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REVIEW OF YÁÑEZ-BOUZA ET AL (2019),  
*CATEGORIES, CONSTRUCTIONS, AND CHANGE IN  
ENGLISH SYNTAX*

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TAMARA BOUSO  
*University of the Balearic Islands*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

As reflected in its title, the volume under review revolves around three main topics: categories, constructions and change in English. Part I, consisting of five chapters, deals with grammatical categories; Part II, of the same length, mainly focuses on constructions, and Part III, slightly shorter (four chapters), addresses comparative and typological issues in language change. These three main parts of the volume follow a detailed introduction that offers a well-rounded justification of why a book of such characteristics is necessary. First, it notes the absence in the market of a monograph that brings together the diverse approaches and methodologies on English syntactic structure presented in this volume. Second, it is noted that the book is dedicated to Professor Emeritus David Denison, whose diverse work should be celebrated in a fitting manner.

Edited by four highly reputed linguists with first-hand knowledge of Denison's lifetime legacy, the volume embraces original work on English syntax written by nineteen established and emergent researchers in the field. As evident from the summaries provided below, the book combines a great array of orientations, from synchronic approaches (Aarts) and newly developed frameworks such as Construction Grammar (McColm & Trousdale, Traugott), to more traditional ones such as, for instance, grammaticalisation (Brinton, Mair) and Lexical-Functional Grammar (Börjars & Vincent, Payne).

From a methodological perspective, the book does not fall short in scope either. It includes philologically oriented studies (Allen, Adamson, Miura), as well as studies based on large corpora (McColm & Trousdale) and involving statistical analysis such as multifactorial conditional inference trees (Heller & Szmrecsanyi). As language change is not solely accounted for on the basis of internal factors (Hogg & Denison 2006: xii), external factors such as gender and social class, and the role of standardisation and prescriptivism are also considered in some studies (Kytö & Smitterberg, Mair, Adamson). Finally, though the emphasis of the volume is unavoidably on written language, attention is also paid to speech-like data (Kytö & Smitterberg). In what follows, I will first comment on the volume's fourteen contributions, and conclude with a section providing an overall evaluation.

## 2 SUMMARY

### 2.1 *Part I: Approaches to grammatical categories and categorial change*

Part I starts with Payne's contribution, 'What is special about pronouns?'. Taking Lyons's (1986) observation that pronouns are restrained from occurring in *of*-PP genitive constructions (e.g. *\*the brother of him*) as point of departure, the author successfully demonstrates with Present-day English (PDE) data that pronouns are not only possible in such constructions, but the array of semantic relations conveyed between the head noun and the dependent pronoun can be quite broad. Evidence of this nature had not been previously adduced in the vast literature on the genitive alternation, and the apparent absence of pronouns in the *of*-PP genitive construction has led linguists to exclude them from statistical analyses (see, for instance, Heller & Szmrecsanyi's contribution). On another level, the reader may feel that some instances classified by Payne in the separate subcategories time (e.g. *she had a long day in front of her*), member (e.g. *the indigenous officers of it*) and content (e.g. *the idea of it*) could well be included in broader categories. This is relevant in that it can affect the overall ranking of semantic relations proposed, which, contrary to previous analyses (e.g. Stefanowitsch 2003), suggests the quantitative (e.g. *a lot of it*) rather than the part-whole relation (e.g. *a part of me*) is most prototypical for the construction. All in all, Payne manages to convince the reader that new studies of the genitive alternation should not exclude pronominal *of*-PPs from their analyses, as they convey as many semantic relations as the *s*-genitive itself, including those considered to be exclusive of the latter such as kin relations (e.g. *friends of him*). Worthy of note here is that in Payne's data "not a single example of a pronominal *of*-PP [is] used for the semantic relation of possession" (p53). As an example

of this type, the author resorts to *the blood-groups of us all*, retrieved from the *British National Corpus*. This leaves the field open for further research to keep exploring the extent to which possession relations can also be conveyed by pronominal *of*-PPs on the basis of large corpora.

In the second chapter of Part I, entitled ‘What *for*?’, Bas Aarts focuses on the hybrid categorial behaviour of the English lexical item *for*. Through a rigorous bibliographical review of the forms and functions of English *for*, the author argues in favour of always treating *for* as a preposition. *For* can be followed by an NP, a finite clause, or be part of structures that adjust to the pattern [*for* [NP *to* VP]], as in *It will be necessary for me to simultaneously admit her husband to one of my beds, as there is unlikely to be anyone else to look after him*. Disagreement in the literature mostly falls on this third pattern. In such cases, reference grammars and historical linguists treat *for* as a “device for introducing the subject” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik 1985: 1004). Huddleston & Pullum (2002) and Radford (2004), on the other hand, analyse *for* in the pattern above as a subordinator. Aarts dexterously criticises the arguments put forward by both Huddleston & Pullum and Radford, and provides three arguments in the analysis of *for* as a preposition. First, the parallels with other structures such as the [*for* [(NP) V-ing]] construction where *for* is unanimously treated as a preposition. Second, the simplification of the analysis of the lexical entries of verbs that license different patterns of complementation (e.g. *long* and *prefer*). Last, the third argument is a simpler diachronic account of *for*... *to* constructions which, despite contradicting widely adopted traditional analyses, nicely concurs with De Smet’s (2009) recent insights on their historical development. Readers unfamiliar with generativist ideas may find Aarts’s paper tough to read at times, and those interested in Historical Linguistics may feel that, despite being a very well-argued paper, the third argument provided in favour of always treating *for* as a preposition is not as elaborately developed as the previous ones.

Chapter 3, ‘Whatever happened to *whatever*?’ by McColm & Trousdale, builds on Brinton (2017), and tackles the recent development of the English exclamative discourse marker *whatever* (e.g. *All right. Whatever. I’ll let Rush speak for millions and myself*). The chapter addresses three main questions: (i) does quantitative data support Brinton’s qualitative analysis of *whatever*?, (ii) are the functions of reduced forms of *whatever* (e.g. *whatev* and *wevs*) similar to those of the non-reduced form?, and (iii) what can be concluded from a Construction Grammar perspective about the nature of such changes? According to Brinton (2017), the discourse marker *whatever* is the product of a late twentieth century development with two potential sources: the co-ordinate structure *or whatever*, and the chunk *whatever you say/think*. The

latter, Brinton argues, is most likely to be the source, since the contexts in which it occurs (i.e. dialogic ones) overlap with those of the discourse marker. On the basis of extensive corpus data, McColm & Trousdale provide quantitative support for this idea. The development of exclamative *whatever* is accounted for in terms of different types of reduction and expansion. Also, the (mostly monologic) co-ordinate structure *or whatever*, and the reduced forms of *whatever*, which took over the older functions of the full form, are claimed to have “bolstered” or “strengthen[ed] the representation of the new pattern [i.e. the discourse marker]” (p81). For advocates of Construction Grammar, the coinage of the notion of “bolstering” is the most innovative aspect of the paper, as it supports the network model of linguistic knowledge from both a diachronic and a cognitive usage-based perspective (Hilpert 2013, 2018, 2019; Traugott & Trousdale 2013). More specifically, “bolstering” is treated as a “property” (p104) of language changes involving “multiple inheritance” (De Smet, Ghesquière & Van de Velde 2015, and contributions therein), and/or “constructional contamination” (Pijpops & Van de Velde 2016, Pijpops, De Smet & Van de Velde 2018, Hilpert & Flach *forthc.*; see Torrent (2015), for an earlier, related notion).

A similar approach to McColm & Trousdale is adopted in Traugott’s paper, ‘Are comparative modals converging or diverging in English? Different answers from the perspectives of grammaticalisation and constructionalisation’. It focuses on the categorial change of the comparative modals *better*, *rather*, and *sooner* in British English from a constructionist perspective (Goldberg 2006, Traugott & Trousdale 2013). Traugott’s work nicely complements Van Linden’s (2015) study on the recent development of these modal subtypes in American English. More specifically, Van Linden proposed the grammaticalisation cline *better* > *sooner* > *rather*, and argued that these modals “are overall developing in the same direction” (2015: 221). Traugott’s work, on the other hand, points in a different direction: her historical data reveals that *rather* and *sooner* emerged as preference modals in the sixteenth century, while *better* only became an advice modal a few centuries later. Comparative modals are treated as form-meaning pairings configuring “a small loosely related family of micro-constructions, the network relations of which have changed” (p126): all shared preference semantics at some point, and over time, despite coming close together in form, *better* developed independently its advice meaning. From a constructionist perspective, which regards form and meaning on equal terms, these modals therefore did not converge but rather diverged over time. Furthermore, Traugott’s cline (*better* > *rather* > *sooner*) also differs from the one proposed by Van Linden: *rather* is now in second position as it is more productive and bleached than *sooner*, which is

the least productive of the three.

Chapter 5, 'The Definite Article in Old English: Evidence from Ælfric's *Grammar*' by Cynthia L. Allen, marks the end of Part I. Through a rigorous philological study, the author provides solid evidence of the established use of the lexeme *se* as a definite article during the Old English (OE) period. According to Crisma (2011), two aspects should be taken into account when analysing the existence of articles in OE: (i) the article does not show variation with "direct arguments", that is, subjects and objects, and (ii) prose and poetry behave differently, as articles are abundant in the former but absent in the latter. Allen's study thus focuses on subjects and objects in OE prose, and ingeniously zooms in on singular count nouns in Ælfric's translations of determinerless Latin examples. Her results clearly confirm Crisma's aforementioned claims, and reveal that Ælfric was consistent in the use of *se* as a definite article. Another interesting finding – this time related to the variable use of the definite article in prepositional objects – is that the singular count noun *cýning*, despite having a definite reading, is mostly used in Ælfric's *Grammar* without *se*. Such use, however, contrasts with Ælfric's use in other works of the determiner with *cýning* when functioning as object of prepositions. Allen suggests that this variation in the *Grammar* with regard to his homilies could be due to translation effects, or to Ælfric's awareness that although he "always used a determiner with definite *cýning*", "other people did not" (p144).

## 2.2 Part II: Approaches to constructions and constructional change

The first chapter in Part II is 'How patterns spread: The *to*-infinitival complement as a case of diffusional change, or '*to*-infinitives, and beyond!' by Bettelou Los. Los revisits her own account of the history of *to*-infinitival constructions in light of De Smet's (2013) innovative model of diffusional change. Interesting parallels are drawn here with the spread of the gerund as a verb complement in Early Modern English: much like the gerund, the *to*-infinitive finds its niche in nominalisations, and its development is characterised by a number of stages that involve different types of analogy. Once the *to*-infinitive established itself as a verb complement, four main stages in its development can be discerned: Stage I, characterised by the presence of verbs of Persuading and Urging (*narrow paradigmatic analogy*), Stage II, which is characterized by the occurrence in the construction of verbs of 'Firing Up' (*semantic analogy*), Stage III, which constitutes the spread of the construction to verbs of Commanding and Permitting (*indirect paradigmatic analogy*), and Stage IV, where the *to*-infinitive has become highly abstract and is used with verbs of Intention (*broad paradigmatic analogy*). To De Smet's model, Los

aply adds a Stage V to reflect the attestation in late Middle English (ME) of verbs of Thinking and Declaring in the so-called *to*-infinitival Exceptional Case-Marking Construction (e.g. *men believed their wives to have been virgins when they married*, where the *to*-infinitive appears “with a subject of its own” (p166)). The spread of the passive variant of this *to*-infinitival construction subtype is argued to be connected with syntactic changes (i.e. loss of V2) and paradigmatic analogy.

Old and Middle English constructions are also the topic of Miura’s chapter, ‘*Me Liketh/Lotheth but I Loue/Hate: Impersonal/Non-Impersonal Boundaries in Old and Middle English*’. As in her previous work, Miura delves into the semantic factors that determine the occurrence of verbs of emotion in (im)personal constructions, this time with a special focus on OE rather than on ME (as she did in [Miura \(2014\)](#)). The verbs considered in this chapter include *love*, *hate*, *like* and *loathe* as well as their near-synonymous phrasal impersonals *be/have lief* and *be loath*. This last set, as also pointed out by [Denison \(1990\)](#), “tend to be neglected in studies of impersonal verbs and constructions” (Miura, p172). To distinguish in ME the personal verbs *love* and *hate* from the impersonal verbs *like* and *loathe*, four factors turned out to be relevant: causation, transitivity, duration of the emotion, and animacy of the target of emotion. Miura’s meticulous analysis concurs, on the whole, with the findings presented in her previous study: causation correlates once again with impersonal uses of verbs, and the other three semantic factors correlate with personal uses. The major differences with regard to Miura’s earlier work rely on the new ME phrasal impersonal *have lief*. Despite qualifying as impersonal, *have lief* “is apparently not causative” (p182) in that it was not attested in Cause-subject constructions with a nominative Cause and an objective Experiencer, as shown in (1) below with the impersonal verb *like*. Furthermore, as opposed to other impersonals, *have lief* neither governs prepositional phrases, nor shows any clear tendency as for the animacy of the target of emotion. These findings may be due to “the limited amount of data available” (p189), and/or to the fact that *have lief* represents a newly developed ME impersonal use and therefore, contrary to earlier (im)personal verbs, was not as affected by the aforementioned determining semantic factors. In Miura’s words, “we could assume that verbs and phrases which emerged in lME were less subject to these conditioning factors than the verbs which already existed in OE” (p182).

- (1) *ȝif us oht ilimpeð, we him þa bet likieð*  
 if us anything happens we:NOM him:OBJ the better please  
 ‘If anything happens to us, we please him the better.’  
 (c1275(?a1200) Lay. *Brut* (Clg A.9) 26738))

Laurel J. Brinton's chapter, 'That's luck, if you ask me: The rise of an intersubjective comment clause', perfectly ties in with McColm & Trousdale's contribution on the history of exclamative *whatever*. On the basis of corpus data retrieved from a wide range of sources, the author reports that the origins of the parenthetical discourse marker *if you ask me* go back to the mid-16th century, and that in the 21st century this syntactic construction becomes a relatively stable feature of colloquial speech. *If you ask me* is argued to have moved from having a literal meaning in the protasis of a direct condition (e.g. *If you ask me what gets me mad, it's the war issue*) to being used as an epistemic hedge conveying negative politeness face-saving strategies (e.g. *That's luck, if you ask me*). Like other types of insubordinated clauses, *if you ask me* is claimed to have developed out of a full biclausal structure, as in *If you ask me what these agreeable little citizens do for food in the winter, I answer, they go without*. The added values of Brinton's research lie in the diachronic evidence provided, and in the attempt to determine the order of occurrence of the two types of ellipsis identified. Diachronic data points towards an earlier elision of the complement of the verb *ask* with regard to the apodosis main clause (one referring to an act of communication, as in *I answer*, in the example of a full biclausal structure given above).

The focus of the last two chapters in Part II is on Late Modern English (LModE) syntax. Adamson's article, 'Misreading and language change: A foray into qualitative Historical Linguistics', like Allen's (Part I), is philological in nature. Its ultimate aim is to "readjust the balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches" (p212) to Historical Linguistics. Adamson's paper deals with (i) the text-and-context method adopted by literary critics, and (ii) the use of misreading when it comes to procedures of textual reconstruction and the psychological profiling of an individual author. The conclusion drawn is that, despite sometimes offering "no conclusive answers" (p232), this type of approach is as necessary and valid as the now predominant quantitative turn in Linguistics and the real "challenge for future researchers is to determine how far qualitative analysis can be methodised and how far its form of knowledge discovery must remain a matter of serendipity" (p233).

The kind of change called for in Adamson's paper is addressed by Kytö & Smitterberg in the last chapter of Part II, 'The conjunction *and* in phrasal and clausal structures in the *Old Bailey Corpus*'. In this study, the conjunction *and* is analysed from a sociolinguistic perspective. Given the PDE correlation between clausal coordination and spoken language, the hypothesis is put forward that LModE speech-based data would also reflect that trend, though with significant differences in use according to the gender and social status of the speakers. Whilst the main hypothesis is confirmed, the gender and



status differences in the data gathered from the *Old Bailey Corpus* seem to be inconclusive. Interestingly, some attention is also paid to what they refer to as the *V and V* pattern, as in *I went and enquired the places*, more commonly known as “pseudocoordination” in the relevant literature (Teleman 1974, Quirk et al. 1985). The reader will perhaps miss mention here of current literature on the topic of pseudocoordination, where some of the issues that Kytö & Smitterberg consider to remain unexplored, such as the frequency, semantics, and development of the construction, are in fact discussed (Hopper 2002, Wulff 2006, Bachmann 2013, Ross 2020).

### 2.3 Part III: Comparative and typological approaches

The approaches to English syntax presented in Part I and Part II are nicely complemented by Part III, where a comparative and typological perspective is adopted. The first paper, by Fischer & Olbertz, is titled ‘The role played by analogy in processes of language change: The case of English *HAVE-to* compared to Spanish *TENER-que*’. It discusses the role of analogy in processes of grammaticalisation taking as a case in point English *have to* and Spanish *tener que*, and analogous constructions in Dutch and German where the possessive verb did not develop into a modal of necessity. Analogy (as a cognitive process) is demonstrated to have played a crucial role in the grammaticalisation of the English and Spanish modal – whereas it did not in Dutch and German. In both languages the construction was fed by the co-existence of a number of semantically and/or formally similar structures. We could say that Fischer & Olbertz’ contribution is in some way a welcome follow-up to McColm & Trousdale’s concept of “bolstering”, which, as already pointed out, emphasises the importance of neighbouring structures “to strengthen the representation of the new pattern” (p81). Work directly relevant to Fischer & Olbertz’s paper, but not mentioned by them, is Yamada & Vega-Valdez (2016) on the current use of English *have to* and Spanish *tener que* in the language of social media.

The focus of Börjars & Vincent’s chapter, ‘Modelling step change: The history of *will*-verbs in Germanic’, is on the development of *will*-verbs in Danish, Dutch, Icelandic and Swedish which followed different trajectories despite going back to the common Proto-Indo-European root *\*wel-*. Form and meaning are claimed to develop independently (or at least partially) as is, for instance, the case of the *WILL*-verbs in Danish and Icelandic, which show important formal similarities but clearly different semantic pathways. The most innovative aspect of Börjars & Vincent’s contribution is their revision of Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca (1994) cline of *Desire* > *Willingness* > *Intention* > *Prediction*. The authors convincingly argue that the ‘willingness’ meaning of



*will*-verbs does not derive from a 'desire' meaning, as originally thought, but it "naturally arises from any WANT verb" (p300).

The genitive alternation, previously explored in this volume by Payne (Part I), is also addressed by Heller & Szmrecsanyi's study, 'Possessives world-wide: Genitive variation in the varieties of English'. Two research questions are under scrutiny: (i) to what extent do World Englishes differ in their genitive choice grammars? and (ii) what are the probabilistic constraints that tend to make a difference in a cross-variety perspective? The authors show that the *s*-genitive is more widespread in (native) Inner Circle varieties (Canadian English, British English, Irish English and New Zealand English) than in Outer Circle varieties. Furthermore, they show that out of the many language-internal variables analysed, animacy, constituency length, and final sibilancy have the strongest effects: while animates favour the *s*-genitive, long possessors as well as final sibilancy favour the *of*-genitive. Finally, by means of a multifactorial conditional inference tree analysis, Heller & Szmrecsanyi reveal that the overall impact of these constraints differs across varieties. More specifically, two groups can be distinguished: for Group I, formed by British English, Indian English, Jamaican English and Philippine English, possessor length is crucial, and for Group II, formed by Canadian English, Hong Kong English, Irish English, New Zealand English and Singapore English, the animacy constraint is most relevant. This study is an important contribution to the study of World Englishes, since it is the first in-depth investigation of the genitive alternation in nine international varieties of English, and thus it sets the basis for further research on the topic.

The volume closes with Mair's contribution 'American English: No written standard before the twentieth century?'. Starting from Schneider's Dynamic Model (2007), where five different phases of emancipation of World Englishes are postulated, the author proposes that the boundary between Phase 4 (*endonormative stabilisation*) and Phase 5 (*differentiation*) of American English should be placed "well into the twentieth century" (p361) rather than in the 19th century (cf. Bailey 2004, Schneider 2007). Such refinement in the chronology of the standardisation process of American English is fully justified. It stems from the results of several corpus-based studies outlined in the chapter and where Mair adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining meticulous philological and statistical analyses of individual case studies of morpholexis (*toward(s)*, *gotten*), orthography (*-or/-our*, *-er/-re*, *traveler*, *worshipping*), and grammar (complementation of *prevent* and *help*). Of particular interest is this last issue, that is, the syntax of the verbs *prevent* and *help*. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the verb *prevent* alternates between a *from* variant (e.g. *prevent the bearings from coming out*) and a *from*-less variant (e.g.

*prevent the operators slipping*) in American and British English respectively. The verb *help*, on the other hand, remains unchanged in both varieties, showing a preference for *to*-infinitive in the 1930s, and for the bare infinitive at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (p351). In this regard, Mair argues that the *horror aequi* principle applies here so as to avoid a second *to*-infinitive following *to help* (e.g. ?*to help to help* garnish his mother tongue).

### 3 EVALUATION

All in all, this volume stands out because of its reader-friendly quality, the depth of the various analyses it presents, and its insightful introduction, which conveys the *raison d'être* of the volume. The eclectic approach adopted by the editors sets this volume apart from monothematic volumes, where it is commonplace to include a theoretical introduction, a concluding chapter and frequent cross-references between the individual chapters (see, for instance, Van Goethem, Norde, Coussé & Vanderbauwhede 2018). A potential weakness of the volume under review lies precisely in the absence of cross-references, and also in the organisation of the different contributions within the various parts. The volume does not follow a strict chronological order in terms of the periodization of English, which might have been desirable. Furthermore, the delimitation between Part I and Part II does not seem entirely convincing: Part I includes two articles (McColm & Trousdale, and Traugott) that would fit better in Part II, given their evident connection with the topic of constructions and constructional change. Finally, as is the case with most collective volumes of this type, the chapters are best suited for the specialist. Overall, they are of high quality, but differ in their degree of complexity. In this regard, I find Adamson's vindictive paper extremely interesting and necessary, but perhaps too dense in comparison with the other more qualitatively and/or quantitatively oriented chapters.

If the ultimate goal of the volume was to make manifest Denison's "rich, diverse, innovative, and inspiring work over the years" (p1), there is no doubt that it has successfully been achieved. Each and every chapter alludes to Denison's lifetime legacy in the form of appropriate quotes from his long and distinguished academic career – quotes that in most cases (cf. Traugott, Miura, and Adamson's contributions) serve as a major justification for the type of research conducted. On the whole, the volume is an outstanding contribution to the deeper understanding of English syntax. It represents a substantial advance in this area of research, which, despite having been the focus of attention for many years now, is still very much alive and open to further research. The findings presented by Payne in Part I, for instance, are relevant for Heller & Szmrecsanyi's current ongoing project on the genitive

alternation from a cross-varietal perspective (Part III). Mair's closing chapter (Part III) draws attention to Gonçalves, Loureiro-Porto, Ramasco & Sánchez's research published just when his work was "going to press" (p340). McColm & Trousdale's article (Part I), and to a certain extent also Fischer & Olbertz' contribution (Part II), superficially touches on new "theoretical constructs" that, as aptly noted by Hilpert, "necessitate measurements of variation" (Luiz Wiedemer, Machado Vieira & Maura Cezario 2019: 31). Finally, even in such an intensively studied topic as impersonals (Denison 1990, Möhlig-Falke 2012, Miura 2014), some gaps can still be filled, as evinced by Miura's own contribution in Part II (also see Castro-Chao (2019) on impersonals in Middle and Early Modern English). To conclude, one can only say that the volume is indeed a very welcome contribution that constitutes a vivid picture of what is hot and happening in the field of English syntax, and serves as an excellent tribute to Denison's enduring and impressive legacy in the three areas of categorial, constructional and typological change covered in the volume's pages.

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Tamara Bouso-Rivas  
Departament de Filologia Espanyola, Moderna i  
Clàssica  
Campus Universitari  
Edificio Arxiduc Lluís Salvador  
University of the Balearic Islands  
Cra. de Valldemossa km. 7'5  
07122 Palma de Mallorca  
[tamara.bouso@uib.es](mailto:tamara.bouso@uib.es)