



Book review

Dialektologie in neuem Gewand: Zu Mikro- / Varietätenlinguistik, Sprachenvergleich und Universalgrammatik [Linguistische Berichte, Sonderheft 19]. Edited by **Werner Abraham** and **Elisabeth Leiss**. Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 2013. 271 pp.

Reviewed by **Juan Cuartero Otal** (Universidad Pablo Olavide)

‘Every human being speaks a variety of languages. We sometimes call them different styles or dialects, but they are really different languages [...]’ (Chomsky: *Language and Problems of Knowledge*)

The 18th Symposium of the Language and Literature Graduate School Munich – Class of Language (formerly known as LIPP) took place from November 12 to 14, 2012, at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich (Germany) with the theme ‘Grammatische Variation und Standardgrammatik’ (Grammar Variation and Standard Grammar). The lectures presented at this meeting were published as *Dialektologie in neuem Gewand*, which we review here.

According to the editors, this volume provides a clear position on the question of whether the fact of linguistic variation follows from the conception of I-Language by Noam Chomsky (1986): language can be considered a cognitive phenomenon and language variation a part of individuals’ linguistic competence. This general question is examined in ten contributions, all using micro-linguistic methodology. The methodological importance of this development in dialectal linguistic research is reflected in the description of grammar from synchronic as well as diachronic viewpoints, but also goes beyond the traditional methods of dialectology and some previously used aspects of applied linguistics.

The ten essays, some written in German and some in English, deal specifically with German dialects in Germany and further afield, as well as with Flemish-Dutch and Italo-Romance dialects. The most important aim of their research and descriptions was to examine from a new point of view variation in dialects, language varieties which are not determined by a stark tradition of written form. Dialectal variation within the syntax had been previously not very interesting for generative grammar, typology and dialectology. Generative grammar and linguistic typology have, until recently, mostly been interested in standard languages, and dialectology in lexical and phonological variation. In recent years, however, dialect syntax has occupied a more important place in language studies, which are now dealing with the syntactic properties of dialects in a more systematic way. A micro-linguistic perspective sheds light on a realistic picture of past language data. These language varieties, understood as more ‘natural’ than the standard language, could provide a diachronically more reliable picture of older and unwritten

forms of natural languages since they are closer and more similar to such forms from which they originated (Weiss 2004).

With regards to the paradigm of micro-linguistics, there are two possible ways of approaching data research: quantitative and qualitative. According to the preface by Werner Abraham and Elisabeth Leiss, this quantitative method exponentially enlarges the number of data fields and the qualitative method allows us to find gaps in the grammar when micro-level and macro-level data are compared. That opens the door for exploring the diachrony of the whole diasystem, that is to say, of the whole polylectal complex. If the field of study is also extended by considering data from substandard varieties, it becomes possible to anticipate changes in the standard variety: as an essential type of progress, diachrony provides a prospective vision which complements itself (Abraham 2006). A central issue in this research area is the extent to which the unwritten language varieties should be included under the umbrella of UG-based Generative Linguistics, that is, to what extent these varieties belong to the faculty of language.

The following topics are discussed in the volume:

- Variation in grammar between standard and substandard languages
- Comparative syntax at the macro- and the micro-levels
- Diachronic evolution of infinitive and gerundial constructions
- Variation about the DP-structure
- Pronoun forms and their structural slot conditions
- Ethnolects: natural, non-standardized language change and its explanatory capacity for the (evolution of) standard languages
- Variation in grammar found in speech compared with writing

The first contribution to this volume is from one of the editors, Professor Werner Abraham, and is entitled *Philologische Dialektologie und moderne Mikrovarietätsforschung. Zum Begriff des Erklärstatus in Syn- und Diachronie* (Philological dialectology and modern research in micro-varieties: on the concept of explanatory capacity in synchrony and diachrony). His work is based on the analysis of examples of the Cimbrian dialect (in German, *Zimbrisch*; in Italian, *Cimbro*), one of the several local Upper German varieties spoken in northeastern Italy. In this paper attention has been paid to presenting a general framework of the contribution of micro-linguistics to the explanation of linguistic change. It is not easy to understand why all language varieties have to change: historical linguistics has long been trying to clarify the exact causes of linguistic change. Every language



is characterized by some inertia (*Sprachinertia*) and also by the fact that children learn its grammar perfectly. The author does not agree with the so-called *Double Base Hypothesis* (DBH) (for example in Pintzuk 1991) which argues that change can be explained by the fact that there may be two coexisting grammar rules in relation to a particular phenomenon. This Double Base Hypothesis is only relevant when it is considered to have operated in two subsequent generations: the new generation will assume intentionally or mistakenly only one of these two rules (p. 17). Some examples on the use of clitic pronouns in Cimbrian taken from Bidese (2008) are, however, an evidence of the crucial influence of language contact in the origin of change. Abraham's 'radical thesis' (p. 16) states that language change in a living dialect happens under the conditions of language contact only if such change could also take place independently.

Two examples of the syntax of Bavarian varieties are presented in the second paper *Klitisierung. Reanalyse und die Lizenzierung von Nullformen: zwei Beispiele aus dem Bairischen* by Josef Bayer (Clitization: Reanalysis and licensing of null forms: two examples from the Bavarian dialects). They are two apparently different phenomena: on the one hand the use of inflecting complementizers, which is a fairly common issue in linguistic research about Bavarian, and on the other hand the reduction of the modal particle *denn* to an agreement marker, which is not as well-known. Actually, subject agreement of non-verbal inflections is a typological rarity: it does not seem to exist in Romance languages nor in Indo-Aryan languages, but in some spoken varieties of German it is an example of disregard for the norm. Two examples presented in the article show how this is far from the case of standard German:

- (1) ob-**st** du des ned spuin kon-**st**
if-2SG you this not play can-2SG
'if you cannot play this'
- (2) dass-**ma** mia af Minga fahr-**n**
that-1PL we to Munich drive-1PL
'that we go by car to Munich' (pp. 30, 31)

The second issue in this paper is the presence of a modal particle *denn* (mostly in the reduced form *-n*) as a clitic following the finite verb form in Wh-questions:

- (3) Wo host-**n** du damals gewohnt?
Where AUX.PAST-1SG+**clitic** you then lived
'Where did you live then?'

Bayer shows in his article that both phenomena find their origins in the same mechanisms of language change and that both are nearly identical and partly

transparent traces in the particular grammar rules of Bavarian: they are both based on processes of reanalysis of clitics and both allow the licensing of null categories. While complementizer inflection permits *pro*-drop, *denn*-cliticization gives rise to the option of *wh*-drop. This discussion could have an influence on current debates in which properties are ascribed to the complementizer position C that point to a special relation with the subject which is independent of subject-verb agreement. With regard to the considerations of the modal particle *denn*, the supposed special status of complementizer inflection in the Universal Grammar becomes relativized and can be used as a predictable variation in V2 languages with cliticization into the C position, the so-called ‘Wackernagel position’

The third contribution to this volume, *Bilingual competence, complementizer selection, and mood in Cimbrian* is presented by three Italian linguists: Ermenegildo Bidese, Andrea Padovan and Alessandra Tomaselli. It deals also with some data in the grammar of Cimbrian; in this case, the correlation between complementizer selection and verbal mood in some embedded declarative clauses. The Cimbrian variety spoken in Luserna (a municipality in the northern Italian region Trentino-Alto Adige) has two (more or less) interchangeable complementizers, *az* and *ke* (‘that’). A verb like *gloam* (‘believe’, ‘think’) can take either the complementizer *az* with subjunctive mood in modal sentences like (4) or *ke* with indicative mood in purely declarative clauses like (5):

(4) I gloabe **az**ta *sai* gerift dar Gianni
 I believe that.there be-SUBJ arrived the Gianni
 ‘I believe that Gianni arrived’

(5) I gloabe **ke** z’ *izta* gerift dar Gianni
 I believe that is.there arrived the Gianni
 ‘I believe that Gianni arrived’

In Italian the standard construction is ‘*che* + subjunctive’, as in *Credo che Gianni sia arrivato*. Nevertheless, data which the authors collected in translation tasks from Italian into Cimbrian reveal an unexpected phenomenon: *ke* can co-occur both with indicative and subjunctive mood in the embedded clause.

Their analysis becomes more complex, however, since an unexpected pattern shows up concerning the 1st person plural. In such very specific contexts only the complementizer *ke* is possible. As their data confirms and in opposition to the general theories of isomorphism, syntactic interferences in the domain of language contact are difficult to obtain.

The central point of interest in the article by Federica Cognola is the relationship between syntactic variation and Universal Grammar. The author considers some grammatical data of Mòcheno, another Upper German variety which is close to Cimbrian and spoken in Trentino, in northeastern Italy. Her work focuses on

three specific issues. First, in Mòcheno it not obligatory to apply the V2 rule which states that the second place is the non-marked position of the verb in main clauses:

- (6) Der Mario gester hòt a puach kaft (non-V2)
 The Mario yesterday has a book bought
- (7) Gester hòt der Mario kaft a puach (V2)
 Yesterday has the Mario bought a book

Cognola claims, however, that (6) and (7), contrary to the traditional approach, are never equivalent versions of the same sentence, contributing to different interpretations on the information structure.

Second, unlike in standard German, in Mòcheno both word orders – OV and VO – are possible:

- (8) Gester hòt =er a puach kaft (OV)
 Yesterday has he a book bought
- (9) Gester hòt =er kaft a puach (VO)
 Yesterday has he bought a book

Also the distribution of OV/VO word orders is determined by constraints at the interface between syntax and information structure.

Third, the complex subject pronoun paradigm is composed of strong, weak and clitic forms for almost all persons (p. 62). Variations in the domain of use of these subject pronouns are, however, not due to optionality but to diatopic variations. Cognola’s analysis shows that both options are diatopically distributed by the grammar of Mòcheno and are strictly dependent on it.

Data presented by the author seems to provide evidence for the claim that the presence of syntactic variation is unproblematic for the existence of Universal Grammar. This proposal is based primarily on two criteria: variation in Mòcheno is restricted to specific domains (namely V2 and OV/VO) and this variation is governed by specific rules at the syntax/information-structure interface.

Cecilia Poletto’s contribution to this volume is an article entitled *On the internal structure of q-words* in which the data are again taken from Cimbrian and also from some varieties of Italian. In her proposal she shows some evidence for the existence of a structural distinction between bare QPs and quantified expressions. These differences are observed in several areas. She shows that only bare Qs – but not quantified DPs – can occur in French and Cimbrian in front of the past participle. Her proposed explanation for this fact is that the past participle does not raise high enough to bypass the aspectual position where the bare Q is realized. There is a position dedicated to bare Qs but there is none for quantified expressions. Furthermore the possible explanation for such a distinction between

bare QPs and quantified nominal expressions in French or Cimbrian is related to do with some special internal layering of bare Qs: they are paired to a classifier with the feature [+/- animate] but not to an entire DP or a lexical NP. This work leaves the door open for further work in which the etymology or internal morphological layering of each type of quantifier will be taken into account to provide new evidence about the results.

The article *Infinitivprominez in deutschen Dialekten* by Oliver Schallert, lecturer at the Philipps University Marburg, deals with infinitive constructions of various German dialects. This comprehensive paper is concerned with the phenomenon of the so-called ‘infinitival prominence’, i.e., the extent to which language varieties make use of infinitive constructions. His data analysis shows important differences in this respect between standard German and its dialects on the basis of the variation of infinitive clauses. The author shows that the German dialects display an amazing amount of micro-variation both in terms of the structure of the infinitival clauses as well as in the range of complementation patterns between ‘coherence’ and ‘incoherence’. However, even if there is such huge dialectal variation, there is also evidence for invariant properties of such constructions. As a general conclusion on the theoretical range from the analysis of his data, the author considers that infinitive constructions in German dialects represent an interesting test bench to look for the linkage between macro- and micro-typological approaches, but also between formal and functional approaches, according to this formulation by Reis (2007: 41): ‘[The] relation may even become a love relationship, with both partners appreciating the beauty of autonomous language structure on the one hand, and of its pervasive functionality on the other’.

In contrast to the previous chapters on German dialects, the seventh contribution to this volume by Gunther De Vogelaer and Jan Klom is a case study of certain aspects of the acquisition of linguistic varieties in this case, by schoolchildren speaking (varieties of) Dutch. This paper begins with an interesting and concise comparison of traditional dialectology and the micro-variation approach. *Mikrovariation beim Erwerb des niederländischen Genussystems* (Microvariation in the acquisition of the gender system in Dutch) seeks to provide a global perspective based on an example of the way in which linguistic variation patterns are acquired. Standard Dutch has a system with two grammatical genders: *common* gender, for masculine and feminine, and *neuter* gender. However, many varieties – all of those in Belgium and some in the south of Holland – have retained the system of three genders. In today’s Dutch, developments are taking place in the pronominal paradigm wherein grammatical congruence is sacrificed in favor of a semantically-guided use of pronouns on the basis of individualization. An additional contribution of the authors is to determine whether this process of re-semanticization occurs in the varieties with two but also with three genders and to

elucidate whether factors such as the difficulty and obscurity of the system have contributed to this. Sociolinguistic typology asserts that languages (and dialects) in contact situations become simpler. This can be an important condition because dialects in many parts of Belgium are now acquired as part of a diglossia rather than as autonomous varieties.

Helmut Weiß's article *UG und syntaktische (Mikro-)Variation* helps to resolve from a theoretical point of view the apparent contradiction between the concept of generative Universal Grammar and the existence of syntactic variation. In the introduction he gives a summary of how the new model of micro-variation has improved research in the field of dialectology. This is seen as an essential source of knowledge, since it sheds light on several aspects of syntactic theory:

1. Determination of the smallest units of syntactic variation
2. Phenomena belonging to narrow syntax
3. Location / Source of variation (lexicon, morphology or phonology)
4. Optionality

The article deals with examples showing the significance of the model in terms of items 2 and 3. Namely, the question of phenomena belonging to the narrow syntax is studied from the issue of the order of clitic pronouns in standard German (subject>accusative>dative) and in some dialects. With regard to point 3 we find examples to demonstrate that syntactic variation can arise from three sources: lexicon, morphology or phonological form. The conclusion of the paper is significant and twofold:

1. The existence of variation in every language should not be used as evidence against the existence of Universal Grammar
2. Modern generative syntax is well-equipped to explain the appearance of variants and variation

What can new urban dialects tell us about internal language dynamics? The power of language diversity is the title of the paper presented by Professor Heike Wiese, which focuses a new and very interesting variety of German, namely *Kiezdeutsch* (literally 'neighbourhood-German'). *Kiezdeutsch* is a variety of German spoken by young people in Berlin as the result of daily contact between speakers in multiethnic and multilingual milieus. Rather than being considered from a conservative point of view as 'a random accumulation of errors' (p. 214), *Kiezdeutsch* is presented in this article as a systematic variety with a 'standard'

grammatical system, i.e., just like other conventional dialects of German, for example, Saxonian or Bavarian. These essential similarities between dialects and Kiezdeutsch are ascribed to three specific levels of analysis (Wiese 2012): language structure (specific features in the grammatical, lexical and phonological levels), language use (no particular ties to ethnic or linguistic backgrounds) and language perception (as a sign of belonging to a group or ‘region’). In relation to the focus on micro-variation, the article analyzes three specific phenomena in Kiezdeutsch: the use of bare locative NPs, word order variation in sentences and the use of *gib(t)s* ‘there is/there are’ as an existential marker.

The final contribution to the volume is by the editor, Werner Abraham: *Dialect as a spoken-only medium: what it means – and what it does not mean*. The thread of this work is a promising approach concerning the concept of what a dialect essentially is. He claims that a dialect is not so much a social/stylistic variant of a standard language, but that, far more crucially and by contrast to standard (written) language, orality/acoustic receptivity and their specific parsing criteria play the determining processing role’ (p. 248). He includes a contribution on the Darwinian character of the development of dialects, in the sense that they – in contrast to languages – are always undergoing processes of emergence and change. He also notes the three different dimensions of variation: regional variation, diachronic variation, and optionality beyond the norm of the standard language.

One of the most interesting aspects of Abraham’s articles is the discussion about how to achieve the parsing of varieties which are only spoken. This is exemplified by a phenomenon about which much has been written, the so-called ‘Upper German demise of the simple preterit’ and the emergence of the analytical perfect tense, and to a lesser extent by variation in declination of the adjective, doubling of morphemes and verb position in several subordinate clauses. Conclusions are significant, clear, and concise: a good end point for a volume which represents a very effective collaboration.

Some researchers have often overlooked or even denied an obvious fact: dialects always present syntactic variation. The merit of works like the one at hand is that they provide evidence that syntactic variation is real and omnipresent. Moreover, they demonstrate that linguistic changes do not happen unsystematically, that is to say at random, and that there exist clear patterns and correlations in the process of linguistic change. Therefore, one important reason for the study of the syntactic properties of dialects is to fill a few of the empirical gaps that still exist.

Especially noteworthy is the contribution that is made in this volume both from a theoretical point of view and from the explanation and analysis of specific dialectal phenomena, although they mainly concern varieties of German. Readers will find in its pages the necessary information and inspiration to develop research

on other phenomena and/or on other language families. It definitely will help to determine the importance of formal syntactic analysis from the point of view of modern grammar theories in order to develop the methods and especially the goals of dialectology and to give a new face to this indispensable part of linguistic science.

The interest in this area of research is even more important for those who have noticed that there is less and less dialectal diversity today, particularly as a result of increasing globalization and the power of the media. This view may be true for language areas in which dialects have come under strong pressure from the standardized forms of language. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of an obvious but significant fact: the sooner one starts recording a variety, the more the variety will be captured before becoming extinct; unless of course interest in a dialect leads to its conservation.

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Reviewer
Juan Cuartero Otal
Universidad Pablo Olavide
jcuartero@upo.es