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Review Of "Les Prédicats Nominaux En Français: Les Phrases Simples À Verb Support" By J. Giry-Schneider

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Les prédicats nominaux en français:

Les phrases simples à verb support.

By JACQUELINE GIRY-SCHNEIDER.

The title of Les predicats nominaux en français ('Predicate nominals in French') turns out to be somewhat misleading; at least, it misled me. I expected to find a study of pairs of sentences like Paul est mon frère 'Paul is my brother' versus Mon frère est Paul 'My brother is Paul'. That is, I expected the classical copular sentences with an NP in subject position and an NP in postcopular position. That's not what I found. Instead, this book offers an extended examination of sentences with the verb faire 'make' followed by a nominal, considering both syntactic and semantic characteristics, with attention to the use of these constructions in discourse. In fact, very often these constructions find their predicate (that is, the word or words which convey the event of the sentence) in the nominal following faire. Thus the title is not inappropriate. In the introduction the author suggests comparisons to uses of Latin dare 'give', Spanish hacer 'make', and English make, give, have, and get. And the reader can easily come up with comparisons in other languages.

Among the uses of faire studied here are its semantic auxiliary (often aspectual) use (Paul fait une erreur in comparison to Paul commet une erreur 'Paul [makes/commits an error]'), its causative-presentational use (Le professeur fait une conférence 'The professor gives a lecture' in comparison to Il y a une conférence 'There is a lecture'), its causative-locational use (Marie fait une place au sport dans sa vie in comparison with both Marie donne une place au sport dans sa vie 'Marie [makes/gives] a place to sports in her life' and Le sport a une place dans la vie de Marie 'Sports have a place in Marie's life'), and many others.

G-S accounts for distinctions such as Marie fait [une maison] [un faux pas] 'Marie makes [a house] [a false step]' versus Marie fait [la maison de Paul] [le faux pas de Paul] 'Marie makes [Paul's house]/[Paul's false step]' by analyzing phrases like faire un faux pas 'make a false step/ a slip/a social error' as complex predicates. The syntax of questions is also clarified by a complex predicate analysis, where the direct object that is part of a complex predicate cannot be questioned, in contrast to normal direct objects.

G-S discusses the (near?) synonymy of pairs like Marie fait stupidement un faux pas 'Marie stu-
pidly makes a slip’ and Marie fait un faux pas stupidé ‘Marie makes a stupid slip’, in contrast to the lack of synonymy in analogous pairs which do not involve a complex predicate. Psychological and aspectual adverbs show this pattern of near synonymy with complex predicates in general, not just with faire complex predicates.

G-S continues with one piece of data after another, to some extent merely cataloguing particulars of faire constructions, but quite often giving brief analyses which, while certainly not argued for in the tradition of modern syntactic and semantic work, are, I believe, often provocative and deserving of more attention than we might give to mere conjectures. Some of the most interesting points for me were discussions of faire plus N versus faire plus NP, where she enters into the semantics of the definite article, the indefinite article, the partitive, and the use of an anarthrous N. She points out more cases of the well-known fact that the addition of an AP or modifying relative clause can allow an NP where otherwise an anarthrous N is required (Paul fait [carême/ un carême/un carême prolongé] ‘Paul keeps [fast [lent]/a fast/a prolonged fast]’). She looks at the possible range of cleft sentences corresponding to faire constructions, and she has a fascinating discussion of the process or manner sense found in Max a fait une bonne traversée ‘Max has made a good crossing’ but not in Max a traversé un océan ‘Max has crossed an ocean’. Because of the process focus of the faire construction with the nominal traversée, it is ridiculous to say *Max a fait une traversée du couloir ‘Max made a crossing of the hall’, although it is quite acceptable to say Max a traversé le couloir ‘Max crossed the corridor.’ G-S identifies adjectives that can’t be used in copular sentences but that do occur in fixed faire constructions, and PPs acting as modifiers with the same property: she also makes many other interesting observations.

The book ends with over one hundred pages of lists of various types of faire constructions and tables giving examples with indications of the possibilities for types of determiners and types of complements that co-occur.

This book does not seriously enter into syntactic or semantic analysis, however, in spite of the many fascinating side comments on the data we find here. Rather, it catalogues construction types and gives copious examples. It could serve as a good resource for someone interested in beginning a more analytical study. [DONNA JO NAPOLI, Swarthmore College.]


The editor of this collection has previously published a number of books and articles on pragmalinguistic aspects of Spanish. In the present collection he brings together five papers presented at a round table discussion of the semiotics of dialogue held at the University of Amsterdam, and three additional contributions on related themes. This volume, as expected given the interdisciplinary nature of semiotic studies, incorporates articles which may be of interest to pragmatics as well as to those concerned with literary studies.

The volume opens with a contribution by WALTER MIGNOLO, ‘Diálogo y conversación’ (3–26), which serves as a general theoretical introduction. Mignolo proposes clear definitions for these two discourse genres, characterizing dialogue as a written manifestation and conversation as an oral mode of communication, with further differences between them stemming from the fact that dialogues are imitations of conversations. M develops a fairly simplified typology of qualitative differences between oral and written communication based on a historical review of the concept of dialogue, as well as on current approaches to the analysis of conversation.

The following three articles are intended to represent a more linguistic approach, Henk Haverkate, ‘La cortesía como estrategia conversacional’ (27–63), is a pragmalinguistic analysis of the semiotics of politeness written within the framework of Searle’s speech act theory. He proposes a taxonomy of expressions of politeness (including three systems: paralinguistic, metalinguistic, and linguistic), and illustrates the linguistic categories with examples taken from conversational Spanish. Even though not much is new in the analysis of how certain grammatical devices (e.g. verb morphology and impersonal se) may contribute to the establishment of degrees of politeness, he makes an interesting attempt to explain politeness on the basis of three parameters: (1) the difference between negative and positive polite-