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Author's address: Department of Linguistics, 609 Baldy Hall, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, Buffalo, NY 14260, U.S.A.
E-mail: vanvalin@buffalo.edu

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Katalin É. Kiss (ed.), *Universal Grammar in the reconstruction of ancient languages* (Studies in Generative Grammar **83**). Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005. Pp. vi + 523.

Reviewed by CARLO CECCHETTO, University of Milan-Bicocca

Studying dead languages from a generative perspective requires some kind of justification, since, as observed by Katalin É. Kiss in her introduction to this collection of papers, dead languages are seemingly incompatible with a fundamental goal of the generative approach; that is, the description of the internal grammar of an individual speaker, which typically requires obtaining grammaticality judgements on acceptable and unacceptable sentences. For obvious reasons, this is not possible in the case of dead languages. While a careful analysis of available corpora can leave us reasonably confident that a particular structure was available in a given dead language, the absence of a construction in the corpora may be an accidental gap and hence does not allow us to conclude that this construction was ungrammatical. Given this situation, the question arises whether studying dead languages from a generative perspective is a sensible endeavour. There are at least two good reasons for thinking that it is.

First, knowledge of Universal Grammar can aid in the investigation of dead languages. Studying the grammar of a dead language means reconstructing it from incomplete evidence. This reconstruction task is simplified by knowing the parameters along which languages may vary. The task of the linguist who studies dead languages can be likened to that of a child who has to acquire a language from limited evidence. Universal Grammar imposes strong constraints on the form of the target grammar and thus makes the acquisition/reconstruction task easier. However, there are two respects in which reconstruction and acquisition differ. For most of the commonly studied ancient languages, the linguist can use much larger corpora than the child has access to (on the assumption that the child, at least initially, makes inferences only from simple sentences, as proposed, for example, by Lightfoot 1991). This advantage is counterbalanced by a serious

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drawback, which is stressed by Kiss in her introduction. By hypothesis, the child can work with Universal Grammar itself, while the linguist can use only a provisional and incomplete model. Notwithstanding this limitation, the collection of papers in this book confirms that the study of the grammatical properties of ancient languages is clearly enhanced by the application of generative methods.

A second justification for studying dead languages from a generative perspective is that such investigation could enrich the theory of Universal Grammar in a way that the study of contemporary languages cannot, because it can contribute evidence whereby we might better understand the mechanisms that underlie the transition from one grammatical system to another. However, the book under review does not systematically address this diachronic issue. As a consequence, the reader of this collection of papers may be led to conclude that the study of ancient languages has a lot to gain from the study of Universal Grammar, but that studying ancient languages offers no insight into Universal Grammar. I consider this to be a limitation of the book since, at least in principle, the interaction could be profitable in both directions.

Following the useful introduction in which the editor summarises the individual contributions, this book contains thirteen papers that can be grouped according to the topics addressed. One issue that is taken up is word order variation and the question as to whether it is possible to identify a base configuration in Latin and Sanskrit, which are commonly described as having free word order. In her contribution, 'Latin word order in generative perspective: an explanatory proposal within the sentence domain', Chiara Polo claims that careful scrutiny allows one to identify S(ubject)–O(bject)–V(erb) as the basic underlying word order in Latin. Polo argues that the other word orders that are commonly observed in Latin are due to displacement operations that are triggered by informational or prosodic factors (for example, left and right dislocation, heavy Noun Phrase shift, focalisation). Empirical support for this claim comes from a comparison of the original Latin version and an established Italian translation of Petronius's *Cena trimalchionis*. Polo observes that only two of the six logically possible word orders are systematically attested: SOV, which is found in more than 70% of the text; and SVO, which occurs in around 20% of the text and is found in those sentences which, to judge from the Italian translation, have an informational structure requiring displacement (such as left or right dislocation of the object). For the word orders found in the other 10% of the text, Polo leaves the explanation open.

In 'The nominal cleft construction in Coptic Egyptian', Chris H. Reintges, Anikó Lipták & Lisa Lai Shen Cheng examine cleft sentences, a construction known to be motivated by focus. They argue that cleft sentences in Coptic Egyptian are derived from an underlying small clause configuration. In their view, the clefted constituent originates as the subject of a small clause

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(which explains why it must be a Determiner Phrase or Noun Phrase) and later moves to a designated focus projection in the left periphery.

Giampaolo Salvi's article, 'Some firm points on Latin word order: the left periphery', examines the order of elements in the left periphery of Latin matrix and embedded clauses, adopting an articulated structure of the Comp area as proposed by Rizzi (1997). Both Polo and Salvi seem to claim that Latin has a basic word order that reflects an underlying hierarchical structure, a position also adopted by Reintges, Lipták & Cheng in their essay on Coptic Egyptian.

Brendan Gillon & Benjamin Shaer take quite the opposite stand in their contribution, 'Classical Sanskrit, "wild trees", and the properties of free word order languages'. In fact, they revive and further develop Staal's (1967) 'wild tree analysis', by proposing that Sanskrit has a flat structure in which the verb does not project to the phrasal level. In other words, the verb, its sisters and the subject are all immediately dominated by the sentential node. This would make Sanskrit sharply different from modern Indo-European languages and akin to non-configurational languages like Warlpiri. The authors' radical proposal is difficult to evaluate, given that it is impossible to apply to Sanskrit the standard tests that in languages like English (and many others) show the Verb Phrase to be a constituent.

Edit Doron's paper, 'VSO and left-conjunct agreement: Biblical Hebrew vs. Modern Hebrew', is a cross-linguistic analysis of VSO word order and its syntactic correlates. Comparing Biblical Hebrew, Modern Hebrew and other languages for which VSO is attested, she argues that VSO word order results from the subject remaining within the Verb Phrase. Her main empirical argument comes from the agreement patterns that are found between a verb and a coordinated subject DP, which vary depending on whether the subject occurs in preverbal or postverbal position. Doron's paper is a nice example of how considering data from a dead language can help shed light on a question that is raised by the study of contemporary languages.

In 'The correlation between word order alternations, grammatical agreement and event semantics in Older Egyptian', Chris H. Reintges deals with the source of the alternation between VSO and SVO word order in Older Egyptian. He claims that the different word orders are not related to different informational structures but correlate with eventive and stative interpretations. More specifically, the aspectual properties of the verb are determined by the hierarchical configuration in which subject and verb appear with respect to each other.

Another topic that is addressed in this book is the structure of subordination. Two of the papers focus on infinitival clauses. In 'The syntax of Classical Greek infinitive', Vassilios Spyropoulos offers a comprehensive analysis of the accusativus cum infinitivo construction in Classical Greek. After careful examination, he rejects both an Exceptional Case Marking analysis and the idea that infinitives have a tense feature that assigns

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accusative Case to the infinitival subject. Instead, Spyropoulos proposes that the subject is assigned accusative Case by a null complementiser, akin to English *for*. Thus, Spyropoulos extends to Classical Greek the analysis initially proposed by other scholars for the Latin accusativus cum infinitivo construction.

Lucio Melazzo deals with 'Latin object and subject infinitive clauses'. Unfortunately, his analysis is very hard to understand, partly because the tree diagrams in the article do not follow standard conventions and partly because Melazzo is not explicit about his assumptions regarding phrase structure and underlying word order (at one point he seems to adopt Kayne's (1994) antisymmetry framework, which does not permit an underlying OV structure, yet Melazzo's tree diagrams in the paper are not constructed on the basis of Kayne's proposal).

Annamaria Bartolotta's contribution, 'IE **weid-* as a root with dual subcategorization features in the Homeric poems', focuses on the peculiar case assignment properties of the perfect *óida* 'I know' and the aorist *éidon* 'I saw' in Homeric Greek, and proposes that a satisfactory analysis must assume that the lexical features of the root are visible before Spell-Out. The paper is thus constructed as a case study against the Late Insertion principle of Distributed Morphology (cf. Marantz 1995).

The book under review also contains two papers on possessive constructions. Gábor Zólyomi deals with 'Left-dislocated possessors in Sumerian', while Barbara Egedi investigates 'Genitive constructions in Coptic'. The remaining two articles focus on an enclitic coordinating conjunction deriving from Indo-European **k^we* (Emanuele Lanzetta & Lucio Melazzo's 'A particular coordination structure of Indo-European flavour'), and Akkadian predicate structure (Christian Huber's 'Complex predicate structure and pluralised events in Akkadian').

The general evaluation of this book cannot be but mixed and not only for the reason that I have mentioned at the beginning of this review. On the one hand, it contains several papers that are successful examples of how a formal framework can be fruitfully implemented in the study of languages with closed corpora. On the other hand, other articles in this book are less convincing and reflect a common problem in the generative literature on ancient languages. A valuable contribution in this area would typically come from a researcher who combines a good knowledge of generative grammar with solid philological competence. Since generative syntax undergoes constant and often radical reshaping, it is often difficult for someone who is not a full-time generative syntactician to keep track of the evolving field. In this situation, 'technical mistakes' are possible and the formalism may be used in a rather mechanical way, without a thorough comprehension of the underlying motivation for using it. Conversely, it is possible for a grammarian without a solid philological knowledge to draw inaccurate generalizations in the absence of readily available native speaker judgements. Some

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contributions in this collection of papers have fallen into the first pitfall. However, when taking into consideration the general quality of generative studies of ancient languages, it cannot be denied that this book is overall a welcome and important contribution.

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Author's address: Dipartimento di psicologia, Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo 1, 20126 Milan, Italy.
E-mail: carlo.cecchetto@unimib.it

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Frederick J. Newmeyer, *Possible and probable languages: a generative perspective on linguistic typology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. x+278.

Reviewed by Matthew S. Dryer, University at Buffalo

Over the past thirty or so years, Frederick ('Fritz') Newmeyer has carved out a niche within the field of linguistics that really only he occupies. *Possible and probable languages* (henceforth *PPL*) is his latest monograph dealing with foundational issues in the field. The central thesis of *PPL* is that the results of linguistic typology have no bearing on generative theory, that it is misguided to attempt to capture the results of linguistic typology within generative theory because typological generalizations are generally due to external or functional factors rather than grammar-internal ones.

Like his previous monograph, *Language form and language function* (Newmeyer 1998; henceforth *LFLF*), *PPL* focuses on issues that distinguish formal and functional approaches to grammar. The main thesis of *PPL*, that typological generalizations are due to external or functional factors, is one that is consistent with most work in linguistic typology, and contradicts widely-held assumptions in Chomskyan generative theory (henceforth CGT), a label I use to exclude other generative approaches, such as Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar, which do not make the sort of claims

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