

Book reviews

Ann M. Cooreman, *Transitivity and Discourse Continuity in Chamorro Narratives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987, ix+245 pp., DM 98.00

In the mid-seventies, a group of linguists with a variety of backgrounds and research interests, most of them teaching at universities on the West Coast of the United States, envisioned a different kind of linguistics, where the empirical study of the natural languages would not be limited to the study of native speakers' intuitions about isolated sentences. In their search for a methodology where the Saussurean dichotomies still accepted within generative grammar (viz. synchrony vs. diachrony, langue vs. parole) could be overcome, they found 'discourse'. Rather than looking at a list of sentences, typically produced by the linguists themselves or by bilingual speakers used as informants, this group of linguists showed an interest in and the relevance of collecting and analyzing texts. They further hinted at the relevance of communicative goals for grammatical theory, language change, and language typology. In this intellectual climate, developmental psychologists, computer scientists, anthropologists, and sociologists interested in everyday conversation were welcome to join in the discussion.

Out of those years of intense debate, programmatic statements, and hurried circulation of unpublished manuscripts, came a number of influential publications, some of which were collections of papers delivered at conferences on such topics as word order, syntactic change, the interface between sentence structure and discourse organization (cf. Li 1975, 1976, 1977; Givón 1979). Beyond those specific contributions, those years of excitement and challenge to the perceived dominant paradigm (viz. generative grammar) inspired a number of research programs in various departments of linguistics around the U.S. One such program was started by Talmy Givón in the early 1980s at the University of Oregon. Givón took seriously the relevance of the informational organization of discourse for grammatical structure and devised a methodology for the study of what he called 'discourse continuity' (cf. Givón 1983). A group of followers, some of them Givón's students, applied his methodology and analytical categories to syntactic studies in a variety of languages. The monograph by Ann Cooreman is one of the Ph.D. dissertations produced at the University of Oregon under Givón's supervision.

From a corpus of 200 pages of transcribed narratives elicited from Chamorro speakers, Cooreman examines the discourse contexts of a number of syntactic constructions: (1) transitive clauses with ergative case marking; (2) two kinds of passive clauses; (3) antipassive; (4) non-finite (-um)

construction; (5) two types of nominalizations. The main point of the study is that, in Chamorro narratives, the use of different syntactic constructions is related to the degree of topicality of the referents expressed by the major nominal arguments in the clause. Degree of topicality is understood as 'the relative importance or contribution of a referent to the narrative' (p. 13) and can be measured by counting the number of clauses between different mentions of the same referent in discourse. Each noun phrase is seen as contributing to 'textual coherence and different aspect of coherence: (a) referential distance reflects anaphoric coherence (look-back) and (b) topic persistence reflects cataphoric coherence (look-ahead)' (p. 13).

Cooreman's study confirms several theses of discourse oriented grammatical studies of the last two decades. In particular, her findings support Hopper and Thompson's (1980) notion of a continuum of transitivity, the animacy hierarchy (cf. Hawkinson and Hyman 1974; Givón 1976; Comrie 1981), the relevance of the informational status of referents in discourse. On the other hand, some new dimensions also emerge which might not fit very neatly with the analytical paradigm originally set out by Givón. Thus, for instance, in discussing the use of some of the constructions (for example, antipassive), Cooreman mentions notions of involvement, activity, 'lasting' effects. These are not part of the informationally oriented model adopted in the study. The value of Cooreman's study lies in her thorough investigation of a wide range of syntactic constructions and their discourse context. The picture that she provides of Chamorro syntax at the clausal level is detailed and well-documented; she writes clearly and always illustrates her points with examples. The limitations of this study are of two kinds: (i) lack of further elaboration of those very notions (for example, given and new information, background and foreground, paragraph) which form the backbone of Givón's model and quantitative methodology; (ii) the uncritical acceptance of a naive theory of cognition as something either explicitly or implicitly detached from social, cultural, and affectual dimensions of language use. Transitivity and discourse continuity may have just as much to do with notions of responsibility, truth, ethics, aesthetics, and social order as with the informational management of verbal performance.

These criticisms aside, Cooreman has produced a well organized and interesting study of many aspects of Chamorro syntax that will be of great value to syntacticians, typologists, and other linguists interested in the paradigmatic choices offered by a language and its speakers to express transitivity and mitigate agency in narrative discourse.

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John Rickford, *Dimensions of a Creole Continuum. History, Texts & Linguistic Analysis of Guyanese Creole*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987, \$ 42.50

This book will be particularly welcome to creolists as it is written by a linguist who is also a native speaker of Guyanese Creole. Such studies are rare in the field of pidgin and creole languages. Thanks mainly to the work of Rickford in this volume and elsewhere and Bickerton (1975 et passim), Guyanese Creole is one of the best documented creole languages.

The book has two aims: one is to discuss certain theoretical and socio-historical linguistic issues relating to the notion of creole continuum; the second is to present texts illustrating various features of Guyanese Creole. These take up most of the volume (pp. 81–283), while the other material consists of two chapters which provide sociohistorical and theoretical orientation for the texts. The glossed texts are a valuable resource for linguists and students of the language because Rickford has written introductions to accompany them which point out significant features. They span a period from the late eighteenth century to the present day.

In Chapter 1 Rickford addresses the notion of the creole continuum, which has been the prevailing model for analysis of the Atlantic creoles since De Camp (1961) first described the Jamaican creole continuum. Rickford maintains it is still a useful framework, despite increasing criticism of it in