11th Comparative Germanic Syntax Workshop -- Rutgers University

Reviewer: Marcel den Dikken

(from the Germanic Generative Syntax Newsletter 11.2)

The eleventh edition of the Comparative Germanic Syntax Workshop was held at Rutgers University, New Brunswick (NJ). CGSW11 brought together a collection of papers of remarkably high quality, in a friendly and interactive atmosphere.

     The workshop was opened by a talk by Geneva's Eric Haeberli on the (im)possibility of inserting adverbial material between Comp (lexical complementiser or finite verb in V2 constructions) and the subject in Germanic. The Germanic languages turn out to differ rather subtly in this domain (Dutch versus West Flemish; Swedish versus Danish), in ways that Haeberli sought to relate to independent differences between the languages in question, such as the (im)possibility of licensing null expletives in SpecIP and the nature of the agreement system.

     Goerel Sandstroem presented results of research conducted by Anders Holmberg and herself on the syntax of definiteness, Case and possessors in northern Scandinavian dialects, which feature intriguing possessive DPs like boexa haens Viktor `(lit.) trousers-Def his Viktor' and haens Viktor boex `(lit.) his Viktor trousers', i.e. Viktor's trousers. Their account built on Longobardi's analysis of possessive DPs in Indo-European and Semitic, and postulated an AgrGP (genitival agreement phrase) in the DP structure, right below D's projection.

   Peter Svenonius' talk addressed the optionality of particle shift (John put {on} a hat {on}). In a very interesting presentation, Svenonius outlined a Hale/Keyser type analysis of particles as transitive prepositions that incorporate their complement (the Ground argument), thereby acquire a D-feature, and can thus have the Extended Projection Principle (operative within small clausal AgrPs) satisfied by raising to the SC's Agr head. The basic idea is that particle shift is optional because both the particle (by moving to Agr) and its subject (by moving to SpecAgrP) can satisfy the EPP in an equally economical way. Svenonius also analysed the subtle differences within Scandinavian with regard to particle placement in great detail, arguing for a connection between the structure that Kayne (1993) has assigned to periphrastic perfective constructions and that of verb-particle constructions. Svenonius' study of particle constructions was the first in many years to come up with a variety of novel observations in this empirical domain -- like, for instance, the fact that there is a difference between periphrastic passives and s-passives in Swedish regarding the (im)possibility of particle placement to the left of the verb (cf. hunden blev utkastad `the dog was out-thrown' vs. ??hunden utkastades), and the fact that "the waiter wiped the dust off" and "the waiter wiped the table off" (with Figure and Ground arguments realised, respectively) behave differently with regard to particle shift in Norwegian and Icelandic (the latter allowing for `inner particle' orders only, while the former feature the familiar particle-placement differential).

     Marcel den Dikken reported the outcome of ongoing research together with Hans Bennis and Norbert Corver on the structure of DP-internal predication constructions with leftward predicate movement, including the "N of a N" construction (a hell of a problem) and what-exclamatives and interrogatives (what a problem! and Dutch wat voor een probleem?). The paper paid special attention to the status of the indefinite article preceding the second noun in these constructions, which was shown to belong to neither the first nor the second noun, but to be the realisation of a small clause internal functional head.

   Hans-Martin Gaertner asked himself and his audience the question of whether

there are V2 relative clause constructions in German. His answer was `no'; although constructions like "das Blatt hat eine Seite, die ist ganz schwarz" `the sheet has one side that is completely black' may look like relative clause constructions, they do not have the properties of relatives. Nor do they seem to be run-of-the-mill coordinate constructions, if only because the German examples do not allow the addition of the coordinator und `and'. With this said, Gaertner proceeded to lay bare some of the semantic and logical properties of these V2 constructions.

Friday's programme was wrapped up by an optimal session on wh-movement, featuring talks by Peter Ackema (also on behalf of Ad Neeleman) and Gereon Mueller, couched within the Optimality Theory framework. Ackema & Neeleman covered the variation in wh-question constructions with regard to (non-)overt wh-movement with the aid of three general constraints (Q-Marking, Q-Scope and Stay), capturing the English, Bulgarian, Czech, Chinese/Japanese and French patterns by ordering the three constraints differently for each language type, and ruling out further variation by showing that the remaining logically possible orderings will not result in different surface outputs. Mueller's paper was especially concerned with the problem of partial wh-movement (was glaubst du wann sie gekommen ist? `(lit.) what believe you when she come is', i.e. when do you think she came?) and the fact that partial wh-movement constructions alternate with long wh-movement constructions in many languages. Two things are worth pointing out in connection with Mueller's proposal: (i) it deviates from standard OT in that it assumes that the candidates in the reference set are not output representations but derivations; and (ii) it defines reference sets via identity of LF output rather than in terms of identity of numerations.

The Saturday morning session was opened by an empirically highly intriguing talk by Molly Diesing, on the so-called `stem construction' in Yiddish. She showed that Yiddish has two different types of `light verb' constructions, one involving a nominal base (the type familiar from many other languages) and one involving a verbal base. She argued for a syntactic incorporation approach to `stem constructions', the N-based type differing from the V-based one with regard to the level at which incorporation obtains (LF vs. overt syntax). Of particular interest was the behaviour of particle constructions. While Yiddish normally incorporates its particles to the left of the verb stem (as in Dutch and German, and as in Swedish passives), in the verbal `stem construction' the particle shows up to the right of the verb but nonetheless exhibits all the properties of incorporated particles (i.e. it cannot be topicalised or modified). Diesing proposed a V' reanalysis account of this fact, ending up with an approach that included both syntactic particle incorporation (Prt+V) and V' reanalysis (V+Prt). Another mind-boggling property of the Yiddish verbal `stem construction' concerns the proper treatment of the indefinite article preceding the thematic verb (see e.g. er git a kum arayn `he gives a come in'). What is this indefinite article doing, and what is its syntactic position? These two questions become even more interesting once they are compared to the ones posed by the `spurious' indefinite article found in the constructions discussed in Bennis, Corver & Den Dikken's talk. Diesing tentatively suggested that the indefinite article in Yiddish verbal `stem constructions' originally started out as a real determiner (diachronically) and eventually developed into some sort of aspectual marker.

Utrecht University presented some results of the language acquisition research that is being conducted there under Peter Coopmans's supervision. In two papers featuring Bill Philip as the main axis (one co-authored by Peter Coopmans and the other by Martin Everaert), facts from the acquisition of binding problems in Dutch and English were discussed, the Philip/Coopmans paper being concerned with Principle B and the Philip/Everaert talk focusing on reciprocity.

Paola Crisma's paper looked into the use of articles in Old English prose, which featured as its central ingredients the idea that morphological articles

must receive an interpretation, that definiteness may or may not be encoded as a morphological feature of the grammatical system, and that languages may or may not possess an article with null phonetic content but with selectional features and a definiteness value.

Marga Petter argued that `passive' infinitives like Dutch "Jan liet de auto wassen" `Jan let the car wash' (i.e. Jan had the car washed) really are not passive at all, but rather feature a pro subject in the verbal small clause complement to the matrix verb. The difference with regard to the possession of this `passive' infinitive construction between Dutch/German/Scandinavian/Italian on the one hand, and English on the other, and also the diachronic development of English in this respect, was related to the presence or absence of infinitival morphology.

The prime purpose of the talk delivered by Artemis Alexiadou and Elena Anagnostopoulou was to argue that SVO orders in Greek and Spanish are instances of left dislocation and that they lack a null expletive in subject position. Nonetheless, Greek and Spanish do have a strong `EPP feature' (which, according to the authors, is a universal). In these languages, however, this strong `EPP feature' is not checked by NP-movement to SpecAgrSP but by verb movement to AgrS (cf. also Svenonius' paper, where NP-movement and particle movement were argued to be two ways of satisfying the EPP). Checking AgrS's strong `EPP feature' via V-raising was shown to be a property confined to languages with (pro-)nominal agreement paradigms.

Christopher Laenzlinger and Ur Shlonsky co-presented a paper on pronoun clustering and adjacency effects, comparing German and Hebrew facts. Their main point was to argue that pronominal clusters result from adjunction of one pronominal DP to another in overt syntax. And in the final talk of the workshop, Jon Bobaljik revisited his CGSW10 paper by recapturing the basic split in Germanic between German, Dutch and Insular Scandinavian on the one hand, and English and Mainland Scandinavian on the other in terms of a phrase structure parameter which said that in the former AgrPs are present while in the latter they are not -- the `Split IP Parameter'.