasović** focuses on the status of lexical rules in RRG. His analysis is based on the involuntative in the north-west Caucasian language Kabardian, which is used for expressing that an action is performed unintentionally. The involuntative is analysed as a lexical rule that cancels the agentivity of the base verb. Broadening the picture, Matasović raises the question why such a rule is less widespread and less often grammaticalized in languages than the inverse rule expressing that an action is performed volitionally. This finally results in the question why certain types of lexical rules are attested more often in some languages than in others.

In his paper 'Direct versus Inverse in Murik-Kopar', **William A. Foley** discusses the direct-inverse inflectional system of two particular Papuan languages – Murik and Kopar, which both belong to the Lower-Sepik family. Inverse languages are built on a role hierarchy, which generally ranks the higher argument (= actor) over the lower argument (= undergoer). This ranking holds for the well-known Algonquian languages but not for Murik and Kopar, which reverse the hierarchy. In this regard, the two languages exemplify an unusual inverse system. The author discusses the linking system of these languages in detail and aims in developing a theoretical analysis of inverse marking that can be applied to languages showing such an unusual inverse system.

The paper 'Shifting Perspectives: Case Marking Restrictions and the Syntax-Semantics-Pragmatics Interface' by **Anja Latrouite** deals with differential object marking, and voice and case marking exceptions in Tagalog. Latrouite focuses on actor voice sentences with specific undergoers and argues that the description of the licensing conditions for these sentences requires the recurrence to three

different levels: the level of referentiality of the respective theme argument, the level of event semantics, i. e. the question of whether a verb is actor- or undergoer-oriented, and the level of information structure. The fact that multiple layers need to be evoked to provide an account of case marking restrictions and exceptions is taken as evidence that a multi-layered theory of language as provided by RRG is clearly to be favored over syntactico-centric approaches.

The subsequent paper ‘Notes on “Noun Phrase Structure” in Tagalog’ by **Nikolaus P. Himmelmann** gives an overview of referential phrases in Tagalog, demonstrating that the complements of the phrase-marking clitics *ang*, *ng*, and *sa* crucially differ in nature from their equivalents in European languages. Himmelmann furthermore finds that the distribution of the three markers differs to an important extent. He suggests that the two former markers should be analysed as determiners and heads, even though the internal structure of the phrases they are heading is shown to be quite different from standard X-bar conceptions of determiner phrases. Importantly the two determiner clitics mark complementary syntactic functions of referential phrases. While *ang* marks topics, subjects and predicates, *ng* marks non-subject complements and possessors. In contrast, the marker *sa*, which may also head a referential phrase, is given a very different analysis. In addition to determiners, demonstratives are discussed in some more detail as they seem to be poly-functional.

The final paper, ‘Integrated and Non-Integrated Left Dislocation: A Comparative Study of LD in Avatime, Tundra Yukaghir & Whitesands’, by **Dejan Matić**, **Saskia van Putten** and **Jeremy Hammond**, investigates the similarities and differences of left dislocations (LD) in three unrelated languages. The authors show that in all three of the languages, LDs allow for iteration, for noun phrases as resumptive elements, for LDs similar to Chinese-style topics and for the violation of island constraints, suggesting that these elements are not easily analysed as integrated into the sentence. On the other hand, they observe that the languages differ in important structural and functional ways which indicate that we may have to distinguish different levels of integration. For example, LDs in Avatime may appear in unexpected environments, like embedded clauses, suggesting a higher degree of integration (loosely integrated LDs). Moreover, Whitesands has developed specialized pronominal forms to indicate LDs, which is also viewed as a sign of a higher level of integration.