

From First Words to Grammar: Individual Differences and Dissociable Mechanisms, by Elizabeth Bates, Inge Bretherton, Lynn Snyder, Cambridge University Press, 1988, cloth, xii, 326 pages, \$51.75 CDN, ISBN 0-521-34142-6.

An interesting title, but a disappointing book. It is composed of twelve exhaustive statistical studies all based on a single longitudinal study of twenty seven children at four age levels: 10, 13, 20 and 28 months. At each age level data were collected in two sessions; one held in the home, followed by a session in the laboratory no longer than seven days later. The result is several hundred pages of reporting on social science research, laboratory recordings, interviews, analyses, pages of statistics on such things as MLU (Mean Length of Utterance) - the whole thing, which sometimes comes to life (e.g. Julia in Chap. 16), not really going anywhere for lack of a coherent theoretical underpinning.

There is little that is truly new; the authors occasionally spend time debating whether their statistics correlate to some of the known facts of child language (e.g. the shift from nouns to verbs in the second year); the result, for anyone who reads the whole text, is tough sledding. On the first page of the final chapter (261) we read 'We sympathize with the reader who has ploughed through twelve studies and hundreds of numbers to get to this point.' The summaries in this final chapter are useful, but there will probably be few linguists prepared to plough through the mass of statistics to get there. The fact that the psychometric tradition adopted by the authors is almost unknown in the field of child language is discussed in the brief Chapter Three, and several 'good reasons' (31-2) given as to why this is so. In the following ten pages the attempt is made to justify its application, but the fundamental problem remains: the what is already largely known from all kinds of longitudinal studies (is the massive Leopold (1939-49) already forgotten? it isn't in the bibliography); what we need are answers to why. A massive longitudinal statistical study such as this does not give us such answers; we have studies on the mean length of utterances that go back as far as Nice 1925, for example. The answers to why are to be found in such studies as Jakobson (1949), an article written in French, which Trubetzkoy included in his Principes de phonologie (1949), and which examines the fundamental principles of sequencing in acquisition and attempts to discover the linguistic universals of sequencing.

The authors, however, are specialists in Psychology, Human Development, and Speech Communication, not Linguistics. Their research, consequently, is psychologically oriented, and rests on two assumptions, both of which I applaud: (1) the language faculty

has a componential structure, and (2) individual differences in language development (and language loss, as in aphasia) can reveal facts about this componential structure. This is, of course, pure Jakobson (1941 - this one in German), but the name Jakobson does not appear even once in their 17 page bibliography, which in fact cites no title in any language other than English, and is over 95% from American sources. Massive industry, which has nevertheless missed the essential key, the very approach that would have suited the authors declared intentions.

The authors complain, in fact, that their second assumption is 'surprisingly unpopular among linguists and psycholinguists.' Who are these linguists? Jakobson's point of view in the 1940's was, of course, a minority one, and the majority Behaviorist view then current in American linguistics was only partly swept away by the 'revolution' of the sixties. The new paradigm, especially in its early stages, still maintained such Behaviorist doctrines as (1) the separation of syntax and semantics, and (2) the definition of language as rule-governed behavior.

The Behaviorists believed that morphosyntax, being directly observable, was the only scientific reality of language, and that meaning, not being directly observable, should be dealt with separately, or just ignored. This is the same argument that was used to defend their anti-mentalist position: the separation of syntax and semantics is an anti-mentalist doctrine that has survived into a self styled 'mentalist' paradigm, a contradiction that has bred endless confusions. It was this contradiction, for example, that led to the 'palace revolution' of the Generative Semanticists.

One of these confusions is apparent in the very title of this book, which presupposes that there is no 'grammar' in children's first words, that grammar does not start until you have rules such as  $S \rightarrow NP + VP$ . But the child's first word is normally predicated of something that is present; at a second stage predication is made to something that is not present, to something that is memorial rather than a direct percept. A third stage is the two-element stage (discussed by the authors on p. 122) where one notion is simply predicated of another (the pivot) in topic plus comment fashion. The predication of VP to NP is no more than a fourth stage of this fundamental cognitive processing. The view here is twofold: (1) the adult's exclamation of disappointment 'Rain!' is just as grammatical as The cat sat on the mat, and (2) that grammar builds, so that the truth is that  $NP + VP \rightarrow S$ .

Such a viewpoint would have meshed so well with the authors' own modular approach: as they say on p. 284, 'Modules are not born; they are made' (emphasis theirs). But the only modules they can find to borrow from modern linguistics (21) are 'phonology, syntax,

semantics, and pragmatics.' This is seriously disconcerting: phonology is certainly a module, but where is morphology? The parts of speech are themselves modules: the verbal system of English is a module which contains subsystems of tense, person, aspect, mood, etc. These subsystems (e.g. tense) are also meaningful, so that semantics itself is modular. And pragmatics is not modular; pragmatics is simply the practical application of semantics! Use, application, exploitation of a module cannot itself be a module of the same status.

This confusion is particularly regrettable when we find the authors concluding in their final summation (298): '...we have cast our lot with Aristotle and the Analogists, trying to understand language development within a more general framework of cognition, perception, and learning. Anomalism is a defeatist philosophy, a bad place to start no matter where we ultimately end up.' Here it must be understood that 'innatism' or 'general nativism' are anomalistic (if, for example, with a given theory no other explanation is rational, so that all languages have to be hard wired in the human mind - surely a defeatist point of view). It must also be understood that the authors have missed the fundamentally cognitive approaches to Child Language (e.g. Piaget 1959, or Jones 1970, a Jakobsonian point of view which, since it was reviewed in an American publication (Hewson 1973), one could expect to find in their 17 page bibliography). Perhaps George Lakoff's plea to treat linguistics as a cognitive science (1987:xi) which he considers to be a 'new field' (what would Jakobson have thought?), will lead the authors to undertake the revision that in their conclusion they feel to be necessary (288), and to review the obvious symmetry of their own point of view to that of linguists who follow in the Jakobsonian tradition of taking a cognitive approach to linguistics. The existence of recent books on language learning that question nativism and the autonomy thesis (e.g. O'Grady 1987) would provide further resource materials for such an approach.

The definition of language as rule-governed behavior, furthermore, leads to gross problems in Child Language. If the rules govern language, then the rules have to be learned first, before there can be language. How do you learn a metalanguage before you learn a language? Since moreover the rules are always flawed (see, for example, Robin Lakoff 1969) we keep rewriting the grammars until the Revised Extended Standard Theory becomes upstaged by Government and Binding or replaced by Relational Grammar, Arc Pair Grammar, Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar, etc. - there are some thirty of these on the go in the current literature. The time has come for linguists to set their house in order and get down to some fundamental principles that make sense, and that the vast majority of linguists can wholeheartedly support. Until we do this, we are going to continue to mislead honest and diligent

workers in other disciplines with our confusions, as has happened in this book.

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Linguistics in a Systemic Perspective, ed. by James D. Benson, Michael J. Cummings and William S. Greaves, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1988, x, 452 pages, \$24.95 US, ISBN 90-272-3533 (cloth)/ 90-272-3555-4 (paper).

'Systemic grammar' was a name coined for the theoretical perspective developed by Michael Halliday during the 1960's, the successor to 'Scale and Category Grammar' (1961), which was in turn heavily influenced by Halliday's teacher, J.R. Firth. It may be considered a variant of European functionalism, as indicated by the title of Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar (1985). As Hudson comments in a comprehensive review article (1986) 'the name comes from the key concept, the 'system,' which is just a set of alternatives.' This book is a set of thirteen essays that show 'systemicists at work' (ix). The result is a very mixed bag, as is frequent when such collections are made.

The first article in the book, 'Intonation and meaning in spontaneous discourse' by Afaf El-Menoufy, is a solid piece of phonetic description which plays the role of overture for the next article by Michael Halliday, who has always been the leading figure of the Systemic school: 'On the ineffability of grammatical categories.' This is one of the two items that had been previously published (it was Halliday's Presidential Address to LACUS in 1983).

Halliday always sparkles, whether the word be spoken or written, and there are many interesting insights on the difficult question of describing grammatical meaning which is the topic of his paper. He concludes, for example, that 'The meaning of the s on cats is impossible to gloss in natural language ... The category is, quite simply, ineffable' since I like cats does not mean I like more than one cat (33).

What is at issue here, as Saussure long ago pointed out (1916:121-2), is not the meaning of plural, but the meaning of the singular/plural contrast, where we have a simple binary system: the establishment of a unit, and transcendence of the unit. Consequently any representation where the unit is transcended becomes plural, as in 1.05 inches. It is surprising, therefore, in a book that purports to represent 'Systemic linguistics' at work, that the question of the meaning of such a simple system is not only not addressed, but the issue in fact dismissed as a failure of the metalanguage: '... grammatical categories will remain ineffable' (37).

This is, in fact, a problem that I found throughout the whole book: that in Systemic linguistics there does not seem to be any clear notion of system. In fact Halliday writes 'language (if I may be allowed to invert Chomsky's famous dictum) is an infinite system that generates only a finite body of text' (33). Here, quite apart from the obvious matter of fact that the dictum is Humboldt's, as Chomsky quite properly acknowledges (1965:8), there are two major confusions: (1) language is not a system, and (2) an 'infinite system' is a contradiction in terms.

The first of these problems is a perennial one: the failure to distinguish the means of production from the product, to distinguish, for example, the fount of type (finite system) from the printed pages (potentially infinite text). Hockett is quite right, for example, when he says that the search for system in language (i.e. langage, which includes text) is a 'wild goose chase' (1959:936); Saussure himself had said 'Le tout global du langage est inconnaissable' (1916:38). Nevertheless every language (langue) is a system of systems, with a phonological system, grammatical system, etc. We have to make the Saussurian distinction between langue and langage, even though our mother tongue does not help us to do it. If we fail to do this we fail to think clearly about the realities of language and may end up looking for system in the wrong place: one never hears phonological systems in the stream of speech; one only hears allophones that have to be analysed. If such systems could be observed directly, in texts, there would be no need to train linguists.

Since Butler (1985:77) regrets the lack of direct critical comment by outsiders to the theory, it is perhaps important to make this fundamental criticism perfectly clear. Systems are, by definition, finite: they are composed of parts that fit together in a recognizable way. They may be either open or closed; an open system, such as a speaker's vocabulary, can have items added or subtracted, but at any given moment of time will be finite. A closed system cannot be altered without destroying it, because all the parts fit together into a coherent unity.

These questions are at issue all the way through this text. One gets the impression from the following paper by A.A Lyne, for example, ('Systemic syntax from a lexical point of view'), which has some interesting comments on collocations, that there are 'system networks' to be found in texts; the same point of view reappears in Christian Mathiessen's paper 'Semantics for a systemic grammar: The chooser and inquiry framework.' But texts are Saussurian parole, and we are back with the product, not the means of production. The same problem also arises in the next paper (John McH. Sinclair, 'Sense and structure in lexis') with Sinclair's analysis of the variant meanings of YIELD, where he talks of '... lexical structure

in terms of collocations and similar patterns' (74), not, as we might expect, in terms of semantic field. Insistence on text also shows up in three other papers: M.K. Philips, 'Text, terms and meanings: Some principles of analysis,' Terry Threadgold, 'What did Milton say Belial said and why don't the critics believe him?,' Erich Steiner, 'The interaction of language and music as semiotic systems: The example of a folk ballad,' the last two being analyses of texts. Phillips in fact states (107) that 'the text as a whole constitutes a vast network' and later presents Hjelmslev as arguing that 'language has to be viewed as a network of relations' and that 'this view stemmed from Saussure.' Any network of relations for Saussure and Hjelmslev, however, would be in langue, the means of production, whereas text is unquestionably parole, the product.

Rhetoric, of course, can have structure, and the best aspect of most of these papers is the interesting insights that they furnish into the structure of various aspects of rhetoric, as in Christopher Butler's paper on politeness ('Politeness and the semantics of modalised directives in English') and that of Eirian Davies on possibility ('On different possibilities in the syntax of English'), and the carefully crafted analyses of Threadgold and Steiner.

Steiner's paper had been published before, but in a local journal; republication makes it more easily accessible. The paper by Michael Gregory ('Generic situation and register: A functional view of communication'), on the other hand, is new in format, but rehashes earlier publications and adds very little that is new. The whole of the last section, for example, is a 'recall' of things that were 'proposed in 1967 and developed in ... 1978' (316).

Robin Fawcett's paper, ('The English personal pronouns: An exercise in linguistic theory'), which I had been led to think might deal with the system of the personal pronouns, was a great disappointment. He tries to create 'a purely formal grammar' (189), but this is impossible, given the syncretism of it and you and the need to distinguish objective her from possessive her (I saw her vs. I saw her book where her is obviously not the same element - cf. him/his). He ignores the possessives, however, and for a system gives us simply the following, which is nothing but a list (190):

I/me/you/he/him/she/her/it/we/us/they/them

to which the ENTRY CONDITION is [pronoun]. His arguments against 'both a "nominative" and an "accusative" it' (193), furthermore, could also be used for claiming that verbs such as put and set have only one tense in English, and no past participle. Given I put/set it in the garden yesterday vs. I sometimes put/set them in the garden, would he claim that there is no difference of tense because there is no difference of form? If he does, it can be

shown that there is something seriously wrong with his method by substituting a verb such as plant for put/set. If he does not, he must be prepared to admit that the system is not in the morphemes; that the morphemes sometimes mark, sometimes fail to mark, the systemic differences. Long experience has shown us that where the morphology fails to mark the distinctive or systemic differences, it is a gross error to presume that such systemic differences do not exist: it is just as wrong to argue against a 'ominative and accusative it' as it is to claim that set and put have no past tense or past participle. There is an underlying content system (to use Hjelmslev's term) of which the morphemes are merely the markers; these latter have no value whatever without the content which they mark. And a single morpheme such as it or put may be used to mark more than one content.

For me the most enjoyable and profitable item was Martin's paper on Tagalog ('Grammatical conspiracies in Tagalog: Family, face and fate - with regard to Benjamin Lee Whorf'). This paper includes a perceptive defence of Whorf, and does have the sense of system that I looked in vain for elsewhere, while still dealing with collocations (in that it deals with classes of words that fit in certain collocations, such as the covert class of 'political' verbs listed on page 269, with meanings such as boast, sellout, offer, entrust, prohibit, etc.). The class of words would form, in Jakobson's terms a (vertical) paradigm, where each item might replace the other, whereas the collocation forms a (horizontal) syntagma that undergoes alteration as the different paradigmatic elements are inserted into it. The former could be considered a system of langue, the latter a structure of parole. Martin's paper is a long and thoughtful essay that a linguist of any persuasion should be able to read for profit, which is a rare achievement by any linguist these days.

Perhaps Martin's last word, in his defence of Whorf, could be the final verdict on the whole book: that human beings do have the ability 'to break conceptual fetters' so that we do not remain 'prisoners of the categorisation scheme implied by our language' (297). There is fine work being done in Systemic linguistics, but the one conceptual fetter that it is essential to break is that of the English word language. The systems of langue are cognitive systems, the fundamental linguistic systems that are much more coherent than the rhetorical systems of parole, and the sociological systems of langage. Obviously, a linguistic theory which chooses for itself the label Systemic should deal with the fundamental systems before tackling the peripheral ones.

The Index has some curious lapses. Why, for example, are Boas, Bolinger, Hudson, Malinowski, Sapir, left out, when they are mentioned and discussed in the text, when others such as Firth,



Grice, Givon, Jespersen, Lamb, Leech, are listed? Bolinger, indeed, is quoted at length on page 53, where he occupies a whole paragraph. Hudson's work is discussed on page 70, where he is described as 'in the past a doughty protagonist of the Systemic model;' is this not a sufficient recommendation to get him into the Index?

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