FELIX K. AMEKA, ALAN DENCH, and NICHOLAS EVANS (eds). 2006. *Catching language: The standing challenge of grammar writing*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. viii + 622pp. ISBN 9783110186031

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The book *Catching language: The standing challenge of grammar writing* fills a significant gap in the literature on all aspects of grammar writing. As Mosel's contribution points out, grammar writing is not a formal discipline; there are no courses taught on how to write a grammar and, at the time of publication, I am not aware of any textbooks on the topic, although a special issue of *Studies in Language* (Payne and Weber 2006) makes a useful companion to this volume. This book represents an enormous amount of expertise on all areas of grammar writing, and provides a substantial foray into grammar writing as a topic of enquiry. The book is roughly divided into two parts. The first treats theoretical aspects of grammar writing, including discussion of whether, how, and to what extent theoretical concerns drive and shape grammar writing, treating the philosophy of grammar writing, i.e., the underlying frameworks for thinking about how grammars can and ought to be structured. The second part largely contains exemplification of various themes, mainly using grammatical description to highlight various theoretically motivated topics.

The authors in this volume are an all-star cast of those engaged in writing grammars, those engaged in using grammars, and those interested in all aspects concerning grammars and how they are or should be written.

The first half of the book is concerned with setting the agenda, and many of the papers provide desiderata of what should be included in a grammar (Ameka, Enfield, Cristofaro, Dryer, Rice), and how the information should be presented (Mosel, Zaefferer, Mel'čuk, Cristofaro).

Mosel's chapter, "Grammaticography: The art and craft of grammar writing," discusses the tradition of grammar writing as it is practiced. The bulk of the chapter discusses the important distinction between semasiological and onomasiological approaches, a distinction that is taken up in many of the later chapters of this book. A semasiological approach takes form as its starting point, discussing the meanings expressed by certain forms. An onomasiological approach takes function as central, and describes the ways in which particular meanings are expressed.

Many grammars are organized along semasiological principles, taking forms from the language to be described and discussing their meanings. However a strict application of the semasiological approach means certain functional domains, e.g., negation, or orientation in space and time, to name just two of Mosel's examples, can end up scattered all over the grammar rather than in one functionally-motivated discussion. Typically grammar writers use a mixture of both approaches.

Many of the difficult issues in grammar writing that Mosel discusses emerge from the fact that in a book, information must be presented in a linear order. However, while linear order is important for the writer of a grammar, it is much less important for the reader. As Mosel mentions, most users of a grammar do not read a whole single-book grammar from

start to finish. But this means that the linear order in which information is presented is not as important as the number and usefulness of cross-references. In fact, while the possibilities of digital grammars have not so far been explored (but see Zaefferer's chapter), a grammar presented in a digital format can perhaps avoid the problems of linear ordering altogether. In this case though, cross references are perhaps even more critical.

Felix Ameka in his chapter "Real descriptions: Reflections on native speaker and non-native speaker descriptions of a language" calls for the "real" description being done by a collaboration of trained native speakers and trained non-native speaker linguists. He gives many cogent examples of shortcomings in work on Ewe by both these types of professionals. In the end, he makes a plea for collaboration, drawing on Mosel's categories of semasiological and onomasiological descriptions: "It might be useful for the non-native speaker to tackle the structural or semasiological aspects while the native speaker contributes the onomasiological aspects. Then the roles can be reversed" (99).

Zaefferer's paper, "Realizing Humboldt's dream: Cross-linguistic grammatography as data-base creation," is concerned with Humboldt's dream of creating a "general comparative grammar based on the firm ground of properly established leading ideas" (113), which Zaefferer approaches with a description of the Cross-linguistic Reference Grammar project, which aims to provide an electronic database of languages created under universally comparable categories. The approach is that a comparative grammar should be "a grammar that describes each phenomenon of each individual language by assigning it its systematic place in the typological space, i.e. the universal space of possible linguistic phenomena" (117). The grammar is to be created on the basis of translation equivalents, described by Zaefferer as "an obvious way of comparing languages" (126). The advantage of this type of approach is freedom from linear ordering of elements, as just discussed. On the other hand the obvious problem with being forced to base the grammar on translation equivalents from an original language means that structures found in the target language that do not occur in the original language will not show up in such a description.

Sonia Cristofaro's paper is entitled "The organization of reference grammars, a typologist user's point of view." The standardization of terminology is taken up only at the end of the paper, but what concerns Cristofaro most is the organization of information within a grammar: a purely form-to-function grammar makes it hard for a user to find information on a specific topic if that information is expressed in an unusual way in the language. Also, the grammar may not provide enough information for a typologist to be able to use the data, either because there may not be enough information about variation within the category, or the organization of the information may fail to reveal how the expression of this category differs or is similar to that in other languages. Again the form-to-function problem as discussed by Mosel is critical: for typologists, at some point comparison has to be functional. Even if a particular morpho-syntactic structure is taken (as opposed to the more common taking of a functional domain as the basis of comparison), a typologist ultimately will be comparing its functional equivalents across languages. Practically speaking, many of the problems discussed in this chapter can be allayed by the grammar writer providing a good subject index, multiple cross-references, and, most critically, a knowledge of the concerns of typology and the general typological character of every functional domain.

Mel'čuk's ambitious paper, "Calculus of possibilities as a technique in linguistic typology," is concerned with the development of a "cross-linguistically viable conceptual

system and a corresponding terminological framework" that lies at the interface of grammar writing and typology (171). In order to be able to carry out this type of work, one also needs detailed grammatical information on the features described; Mel'čuk argues with an example from French voice that "a rigorously standardized typological framework can force us to answer questions that previous descriptions have failed to resolve" (171).

Dryer's paper on "Descriptive theories, explanatory theories, and Basic Linguistic Theory" argues that basic linguistic theory (BLT) has emerged as the majority theoretical framework for describing language, despite the fact that many or most of its practitioners have failed to realize that this is the theoretical framework in which they are operating. Dryer argues that improvements in the theory have followed from the insights, and needs, of typology. Once again, the relationship between grammar writing and typology, as described by Cristofaro, is central to the success of the endeavor. Dryer emphasizes the need to distinguish descriptive theory from explanatory theory, arguing that BLT is the former, not the latter, and thus cannot be criticized for not providing explanations of grammatical facts.

Rice's paper "Let the language tell its story? The role of linguistic theory in writing grammars" takes up where Dryer's leaves off. Her primary concern is with the way in which theory influences linguistic description. This is the first paper to start off explicitly with a question about the genius of a language, although revealing the genius of the language must be the ultimate wish of every grammar writer. Rice also puts fieldwork firmly in center stage, as "it is difficult to talk about writing grammars without talking about fieldwork, as the latter is frequently a prerequisite for the former" (237). Fieldwork is so critical to the enterprise of most grammar writing, but this is the first paper in the volume to have addressed the topic. The bulk of Rice's chapter is concerned with a demonstration that because of her formal background her descriptive work on Slave had a depth and scope that would otherwise have not been possible. At the same time, one must be aware that "The theory informs and shapes, but does not control" (262).

LaPolla and Poa's paper, "On describing word order," argues that "we should not assume that there are universal categories of grammatical relations, and that word order in all languages can be explained using them" (270). Their paper concerns word order and grammatical relations using English, Chinese, and Tagalog as examples to show that the extent to which the concept of subject is grammaticalized as a grammatical category differs in these languages, and therefore the extent to which one can truly describe a language as being SVO, SOV, or whatever differs among languages enough to make such descriptions problematic. This paper is an example of fine-grained description informing on and being informed by particular theoretical frameworks, as was evident also in Dryer's and Rice's papers.

Enfield's and Schultze-Berndt's papers discuss the thorny divide between grammar and lexicon. Enfield's paper, "Heterosemy and the grammar-lexicon trade-off," aims to shed light on the question of how to deal descriptively with regular alternations between word classes of particular lexical items: is this an area to be treated in the grammar or the lexicon? Schultze-Berndt's paper "Taking a closer look at function verbs: Lexicon, grammar, or both?" makes a similar point that some elements of a language straddle the boundary between grammar and lexicon, using the example of function verbs—verbs occurring both as simple predicates and as parts of complex predicates (e.g., *take* in *take a walk* and

give in *give a laugh*), thus belonging both in the grammar and in the lexicon. In an interesting section Schultze-Berndt gives a catalog of around forty grammars of languages with function verbs, showing the wide variety of treatments of function verbs in these descriptions.

A further problem with the grammar-lexicon divide, mentioned so far only by Schultze-Berndt, is entirely practical: while grammars are readily written and published, often as part of a PhD project, very few linguists will ever publish a dictionary of the language they have specialized in. A dictionary is generally not considered a suitable PhD topic, and indeed dictionaries often take decades, rather than years, to produce. This means that assigning a particular element to the lexicon rather than the grammar effectively means that it will not see the light of day.

Hellwig's paper, "Field semantics and grammar-writing: Stimuli-based techniques and the study of locative verbs," is more practically oriented, describing how to carry out semantic analysis using various elicitation techniques, namely visual stimuli, rather than relying on, or feeling the absence of, native-speaker intuition.

Amha and Dimmendaal, in "Converbs in African perspective," present a description of converbs in two phyla, Afroasiatic and Nilo-Saharan. The description brings out the morphological, semantic, and functional properties of converbs in these languages, showing similarities and differences in members of these phyla. One goal of the paper is to show how depending on the descriptive tradition of the author describing these constructions, terminology used to describe them differs wildly in different grammars: what the authors call converbs have also been called gerunds, participles, consecutives, constructive mood, short imperfect, conjunctive verbs, serial verbs, medial verbs, and dependent verbs. And of course outside Africa, very similar constructions are called in the Papuan tradition clause chains, the converbs being called medial verbs (Foley 1986). Obviously this terminological minefield hinders comparative work on these languages.

Hilary Chappell's paper, "From Eurocentrism to Sinocentrism: The case of disposal constructions in Sinitic languages," takes up a similar point, showing that differences in descriptive traditions conceal broad similarities in different linguistic areas. Chappell uses disposal constructions to show that whereas Greek and Latin were often role models for describing European languages, Mandarin Chinese has become the role model for describing Chinese languages, with the result that many features present in Sinitic languages but not present in Mandarin are overlooked.

Himmelmann, on "How to miss a paradigm or two: Multifunctional *ma-* in Tagalog," writes on a similar theme. As an example of his major point, he uses description of the Tagalog prefix *ma-* to highlight the different analytical traditions that have developed radically different analyses of this prefix. He highlights the way in which structural regularities can be missed depending on the background and linguistic tradition in which the description is embedded.

Rankin's chapter, "The interplay of synchronic and diachronic discovery in Siouan grammar-writing," deals with the importance of comparative methodology in grammar writing. By way of exemplification, he uses data from Siouan to show the useful role that diachronic analysis can have towards a fuller synchronic description of a language.

Joseph's paper, "The historical and cultural dimensions in grammar formation: The case of Modern Greek," deals with the problems associated with describing a language for

which very much information is available—"a state in which there are too many received ideas about the target language that lie before the analyst" (551). How does one produce an accurate description without taking into account, and being biased by, the previous body of work on that language. He takes the opposite point of view from Rankin's on the synchrony vs. diachrony divide, pointing out that if one includes diachrony, "preconceptions are inevitable," while in fact "diachrony should be irrelevant and extraneous to the goal of typology" (551). In fact, "History ... is embedded in current usage and variability" (552). This is probably particularly the case with his example of Modern Greek, which has Ancient Greek, the "800-pound gorilla" always looking over the grammar-writer's shoulder.

Diller, on "Polylectal grammar and Royal Thai," is interested in ethnographic facts that lead to linguistic variation, in particular special registers that, once described together with the standard register, can lead to important insights about the structure of a language. He illustrates this point with an example from Royal Thai versus Common Thai, two registers that differ mainly in vocabulary, but also in some constructions, showing that sociolinguistic register differences can also be critical to an adequate grammatical description.

In the last chapter, "Writing culture in grammar in the Americanist tradition," Jane Hill is concerned with the degree to which authors' theoretical backgrounds inform on their work as grammar writers, in particular their attitude towards the role of cultural description in grammar writing. Hill talks of five ways in which culture can be written into grammar: The first way is by writing in background materials, e.g., in a first chapter or introduction to a grammar. The great Americanist grammar writers Boas, Sapir, and Whorf, who were all interested in cultural anthropology, gave anthropological issues little or no space in their grammars in this way—unlike the Australianist tradition, in which typically an entire first chapter may be devoted to socio-cultural description. The second way of including culture in a grammar is through the use of examples of naturally occurring discourse that inherently illustrate culturally loaded themes and items. The third way of writing culture into grammar is through explicit discussion of "characteristic discourse structures," e.g., idioms. Fourth, attention can be given to the way in which linguistic expression reflects cognitive categories. Fifth, culture appears in grammar through the "internal logic of a language," in which the emergent categories of the grammar reveal underlying organizational principles of a language.

Altogether, the chapters represent a significant body of expertise on the art and craft of grammar writing. If those faced with the challenge take the advice emerging from this book, they will not only need to be historical-comparativists (as Rankin calls for), typologists (as required by Cristofaro), visionaries (for Rice), able to predict the future of various elements of theory (for Dryer), native speakers or part of a team with a native speaker in it (Ameka), and ultimately artists (for Enfield). And of course in most cases, fieldworkers.

The subtitle of the book is *"The standing challenge of grammar writing*. This book engages with that challenge and sets out a strong agenda for the future of grammar writing.

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