Review of: An Introduction to Syntax

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Written by a scholar known for his innovative analyses of genetically and typologically varied languages, this comprehensive introduction will not disappoint the student or teacher yearning for a more diverse sampling of languages. At the same time, the discussion is attentive to various competing syntactic formalisms and offers a firm grounding in contemporary linguistic theory along with exposure to a wider range of typological variation. Engaging and logical from beginning to end, it opens with the practical, yet intriguing question, ‘How does an Aborigine from central Australia, a Basque from Spain or an inhabitant of the island of Madagascar put a sentence together?’ (xiii). The answer to this deceptively simple question occupies the rest of the book.

The discussion is arranged in six chapters. Ch. 1, ‘Syntax, lexical categories, and morphology’ (1–20), introduces the book’s holistic approach to syntactic phenomena which includes as much attention to morphosyntax and semantic factors as to phrase structure per se. Ch. 2, ‘Grammatical relations’ (21–85), provides a crosslinguistic survey of the syntactic notions ‘subject’, ‘direct object’, and ‘indirect object’. Ch. 3, ‘Dependency relations’ (86–109), explores head and modifier relationships. This chapter also introduces the notion of valence, making a clear distinction between semantic roles such as AGENT or PATIENT and purely syntactic categories such as SUBJECT and OBJECT. Ch. 4, ‘ Constituent structure’ (110–43), discusses phrase structure and form classes across languages. Ch. 5, ‘Grammar and lexicon’ (144–71), examines the relationship between syntax and lexi-


This is the first published English translation of Pieter Verburg’s classic study Taal en Functionaliteit (Wageningen: Veenmann & Zonen, 1952), originally published in Dutch as the commercial edition of his doctoral dissertation (submitted to the Free University of Amsterdam in 1951). Language and its functions is a historiographical study that charts conceptions of functions of language in philosophical and linguistic theories from the twelfth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century. A possible source of confusion for readers is the fact that Verburg’s use of the term ‘function’ is different from the sense that is most widespread nowadays (as also