

Introducing arguments Linda Pylkkänen (2008)

Reviewed by Lene Nordrum

In her book *Introducing Arguments*, Linda Pylkkänen distinguishes between the core and noncore arguments of verbs by means of a detailed discussion of *applicative* and *causative* constructions. The term applicative refers to structures that in more general linguistic terms are defined as ditransitive, i.e. when both a direct and an indirect object are associated with the verb, as exemplified in (1) (Pylkkänen, 2008: 13):

(1) I baked him a cake.

The causative construction is illustrated in (3), and explained as the product of a causation process, referred to as *causativization* by Pylkkänen, where a causer (*Lisa*) is added to a construction such as in (2) through an ‘argument-structure-altering process’:

(2) Noncausative
The window broke.

(3) Causative
Lisa broke the window.

Causativization thus corresponds to what is referred to as ‘ergative alteration’ in other linguistic traditions (cf. e.g. Davidse and Geyskens, 1998: 157) and discussed by way of the ‘ergative perspective’ in Systemic Functional Grammar (cf. Thompson, 2004: 135).

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The main aim of Pykkänen's study is to answer the question of how noncore arguments are introduced in argument structures. The study is placed within the general framework of generative linguistics. The essential claim is that arguments are introduced by seven functional heads and that cross-linguistic variation is the result of selecting different functional heads as well as where/how the selected elements are fitted into syntactic projections.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter articulates the theoretical position of the study and presents a general overview of previous work. In Chapter 2, a new applicative typology is proposed, arguing that despite surface similarities, applicative constructions can be split into two semantic types corresponding to two different syntactic structures: *high applicatives* and *low applicatives*. The difference between these two constructions is that the noncore argument (indirect object) is introduced at different levels in the syntactic projection. In Chapter 3, Pykkänen presents the view that the causer argument (cf. *Lisa* in example (3)) is introduced by means of a voice element rather than by an element that encodes causation, thus making the claim that the subject in causatives is similar to other noncore arguments.

As the book is placed within generative theory, it presupposes that the reader is familiar with a number of theoretical concepts fundamental to this tradition. Coming from an eclectic linguistic background, the reviewer must therefore admit that she cannot do justice to many of the theory-internal solutions proposed. A brief explanation of some technical terminology would have remedied this situation as well as broaden the potential readership of Pykkänen's work, but was perhaps not intended given the nature of the study: a theoretical refinement of work within the generative tradition. Theoretical stumbling blocks aside, however, the book is written in clear and accessible prose and contains numerous illustrative examples of the structures discussed.

What can Pykkänen's study offer the linguist coming from a background other than generative theory? The obvious answer is that it provides interesting observations about how different categories of meaning are mapped onto syntactic structure, the interest at the heart of every linguistic theory. For example, the split into high and low applicatives is based on the semantic difference that in the former, the indirect object has a straightforward relation to the verb, whereas in the latter there is a 'transfer-of-possession relation' where the indirect object becomes the 'owner' of the direct object (Pykkänen, 2008: 14). Pykkänen (2008: 13) gives an example of a low applicative structure in English (4) and a high applicative structure in Chaga (5) to illustrate the difference:

- (4) English
I baked *him* a cake
- (5) Chaga
N-ä-i-lyi-i-à
FOC-1SG-PRES-eat-APPL-FV 1 *m-kà* *k-élyá*
wife 7-food
'He is eating food for his wife'

In (4) the direct object *a cake* is obviously intended for the indirect object *him*. In (5), on the other hand, the indirect object *his wife* benefits from *the act of eating* food, but she does not get any food, as would be assumed in a low applicative construction. Thus, low applicatives 'denote a relation between two individuals', while high applicatives 'denote a relation between an event and an individual' (Pylkkänen, 2008: 13). Observations such as these can shed new light on the nature of indirect objects even in semantically geared models of grammar and hence be useful to further modify descriptions of lexicogrammatical patterns cross-linguistically.

Furthermore, regarding Pylkkänen's study of causative constructions (or ergative constructions in SFL terminology), she makes the claim that cause is not a theta-role (theta-role corresponds roughly to thematic/participant role in other theories) but that the noncore argument (i.e. the subject) in a causative construction is related to a functional property named *voice*, and therefore not part of the argument structure of the verb. Pylkkänen's proposal is interesting in light of discussions by, for example Davidse, within the functional paradigm where the core argument of causative constructions (referred to as *the nuclear participant* by Davidse and corresponding to *the window* in (3)) is claimed to have a 'mixed activo-passive relation' to the verb and that the possible 'agent' or 'instigator' (*Lisa* in (3)) of the verb is the 'variable' of the construction (Davidse, 2002: 153). Thus, there has been work within functional theories on the nature of noncore arguments that could have been interesting to Pylkkänen, and even allowing for some intriguing comparison of ideas. It is a pity that such cross-fertilization across theoretical camps rarely takes place, which is also true for Pylkkänen's work.

One last big question is appropriate in any book dealing with argument structure, namely how the relation between syntax and semantics is regarded. In her book *Introducing Arguments*, Pylkkänen's answer combines semantics and syntax in the sense that she argues that arguments are introduced in the argument structures via syntactic heads but that syntactic heads combine with their complements and specifiers according to 'the traditional modes of semantic composition' (Pylkkänen, 2008: 5). In essence, therefore, Pylkkänen's theory deals with verb semantics. This mix follows naturally from the fact that, as described by Bresnan (2001: 304), argument structure lies at the 'interface

between the semantics and syntax of predicators'. At the same time Pylkkänen seems to follow Chomsky in arguing for syntactic autonomy. For example, she states that 'syntactic structure building is the only mode of structure building in natural language' (2008: 5). This poses the interesting question of exactly how semantic a theory of autonomous syntax should or can be. Pylkkänen attempts to explain her position on such issues in Chapter 1, an effort which should be applauded, but the discussion can be continued.

On the whole, Pylkkänen's book presents an impressive theory of the way noncore arguments are introduced into sentences, and provide food for thought on the nature of the relations of arguments to verbs and the dialogue between form on the one hand, and meaning/function on the other, a dialogue that we all seek to understand.

References

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Book reviewed

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