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

Donna Jo Napoli
Swarthmore College, dnapoli1@swarthmore.edu

Recommended Citation
https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-linguistics/139

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Linguistics at Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Linguistics Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.
of producing an automatic parsing system which will produce a constituent bracketing—and hence a surface-structure tree—for any given sentence or fragment of English. The most technically advanced and hence difficult chapter is a description by Roger Garside and Fanny Leech of the work in progress on the UCREL (Unit for Computer Research on the English Language) parsing system, which it is claimed has already reached approximately 50% accuracy.

The statistical basis for the UCREL operation comes from two sources. The first is the tagged Brown corpus, which was produced over a period of ten years or so, beginning with a computer routine which successfully tagged about three quarters of the words in the corpus. The remainder were done manually. The second foundation is a manually parsed random selection of sentences from the LOB corpus, amounting to 50,000 words, or about 4.5%. The product of this parsing was a ‘treebank’ of over 2000 parsed sentences. Ch. 7 of the book, also by Sampson, describes the parsing scheme he developed for this purpose and the difficulties he encountered in using it with actual sentences drawn from a corpus of ‘natural language’. Regrettably this chapter is placed after that of Garside and Leech, though it is essential to an understanding of their work.

Other chapters deal with such interesting topics as ‘Problems in the automatic parsing of idioms’ and ‘Dealing with ill-formed English text’. One is left with the impression that a number of intelligent and devoted scholars have made significant progress in a concerted ‘effort to teach computers (in certain respects) to be capable of understanding and processing human language’ (1). Their success, which is considerable though obviously incomplete, is largely due to their willingness to develop modes of analysis which are neither traditional nor particularly fashionable in today’s linguistics. It is the hope and expectation of Leech and his colleagues that their work will be a major contribution to the linguistics and cognitive science of the future. [W. N. Francis, Brown University.]

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 ‘Paul makes/commits’ 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 stupide '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.]

**La semiótica del diálogo.** Ed. by HENK HAVERKATE. (Diálogos hispánicos de Amsterdam, 6.) Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987. Pp. 218.

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 pragmatists 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. Migno 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-