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Robert D. Van Valin, Jr. *An Introduction to Syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. Pp. vi + 239. US\$60.00 (hardcover), \$23.00 (softcover).

Reviewed by Leonid Kulikov, *Leiden University*

The book under review is a new introduction to syntax. Although written as a textbook for students (and, of course, not the first textbook on syntax), it is of scholarly interest, too. It is always worthy of attention how one of the leading syntacticians and one of the fathers of a popular syntactic theory, Role and Reference Grammar (dating back to Foley and Van Valin 1984), introduces students into the universe of the syntactic concepts, problems and theories, what is considered important or irrelevant, worthy of investigation or trivial.

This is not the first handbook of syntax written by Van Valin (VV). A much more voluminous (more than 700 pages) introduction, prepared together with R.J. LaPolla, which appeared just four years before the present book (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997), gives a detailed introduction into Role and Reference Grammar (RRG). This is not the place to describe at length the main features of this theory (for a synopsis, see also Part I of Van Valin 1993); among its achievements one might mention in passing the very flexible interface linking semantic and syntactic representations in terms of semantic macroroles (actor and undergoer). Importantly, the main statements of RRG are empirically much more testable than the constructions of many other syntactic theories.

While the 1997 handbook introduces the reader, above all, into the apparatus of RRG, the book under review is more neutral in its explanation of the main syntactic concepts. And, like the former, it is a great success. The book is well organised and clearly written.

I am much indebted to Y.G. Testelets for valuable remarks and comments on an earlier draft of this review.

It gives both general knowledge and a bird-eye view of the current syntactic research; it also addresses many particular syntactic problems. Each of the six chapters opens with an introduction, where the main topics and problems are briefly outlined, and is accompanied by a list of recommended readings and useful exercises.

Chapter 1 ("Syntax, lexical categories, and morphology", pp. 1–20) introduces the basic concepts of syntactic analysis and the main aspects of syntactic structure: grammatical relations, constituency, phrases, and phrase structure. VV briefly outlines the main classes of lexical categories: nouns (proper/common), verbs (intransitive, transitive, ditransitive), adjectives, and determiners. Further, VV defines three main syntactic functions (argument, modifier, predicate) and shows how intricately they are correlated with the main lexical categories (noun, adjective, and verb). The author's main conclusion that they are universal (p. 12: "noun and verb are universal lexical categories, but adposition and adjective are not") seems quite convincing; his statement on adverbs is more reserved, but the recent typological studies on adverbs (see van der Auwera 1998) rather plead for their universality, too.

The concluding section deals with morphology, briefly outlining the main morphological concepts which are relevant for syntactic analysis: morpheme and allomorph, and types of morphemes (lexical/grammatical). Here an explicit definition of the notion of morphosyntax (the term "morphosyntactic" first appears a few paragraphs earlier), which nowadays gains more scholarly attention (see especially Payne 1997), would have been in order.

In Chapter 2—the longest (pp. 21–85) and probably most important in the book—VV demonstrates the relevance of the main grammatical relations: subject, direct object (DO), and indirect object (IO) (for instance, for describing the person agreement on the verb), and their mapping onto semantic roles. In particular, VV clearly demonstrates that subject can correspond to different semantic roles, depending on the lexical class of the verb: agent ("run", "give", "kill"), patient ("break", "fall"), experiencer ("hear", "know"). VV convincingly shows how the step-by-step generalisation of the semantic roles from verb-specific (runner, giver, hearer) through the next level of generalisation (agent, patient, experiencer), for which he uses the term "thematic roles" (VV's terminological innovation is that thematic roles do not mean the same as semantic roles), leads the reader to the relevance of the highest level, semantic macro-roles, actor and undergoer, which map directly onto the level of grammatical relations (subject/object). As mentioned above, the macro-roles are one of the most useful inventions of RRG.

The next section (2.2) concentrates on the properties of grammatical relations, which can also be used as criteria for identifying them. VV distinguishes between coding and behavioural properties. The former include case-marking, verbal agreement, and word order. The author pays attention both to the standard (proto-typical) and non-standard case-marking, justifiably cautioning against identification of case-marking (or functionally equivalent coding properties) with grammatical relations (cf. the languages which mark both direct and indirect objects with the same case, p. 37f.). The discussion of the languages where verbal agreement plays the role of case-marking, such as Swahili or Lakhota, only briefly mentioned in this section, is mainly concentrated in the next chapter (p. 97ff.).

By behavioural properties of terms VV means "the range of constructions that they may be involved in. If a construction uniquely targets a specific term in a language, then involvement in that construction is a property of the particular grammatical relation in that

language" (p. 40).¹ Thus, reflexivisation can serve as a test for subject in many languages, as the antecedent of a reflexive pronoun can only be a subject. VV further discusses other relevant syntactic phenomena and arrives at the well-known grammatical relations hierarchy: Subject > Direct object > Indirect object > Non-terms. According to VV, this hierarchy suggests that "if a syntactic phenomenon is restricted to a single term type, then it will always be restricted to subjects . . . if there are two privileged arguments, they are subject and direct object. If there are three, then they are subject, direct object and indirect object" (p. 46). Thus, "if the verb agrees with two terms, then the agreement should be with the subject and the direct object" (p. 59).

In fact, these statements should be taken with caution and some reservations. Most importantly, not only does this hierarchy show the usual priority of grammatical relations, but also the degree of rigidity of their definition. The further we move down the hierarchy, the less rigid the corresponding definitions become. Thus, while for subject we dispose of a number of reliable criteria, DO can only be determined by a few (of which the passivisation test is most familiar), and IO is primarily determined in terms of semantic roles (= recipient) and case-marking (= dative). Finally, the priority of DO over IO is far from obvious in some cases. Thus, as VV himself demonstrates, in some languages "the recipient argument with a ditransitive verb functions as direct object and has the same properties as the direct object of a plain transitive verb" (p. 68). Moreover, the situation may even be more intricate: IO, which is normally less privileged than DO according to the hierarchy, can take priority over DO in certain syntactic phenomena and on certain conditions. Thus, in Abkhaz the finite verb agrees with each of the three terms (subject, DO, IO), but the masdar (deverbal nominal), when used in constructions of the type "the boys wants *to hit* the girl", agrees only with the non-subject terms. Most intricate is the case of the ditransitive verbs like "give", "take away": the masdar either agrees with both indirect and direct objects, or only with the IO, depending on the position of the referents of the objects in the Person and Animacy Hierarchy (1st person > 2nd person > Human > Non-human). Specifically, DO can trigger the agreement only if its position in this hierarchy is sufficiently high as compared to that of IO (for details, see Kulikov 1999a). As it seems, some syntactic processes require a more complex apparatus for their description, where the grammatical relation hierarchy will be supplemented with some others, such as, for instance, Givón's (1984) pragmatic hierarchy of semantic roles and their likelihood of becoming topics (Agent > Dative/Benefactive > Patient > . . .).

The chapter ends with a short outline of two different systems of grammatical relations and of the problems they pose for the traditional syntactic analysis: the "Philippine system", where several syntactic processes can be determined in terms of macroroles, rather than grammatical relations; and syntactic ergativity.

Chapter 3 discusses dependency relations (verb-term, noun-modifier(s)), their main types (bilateral, unilateral, coordinate), and then proceeds to the important concept of valence. The distinction between the obligatory and optional valence is determined in accordance with the usual approach to the problem, as that between "the NPs and PPs

¹The term "behavioural" appears rather infelicitous, as it evokes the association with the behavioural approach to language; on the other hand, coding is related to the syntactic behaviour of a term as well.

which refer to participants which are conceptually necessary to the meaning of the verb” (p. 93) and “those which refer to participants which are not conceptually necessary” (p. 93).²

As in other chapters of the book, the presentation is clear and concise, but there is an annoying gap in its content: the lack of mention of the main valence alternations, in particular, voice and other phenomena which have an effect on the valence structure (passive and anti-passive, causative and anti-causative, applicative, etc.). Furthermore, VV only briefly mentions verbs with “variable syntactic valence” (p. 92 f.), such as “eat” and “give”. A more detailed survey of this syntactic type (called “labile” or “ambitransitive”), with two main subclasses, S = A type (cf. “eat”) and S = O type (cf. “open”, “break”) (cf. Dixon 1994) would be in order here (for a brief sketch of the labile type, see Kulikov 1999b).

Chapter 4 discusses another important aspect of the syntactic analysis: constituent structure. VV investigates the primary tests for constituency (substitution, permutation, coordination) and introduces the most common way of representing the constituent structure: the phrase-structure tree. The discussion of the universality of the two fundamental phrase types, NP and VP, logically leads to the notion of non-configurational languages, defined as those which lack VPs. Incidentally, the discussion of the Lakhota word-sentence (4.20b), with subject and object agreement markers on the verb but no separate terms, gives rise to the surmise that all (nearly all?) languages with subject-object agreement are non-configurational; unfortunately, VV gives no clue as to whether such a universal does exist.

VV then briefly but very clearly introduces the reader into the main concepts of X-bar syntax and ends with a short discussion of the equivalence of constituent-structure grammars and dependency grammars.

Chapter 5 investigates the relationship between grammar and lexicon. VV discusses at length the types of rules for various types of phrases and gives a fragment of a phrase-structure grammar of English. The next section (5.2) concentrates on the organisation of the lexicon. VV confines himself to the traditional way of storing the information using the subcategorisation frames (of the type “put” [_V, — NP PP]); here a reference to the Meaning-Text Theory, which has developed a well-elaborated system of presenting the relevant properties of a lexical unit (realised in the Explanatory Combinatorial Dictionary; see Mel’čuk and Žolkovskij 1984), would be in order. In section 5.3 (“Relational-dependency rules and lexicon”) an alternative type of rules is explained.

The last chapter gives a short survey of the main theories of syntax: Relational Grammar, Lexical-Functional Grammar, Government and Binding theory, and Role and Reference Grammar. The theories are compared using a number of parameters (how syntactic structure is represented, how grammatical relations are treated, the role of the lexicon, etc.), which enables the reader to easily capture the basic ideas of the corresponding theories. Particularly instructive is the comparison of the treatment of some important morphosyntactic phenomena: case assignment and verbal agreement, passive and dative shift, and WH-question formation. (Yet another phenomenon which might be used as an illustration for the comparison of syntactic theories is the causative derivation, one of the

²The term “conceptually” seems redundant in the context of meaning and can be omitted; for a more rigid definition of the types of valence the reader could be referred to the apparatus of lexical semantics.

testing grounds for nearly all syntacticians.) The main distinctive features of the theories discussed are conveniently summarised in section 6.5.

Some other syntactic theories (Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar, Autolexical Syntax etc.) are briefly mentioned and characterised in section 6.6. It is of course impossible to give a complete survey of syntactic theories within this short introduction, but at least one more approach, developed in the framework of the dependency syntax, is worthy of mention: the Meaning-Text Theory, with a well-elaborated system of level-to-level transition rules and a powerful apparatus of presenting the lexical information in the Explanatory Combinatorial Dictionary (for recent trends in the Meaning-Text Theory, see Wanner 1997).

The book concludes with a bibliography and language and subject indices.

VV's Introduction is an excellent guide for any student of syntax, including the beginners, but can also be used by syntacticians as a very convenient conspectus. It illustrates the main aspects of syntactic analysis with data from typologically diverse languages; the clear presentation helps a lot in understanding the most complicated syntactic problems. It is highly recommended as a textbook for any student in linguistics, and as a summary of achievements, trends, and problems in modern syntactic theory.

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