PROJECT MUSE®

Ebenen der Textstruktur: Sprachliche und kommunikative Prinzipien Ed. by Wolfgang Motsch (review)

Ingrid Piller

➡ *For additional information about this article*
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/453144/summary

grammatical functions. Clearly, in such cases the re-flexive clitic does not function as an a-structure binder as described above. A therefore ascribes a second function to the reflexive clitic in Catalan: It may also optionally identify the 'referential indices' of two arguments in a-structure. However, both func-tions ultimately lead to the same effect, namely the colinking of different arguments to the same seman-tic participant. Thus one might wonder whether a more uniform analysis could be provided treating this kind of colinking as the basic function of the reflex-ive clitic and trying to derive other effects such as a-structure binding from independent (mapping) principles.

A's book is highly recommended to linguists inter-ested in syntactic theory as it covers central syntactic topics such as reflexive clitics and causative con-structions. It offers new perspectives on the formal architecture of LFG but will also be of interest to linguists from different theoretical backgrounds. Scholars working on Catalan or on Romance in gen-eral will be provided with interesting analyses and new insights into the structure of these languages. [LUTZ GUNKEL, *Freie Universität Berlin*.]

Explaining culture: A naturalistic ap-proach. By DAN SPERBER. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. Pp. 175. Paper $18.95.

The way one tries to explain a cultural fact follows from what one takes the nature of cultural facts to be. The same is true of linguistic facts; for Saussure, for example, linguistic facts were entities in a realm of their own, connected but not reducible to individ-ual psychological facts. The cognitive revolution has given us a naturalistic reduction of linguistic facts. These are now taken to be configurations in the mind/brain of an individual speaker, and so their evo-lution is best explained as the interaction of that speaker's inherent cognitive mechanisms and the data to which he is exposed.

In a large body of work over the last fifteen years, Sperber has been attempting a naturalistic interpreta-tion for the facts of culture. The six essays brought together in *Explaining culture* represent an overview of this work. Cultural facts, for S, are not Platonic entities but representations in the mind/brain of human individuals. This definition raises a problem which Noam Chomsky's parallel conception of I-language does not face. That is, whereas linguistic representations remain linguistic even if found in only one speaker, cultural representations are only cultural by virtue of being shared by a community. S must therefore expand his definition to state that cultural representations are that subset of all mental representations which come to be widely shared in a particular community. On this definition, there is

no discontinuity, or even clear dividing line, between cultural representations and individual ones.

S's approach to cultural facts is epidemiological. To give an epidemiological explanation is to show how and why a particular representation came to be distributed as it did across the minds of a human group. The factors involved will be ecologi-cal—some aspect of the group's lifestyle or social structure helped spread the representation in ques-tion—and also psychological. As S argues, human cognition systematically transforms representations by processing them. An example here is that of an oral folk tale which, to persist culturally, has to be remembered between tellings and also to remain at-tractive to audiences. These factors will cause it to evolve towards a form which is most memorable and relevant to the human mind. Note that this evolution is not a process of random mutation and selection. Rather, cognition exerts definite directional transfor-mations on the representations it deals with.

There are obvious parallels here with functionalist work in linguistics, and, overall, there are plenty of ideas to interest the linguist in this volume. The es-says are, however, speculative and poorly backed up with examples. Despite some brave rhetoric about the possibility of a science of culture, the approach is totally programmatic. I have not seen a single well-worked empirical explanation using the epidemiol-ogical approach. Nor is it clear how this would be done; we might explain the persistence of a religious belief by asserting that it was specially relevant to some group of people, but how would we know that this was so? Presumably by observing how persistent it was. Until this circle is broken in a principled way, and tight empirical predictions can be made, the epi-demiological approach remains hand-waving.

The essays presented here were written for sepa-rate occasions and tend to be slightly repetitive. Nonetheless, the general commitment to a naturalis-tic and scientific approach to the sociocultural is ex-tremely welcome, and S is to be thanked for continuing to contribute to dialogue between the cog-nitive and social branches of the human sciences. [DANIEL NETTLE, *Merton College Oxford*.]

Ebenen der Textstruktur: Sprachliche und kommunikative Prinzipien. Ed. by WOLFGANG MOTSCH. (Reihe german-istische linguistik, 164.) Tübingen: Nie-meyer, 1996. Pp. xii, 332. DM 58.00.

The articles in this volume developed out of a Swedish-German research project on 'language structure and text structure'. It had been the project's objective to establish levels and structures of gram-matical and textual interrelation and independence. 'Text' is used throughout to refer to spoken and writ-

ten discourse. The volume consists of eleven articles in five chapters and a six-page introduction.

In Ch. 1 (3–33), Motsch devises a model of textual structure. He is particularly interested in the incorporation of illocutionary acts into such a model. As many discourse analysts ignore the systematic relationship between the structure of conversations as a whole and the structure of turns, M suggests a model of illocutionary hierarchies. He distinguishes between the global illocution of a text and the supporting illocutions of turns, which contribute to the overall success of a communicative act.

Ch. 2 (37–117, three articles) is devoted to textual structures that are used to ensure comprehension. Focusing on self-repairs, ELISABETH GUELICH and THOMAS KOTSCHI analyze text production strategies in spoken French. MARTINA DRESCHER studies generalizations as further indicators of text production strategies (also in French). ECKARD ROLF is interested in the occurrence, status, and function of notes and comments. Based on a highly diverse German corpus (literary, legal, and theological comments; notes on train schedules; heating bills; etc.) he distinguishes between comments/notes that accompany a text, and thus constitute a separate text, comments/notes within a text (e.g. as a separate paragraph), and comments/notes within a sentence (e.g. appositional clauses). Like self-repairs and generalizations, comments/notes make it easier to understand a text.

Ch. 3 (121–208, three articles) focuses on the structure of illocutions. BAERBEL TECHTMEIER studies speakers' strategies for ensuring their contribution's acceptability. Her corpus is a 1990 GDR round table discourse, in which representatives of the various political and social groups publicly discussed problems of the GDR's disintegration. In this highly loaded situation, participants exhibited all kinds of communicative behavior to tone down the confrontational content of their utterances. MARKKU MOILANEN uses a German letter to the editor to investigate the sequencing of illocutions. This topic is further elaborated in M's analysis of a business letter.

In Ch. 4 (211–71, two articles), a separate level of 'information structure' is advocated. MARGARETA BRANDT is interested in the weighting of information: How are more important items distinguished from less important ones? She studies this 'information relief' in a German business letter. Kotschi explains why the information structure should be considered a separate textual level and proceeds to collect the units of such a level in French.

Ch. 5 (275–323), 'Further perspectives', brings together an article on modal reference in legal texts by ULRIKE SAYATZ, and one on nonfictional segments in fiction by Rolf. Despite the volume's many contributors, it is surprisingly coherent. It provides interesting new theoretical ideas about the structure of the language level 'text,' which are well-grounded empirically. [INGRID PILLER, University of Hamburg.]

Twentieth-century fiction: From text to context. Ed. by PETER VERDONK and JEAN JACQUES WEBER. (The interface series.) London & New York: Routledge, 1995. Pp. 269. Paper $17.95.

This volume marries literary and language theory to twentieth-century fiction. In combining the various essays within this text, Verdonk and Weber formulate a continuity of language and literature in a natural and organic format. The result is a 'creation of a cognitive text world, . . . different for the writer and for each reader since we all use different assumptions, values, beliefs, and expectations in the processing of the text' (3). The various essays look at a range of twentieth-century authors, which includes such luminaries as E.M. Forster, Doris Lessing, and Raymond Carver.

The essays are grouped to provide a focus on three levels: textual, narrative, and contextual. Chs. 1 and 2 cover the textual level, elaborating on lexical repetition 'as an element of meaning production' (3). This textual device creates an emotional style of writing, making it an easy target for emulation or parody, which then results in what might be called *intertextual repetition* (italics mine). Any writer can regard this intertextual repetition or spoken text—literary or nonliterary—that is produced and interpreted through conscious or unconscious thought filtered through a person's experience or awareness of other texts.

The next level, narrative, has two chapters dealing with dialogue: In Ch. 3, MICK SHORT focuses on 'character talk' where '[d]iscourse analysis concentrates on describing the "structure" of spoken and written discourse above the level of the sentence, including . . . the unwritten "rules" by which people take turns in conversation' (47). ROSEMARY BUCK and TIMOTHY AUSTIN also develop a similar type of dialogue analysis in Ch. 4. They focus on *Howard's End* and analyze the lunchtime conversation between Henry Wilcox and Margaret Schlegel. To gain knowledge of how this 'polite' exchange reflects on language use, Buck and Austin use Brown and Levison's politeness model.

The next five chapters deal with 'narrator talk'—focusing on point of view within the narration. In Ch. 5, the focus is a comparison of oral and literary narratives. SUSAN EHRLICH states there may be ways to identify 'the linguistic clauses responsible' for cueing readers or listeners to the progression of temporal movement within the narration. Ch. 6, by HELEN ARISTAR DRY, deals with a linguistic point of view, focusing on free indirect discourse which