

## Book Reviews

**Ines Fiedler and Anne Schwarz (eds.)** 2010. *The expression of information structure. A documentation of its diversity across Africa*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010. xii + 383 pp. EUR 105.

This volume contains 13 papers dealing with various aspects of information structure in a wide variety of African languages. They form the proceedings of a workshop organized by the Collaborative Research Center on Information Structure (University of Potsdam and Humboldt University, Berlin). In the introduction, the editors define the main contribution of this volume in terms of “*the spectrum of information-structural notions and phenomena discussed, the investigation of information structure in several relatively unfamiliar languages and the genealogical width of the African languages studied.*” (vii–viii emphasis added). In this sense it complements the previous volume on information structure in African languages published by the Collaborative Research Center and the University of Amsterdam (Aboh, Hartmann & Zimmermann, 2007), which was more theory-oriented.

The papers in this volume indeed cover a wide range of phenomena. Most papers are about focus, but within the category of focus several lesser-studied phenomena are discussed, such as verb and operator focus and the interaction of focus marking and verb morphology. Other categories of information structure such as topic constructions, theticity, contrast and prominence also receive attention. The grammatical reflexes of information structure that are studied are all in the domain of morphosyntax; there are no articles dealing with prosody, which is the major device for marking information structure in several European languages, but seems to be less relevant in Africa.

The languages discussed in this volume come from all four major African phyla. Niger-Congo is best represented with eight papers (four of which are on Bantoid languages of southwestern Cameroon). There are two papers on Afroasiatic languages, two papers on Khoisan languages and one on a Nilo-Saharan language. Many lesser-known languages are included and in many cases these articles provide the first description of information structure in the languages they discuss. This volume thus provides a wealth of information for typologists and theoreticians interested in information structure.

Apart from careful linguistic description, this volume also stands out in emphasizing pragmatics. Several articles investigate the function of information structure markers in detail. This is a very important enterprise, as it is only through such work that a cross-linguistic comparison of information structure

categories will ever be possible. Another plus of this book is that many of the contributions use data from texts. As information-structure marking is heavily dependent on context, data from longer stretches of discourse is indispensable for a good understanding of the phenomena.

The articles in the book are ordered alphabetically by author name, and I keep to that order in my discussion of them below.

The first paper in the book is written by *Helen Eaton* and investigates information structure marking in a corpus of written Sandawe (Khoisan) texts. She describes the distribution of the subject-focus marker and the realis pronominal clitic, which is also used for focus-marking. The latter is especially interesting, as it provides an example of how information-structure markers can be recruited from other parts of the grammar.

*Jeff Good's* paper on topic and focus fields in Naki (Beboid, Bantoid) contains a nice mixture of description and theory. He argues that the phenomena of post-verbal foci and preverbal topics can best be accounted for in terms of linear fields and provides clear arguments against an analysis based on constituency trees.

*Tom Güldemann* discusses cleft-like constructions with multiple functions in the Tuu-branch of Khoisan. Apart from contrastively focusing an argument, they also express entity-central theticity in some of the languages.

*Larry Hyman* revisits the topic of focus marking in Aghem (Grassfields, Bantoid), based on the data he elicited 30 years ago. That work resulted in an impressive overview of Aghem grammar, including a lot of information on focus (Hyman 1979). The current paper does not add much to this. Hyman goes into the distribution of the so-called A-forms and B-forms of nouns in a bit more detail and argues, against his previous account, that this distribution is not conditioned by focus, but needs a syntactic explanation.

*Peggy Jacob* provides a first description of information structure in the Nilo-Saharan language Tar B'arma. The paper is rather preliminary, as it is based on question-answer pairs elicited with only one consultant. Nevertheless it contains many interesting details on focus-marking strategies in this underdescribed language.

*Roland Kiessling* describes focus-marking in Isu, a Grassfields language closely related to Aghem. Kiessling, like Hyman, investigates the distribution of the A-forms and B-forms of nouns and he compares the Isu data to Aghem. Contrary to Hyman, Kiessling assumes that the form of the noun is determined by its information structure status. An interesting observation is that the morphologically marked forms are pragmatically less marked.

*Oliver Kröger* looks into referent tracking in Makua-Marevone (Bantu) narratives, with special emphasis on the function of the inverted passive construction. These constructions express a special type of theticity.

*Amina Mettouchi and Axel Fleisch* investigate word-order variations in two Berber lects, Taqbaylit and Tashelhit. Both languages show pragmatically conditioned word-order variation, which goes against the standard assumption that Berber is strictly VSO. The authors show that whereas Taqbaylit can be called discourse-configurational, word-order flexibility in Tashelhit is more restrictive. This difference is related to differences in case-marking between the two languages.

*Stéphane Robert* gives an overview of the fascinating focus marking strategies in Atlantic languages. In many Atlantic languages, focus marking is merged with other verbal morphology, leading to different markers for aspect/tense/voice etc. depending on what element is focused. Different verb forms for focus vs. non-focus also occur in many Benue-Congo languages (such as Ejagham, described later in this volume by Watters). However, the distinguishing feature of Atlantic is that the form of the verb depends not only on the presence of a focused constituent, but also on its syntactic status.

*Ronald P. Schaefer and Francis O. Egbokhare* describe the differences between topic-marking and focus-marking in Emai (Edoid, Benue-Congo). Even though both focus and topic are indicated by displacement constructions, there are several syntactic differences between them. The authors' conclusions are somewhat weakened by the fact that their data seems to only consist of grammaticality judgments, which are not always reliable for context-dependent phenomena such as topic and focus.

*Anne Schwarz* provides a detailed pragmatic analysis of a set of cognate particles in four Gur languages which mark focus on the verb. She shows that these particles interact with aspect marking, which plays out differently in the different languages. Her data are elicited using a questionnaire especially developed for this topic. This questionnaire is based on realistic scenarios within which the elicited utterance is situated and as such shows a promising way forward for the systematic elicitation of information-structure constructions.

*Mauro Tosco* describes the wide range of information structure markers in Gawwada, an East Cushitic language. He mainly focuses on the particle/clitic =**kka** which at first sight seems to mark focus but is better analyzed as a contrast marker and can also be used with topics. His study is a good example of how studying natural discourse can lead to insights which would not have surfaced when using only elicited data.

In the last paper of the volume, *John R. Watters* returns once more to the Bantoid languages of southwest Cameroon with a study of the close interaction of focus-marking and tense/aspect/mood marking in Ejagham. In this language, the main distinction that is made is between operator focus and constituent focus, an interesting and unusual distinction. Watters' terminology is at times confusing,

as what he calls “operator focus” seems to be the pragmatically unmarked information-ordering strategy and “constituent focus” seems to include sentence focus constructions as well.

The wide variety of topics and languages discussed in this book could have benefited from a more elaborate introduction in which links are drawn between the topics of the various articles and in which languages are compared. Nevertheless, this book is a great resource for anyone interested in information structure. The articles provide a broad overview of the field of research and are at the same time easily accessible for people without a background in information structure theory. This, together with an emphasis on careful description of natural data and on pragmatics, makes the book a valuable contribution to the ever-growing field of information structure studies in African languages.

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## References

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- Hyman, Larry M. (ed.). 1979. *Aghem grammatical structure*. Southern California Occasional Papers in Linguistics 7. Los Angeles: University of Southern California.

**Lionel Galand: *Regards sur le berbère*. (Studi Camito-Semitici, 8). Milano: Centro Studi Camito-Semitici di Milano, 2010. 383 pp. EUR 24.**

*Regards sur le berbère* is a wide-ranging overview of Berber by a well-known specialist with over half a century’s experience – Galand was already publishing on Berber in 1948, well before this reviewer, or most of his readers, were even born. The specialist should find it thought-provoking and informative; for the non-specialist, it goes a long way towards satisfying the so far unfilled need for a book-length introduction to Berber linguistics. If this review gives more attention to the relatively few points where the work is questionable, this should not be taken to detract from its quality, but rather as a response in kind to the enthusiasm for discussion and debate which the book reveals.

The introduction addresses distribution, history, terminology, and theory, already plunging him into some controversies. Within French, the author prefers