
Edward J. Vajda
Western Washington University, edward.vajda@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs

Part of the Modern Languages Commons

Recommended Citation

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Humanities at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern & Classical Languages by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

Although the presence or absence of inflection in a language has been a cornerstone of typology since before Wilhelm von Humboldt, a consensus regarding inflectional morphology as a distinct component of linguistic structure has yet to emerge. This book is an attempt to formalize what can be deduced about inflectional paradigms based on a rigorous inspection of the data. Gregory Stump calls his approach paradigm function morphology (PFM), describing it as an ‘inferential-realizational’ theory that regards ‘the paradigm and not merely the word’ (28) as the primary focus of analysis with respect to inflectional morphology. The book develops the idea that paradigms are not epiphenomena of the morphosyntax but rather ‘constitute a central principle of morphological organization’ (32).

The most crucial arguments are presented in Ch. 1 (1–30), which demonstrates the superiority of inferential over lexical theories of inflection and realizational over incremental theories. Also discussed are three properties of inflection—preference for affixal inflection, recurring crosslinguistic patterns of inflectional affix ordering, and the tendency for affixes of the same position class to be featurally coherent—that cannot be explained as arising from PFM, yet in no way contradict the theory either. Competing proposals such as the concrete functional head hypothesis (Margaret Speas, Phrase structure in natural language, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990) are contradicted by these empirical facts in significant ways. S cites Joan Bybee ( Morphology: A study of the relation between meaning and form, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1985) to explain the first two properties as artifacts of diachronic word formation processes; the third he explains by elaborating upon Paninian morphological principles.

Each of the remaining chapters develops a particular facet of PFM and explores the contrast with other theories. Ch. 2 (31–61) uses the Bulgarian verb to illustrate the notion of paradigm functions, arguing in contrast to Stephen R. Anderson (A-morphous morphology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) that realization rules belonging to the same rule block are resolved by Panini’s principle and need not be intrinsically ordered. Ch. 3 (62–95) delves further into the issue of rule competition, using the Potawatomi verb as illustrative material. Ch. 4 (96–137), entitled ‘Headdness’, explores inflection in light of certain nonconcatenative aspects of morphology. Ch. 5 (138–68) rejects the template metaphor, arguing that all inflectional morphology crosslinguistically can be accounted for using paradigm functions without recourse to an unmotivated templatic prosthesis. Ch. 6 (169–211) discusses stem alternations, and Ch. 7 (212–41) explores the issue of syncretism. Finally, Ch. 8 (242–76) contrasts PFM with network morphology, probably the most similar alternative proposal for dealing with inflectional paradigms.

The book’s strong points are undoubtedly the author’s methodical evaluation of competing theoretical interpretations of the data and the rigor with which he investigates the implications of his own conclusions. Some (including the present reviewer) may be inclined to regard this approach as overly formalistic, a possibility S himself concedes (29–30); but the basis for this criticism is largely nullified by the author’s impeccably clear justification of his own methodological choices. Readers disinclined toward detailed formalisms at the expense of typologically rich linguistic descriptions will likewise welcome the extensive inclusion of data from genetically diverse languages.

My one substantive disappointment with the book is that it avoids defining the notion of lexical stem with the same rigor applied elsewhere in the discussion. In particular, I had hoped to see greater elabora-

This content downloaded from 140.160.178.168 on Fri, 16 May 2014 14:56:25 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

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 wide 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 lexeme. The final chapter, 'Theories of syntax' (172–226), provides a refreshingly balanced comparison of four important syntactic models of language: relational grammar, lexical-functional grammar, the government-binding version of principles and parameters theory, and, finally, the author’s own role and reference grammar. Each chapter closes with suggestions for further reading and a set of problems that test student comprehension.

The language index on pp. 234–35 contains reference to 60 languages from over three dozen families distributed on five continents—a mere fraction of the world’s linguistic diversity. Still, anyone tired of syntax descriptions limited to duel formalisms, and applied mostly to simple English sentences, ought to be well satisfied. The book’s attention to morphosyntax, in particular, makes it of great practical value for anyone interested in typology. I used the book as an auxiliary text in a course on morphology and appreciated its clear differentiation between syntactic and semantic valence. The only significant defect is the lack of a glossary; my students often found it difficult to locate clear and concise definitions of key terms. However, the book’s pedagogical benefits far outweigh this single shortcoming. [EDWARD J. VAIDA, Western Washington University.]


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