

Micro-Syntactic Variation in North American English*

Ed. by Raffaella Zanuttini & Laurence R. Horn.

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The present volume provides a collection of articles in which minimal differences in the syntax of varieties of English spoken in North America are analysed. The main goal of this book is precisely to characterise this variation; goal that already evidences the value of this publication, since, as it is pointed out in the introduction, it is the first one to offer systematic investigation in this regard. The different authors offer in each chapter a wide range of unfamiliar empirical data from very different dialects as well as estimable information about their distribution, grammatical properties and cross-linguistic relations. Each of the authors also propose a theoretical approach to their objects of study from the perspective of micro-comparative syntax.

The co-editor, Raffaella Zanuttini, opens the collection with a welcoming introduction for the reader. The justification for this publication is very clear and it is related to the Yale Grammatical Diversity Project. In this project, Zanuttini and the rest of her team work to make the information and descriptions of different interesting constructions of US English visible and accessible. The articles on this volume have helped in enriching this project that is accessible to the public as a website¹. We encourage the reader to visit the site, especially to consult the maps of the different phenomena and dialects, as they are not provided in this volume.

Zanuttini also claims that the methodology chosen, micro-comparative-syntax, has already been proved successful to the empirical study of other languages and therefore, among other advantages, it is suitable for the kind of research expected for this book. To conclude her introduction, after offering a review of the different chapters, Zanuttini returns to the main goals of the book that she had already presented and justifies how the totality of the proposals contribute to accomplish them.

We find specially fitting the order established by the editors for the chapters of the book. The reader is able to find the overlapping topics through the different

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¹ <http://microsyntax.sites.yale.edu>

articles that ease the reading and confer a sensation of unity on the volume. This distribution is classified by the editors in five main topics, listed as follows:

- i. Understanding *so*
- ii. Negation
- iii. Pronouns and Anaphors
- iv. The IP Domain
- v. Broader considerations

Chapters 2 and 3 belong to the first section. In the former, Patricia Irwin studies the construction *SO [TOTALLY]* speaker oriented or “Drama SO”, which started to be used in the 1980s by people born in the late 1960s:

- (1) a. Jamie has *SO TOTALLY* dated that type of guy before.²
b. People are *SO TOTALLY* wearing flip-flops this season. [emph. IFS]

Her proposal is that *so* is a degree word that modifies the speaker-oriented adverb *totally*, which can be overt or covert. To support this analysis, Irwin dedicates a section to distinguish the properties of this use of *so* from related uses of *so* and also to discuss some potential alternative proposals. In this article we can find a broad description of *Drama SO* properties such as word order, prosody or interaction with other elements like negation or modals. In addition, the author offers a wide study of speaker-oriented *TOTALLY* and its relation to other speaker-oriented adverbs.

Jim Wood in chapter 3 focuses on constructions from New England English which involve a negative marker, the so called SAND (*So-AUXn't-NP/DP*) (2) and certain negative exclamatives with affirmative meaning (3).

- (2) a. Alice: You should be more careful.
Fred: *So shouldn't John/he/you/they.*
b. ...Sure it's trendy, but *so aren't most NYC clubs.*
- (3) a. Well don't you look pretty! ≈ ‘You look very pretty!’
b. Well wouldn't you like to know! ≈ ‘You would really like to know!’

This is a quite unknown construction, not comprehensible for most of English speakers, which involves an affirmative meaning despite showing negative morphology. Wood shows several negativity tests to prove the affirmative condition of these constructions and examines other negative structures in comparison to other languages. Wood's conclusion is that SAND constructions are compositional, thus he is able to offer a syntactic solution which captures the semantic and pragmatic properties of these kind of sentences.

This chapter leads to the next section, centered on negation. Firstly, Lisa Green's Chapter 4 examines Declarative Negative Auxiliary Inversion (NAI) in African American English, exemplified in (4):

² All the examples given in this review are taken from the respective chapters of the volume.

- (4) a. *Didn't nobody* want no tea.
 ‘Not a single person wanted tea’
 b. *Wouldn't nobody* ride that bus.
 ‘Not a single person would ride that bus’ [emphasis mine, IFS]

Green reviews some of the previous accounts for NAI that, in contrast to hers, do not take into account the pragmatic context of these expressions. Her analysis is based on the notion of the “emphatic reading”, that is to say, these constructions differ from the ones that lack inversion in that they only accept a reading of absolute negation. She also proves the advantages of her proposal, based on a cartographic approach, in comparison to earlier accounts. Green opens very interesting questions for further research especially about the relationship with other varieties of English and the acquisition of NAI constructions.

Secondly, Raffaella Zanuttini and Judy B. Bernstein focus in chapter 5 on transitive expletives in Appalachian English, that is to say, sentences whose subjects consist in two parts: a pronoun and an indefinite quantificational element:

- (5) a. *They* won't *nobody* know you're gone.
 b. *There* didn't *no girl* go to the door with a boy.

They provide a very clear introduction with the questions to answer from their research and the organisation of the chapter. We find especially interesting section 3 in which they compare these data to Floating Quantifiers in English and to Transitive Expletive Constructions in Icelandic. In the last section they also briefly discuss transitive expletives in Late Middle English and Early Modern English. Their analysis also relates to the analysis of NAI constructions subjects in the previous chapter.

Chapter 6 by Corinne Hutchinson and Grant Armstrong opens the third section of the volume. Again they dedicate their research to Appalachian English, in this case, personal datives (PDs). These constructions are similar to double object constructions. However, here the pronouns have a reflexive interpretation despite lacking reflexive morphology (*-self*):

- (6) a. He_i loves *him_i* some baseball.
 b. Did you_i sing *you_i* some songs at youth group last night?

The authors' contribution is both empirical and theoretical, since they include original fieldwork as well as a new analysis that comprises both interpretation and structure of such constructions. They claim that DPs and DOC are structurally equal, as they are introduced by a low Applicative head, but their relationship with this head differs semantically. They do so by proposing a new kind of low applicative called *satisfactive* that differs from the one proposed in the literature for the DOC, *possessive* low Applicative (Pylkkänen 2002, 2008). In addition, they offer restrictions on direct objects in PDs sentences.

Next chapter is also dedicated to reflexive pronouns. Sarah Loss has as her object of study Iron Range English (IRE), a dialect spoken in a region of northern Minnesota. Unlike what was shown in the previous chapter about Appalachian English, Iron Range reflexive pronouns exhibit the “typical” morphology for

reflexives in English (*-self*), but differ from other varieties in that they can corefer with an antecedent in the higher clause, in either subject or object position:

- (7) a. Hillary_i told Jill_j that [Mary_k believes in herself_{i/j/k}].
 b. Hillary_i told Jill_j that [Tom_k believes in herself_{i/j}].

Loss gathers judgements from native speakers, as well as from herself, for her research. She determines that IRE reflexives show different properties from long distance reflexive pronouns in other languages as Icelandic or Mandarin. She also argues that the key aspect to distinguish reflexive pronouns behaviour in IRE from other varieties of English is that they are not logophoric pronouns.

IP domain phenomena are studied in the next three chapters. Elspeth Edelstein examines alternative embedded passives (AEPs) in chapter 8. In this kind of sentences, specially linked to Pennsylvania and the American Midlands, a form of *need* is immediately followed by a past participle:

- (8) a. The cat *needs fed*.
 b. The car *needs washed*.
 c. My hair *needs cut*. [emphasis mine, IFS]

She discusses the effectivity of previous analyses, which are based on the ellipsis of the copulative verb *to be*. She also points out that the assumption that AEPs and Standard embedded passives operate syntactically and semantically equally is incorrect. AEPs also differ from linking verb constructions and transitive constructions lacking *to be*.

Daniel Hasty's Chapter 9 on double modal constructions of Southern United States English (SUSE), exemplified in (9), not only provides a syntactic analysis from the microparametric variation account but also a quantitative sociolinguistics study of the phenomena, as well as a very clarifying introduction about the study of linguistic variation.

- (9) a. I *might could* go to the store for you.
 b. You *might should* eat before you go.
 c. Those ducks *must not can* feel cold.

He proves that earlier accounts cannot explain some of the data, such as the behaviour of these constructions in questions, with negation and with stranded quantifiers. After reviewing some cross-linguistic data, he concludes that these modals should be analysed as different functional elements: the first modal expresses modality and the second one, tense.

The last section of the present volume is dedicated to reflect about more general questions. Christina Tortora's Chapter 10 focuses on the difficulty of establishing clusters of syntactic phenomena due to the intra-speaker variability. This is a very interesting conclusion for the previous chapters, since she addresses the problem of how linguists should study the cases in which the same speaker produces sentences apparently belonging to different grammatical systems. This problem might have been present to the majority of the researches who contributed

to this book. She proposes three methods to deal with it and she introduces her and her team's new project of a parsed corpus of Appalachian English.

The book is closed with an afterword by the co-editor, Laurence R. Horn. The aim of this closing chapter is to revisit the topics discussed in the contributions of this volume and provide some additional information, namely semantic, diachronic, and sociolinguistic dimension of the presented data as well as other related constructions. Therefore, this is not a summary of what it has already been said, but it offers engaging further considerations that allow the reader to comprehend the extension and complexity of the variation of North American English.

In conclusion, the value of this contribution is undeniable for both the considerable amount of almost unexplored data and the theoretical proposals made by experts on each of the fields and often native speakers of the studied variety themselves. Quoting Zanuttini, this book represents a "hopeful beginning" for the research on the syntax of North American English varieties and we are sure that, together with the Yale Project, it is going to encourage further investigation in this field.