SELECTED PROCEEDINGS OF THE XXXIV
INCONTRO DI GRAMMATICA GENERATIVA
INTRODUCTION

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In this special issue of the Rivista di Grammatica Generativa are collected some of the papers presented at the XXXIV Incontro di Grammatica Generativa, held at the Department of Linguistics, Communication and Performing Arts of the University of Padua, on 21 - 23 February 2008. The annual Incontro started back in 1975 as an informal gathering of linguists working within Generative Grammar (as reflected in the original name Incontro Informale di Grammatica Generativa); over the years it has become one of the most important conferences of formal linguistics in Europe, with a low rate of accepted abstracts, a high rate of speakers coming from foreign institutions, and several invited speakers who are established authorities in their own fields of research. The conference has also grown bigger and more articulated, with poster sessions and parallel sessions now being common. To publish the proceedings of such a conference is a considerable editorial effort, which inevitably requires some kind of selection.

In our case, editorial constraints implied that we could either publish most of the papers presented at the conference with a very low limit on the number of pages, or allow the authors more space but then make a severe selection on the papers that would form the proceedings. We followed the last route, and tried to turn this limit into an opportunity to publish a more coherent set of contributions. Since a selection based on the quality of the paper would have been rather difficult and arbitrary, given the average high quality of the papers presented at the Conference, we took the decision to choose the contributions by topic, and consider only syntactic works. For the same reason we also decided to have the papers reviewed, and to ask the reviewers to provide the authors with comments about specific points that could be improved, rather than with a general evaluation of the paper. The fact that our own expertise lies mainly in syntax also contributed to the decision to only consider articles on syntax. Our overall goal was to produce a volume similar to a selected and edited set of papers on a single, albeit general, topic. We are pleased to report
that our original reviewing process, while inevitably delaying publication, was appreciated by some of the authors, who remarked on how useful the comments had been in improving their papers. With the benefit of hindsight, we can also say that a higher number of pages was indispensable to allow the authors to make their cases convincingly.

As for the topics covered by the authors, despite the inevitable variety of subjects and frameworks that can be found in any volume of proceedings, some interesting patterns can be observed. The Cartographic Programme (on which see the introduction of Cinque 2002 and Rizzi 2004) has proved its usefulness in providing a very clear set of theoretical tools that can be used at different levels of generality: in our collection, this programme is represented more directly by the wide-ranging contributions by Adriana Belletti and Guglielmo Cinque. Belletti’s contribution illustrates the role that the “low periphery” (or VP periphery, the set of discourse-linked functional projections located in the lower part of IP) plays in apparently unrelated syntactic constructions, in this case cleft sentences. Cinque’s paper deals with internally and externally headed relative clauses further refining his proposal (Cinque 2003/8) of a unique underlying structure for all types of relative clauses, in which there are two nouns, one inside and one outside the relative clause. It is therefore crucial that both nouns match in their indefinite character. The paper by Federica Cognola builds on Belletti’s low periphery hypothesis and proposes that phenomena belonging to this area are involved in the alternation between OV and VO syntax in the Mòcheno dialect, a German variety spoken in northern Italy.

Also noteworthy is the fact that all the other contributions in this volume that assume the cartographic approach revolve around the same general problem, namely how does the internal structure of a complex modifier reflect on its external syntactic properties. This is the theoretical problem underlying Silvio Cruschina and Eva-Maria Remberger’s paper on some evidentiality markers in Romance, which derive from grammaticalised clausal structure that have been re-analysed as adverbial modifiers, spelling out evidentiality and occupying a precise position, the authors claim, in a specifier within the IP layer. Likewise, Jacopo Garzonio’s contribution deals with a case illustrating an “incomplete” Jespersen’s cycle of negation in Florentine, namely the grammaticalisation of a negative adverb as a postverbal element reinforcing the preverbal negation. Again, the analysis involves the relationship between the internal structure of negative modifiers and the syntactic feature they spell out in the functional structure. Finally, Andrea Cattaneo’s paper on the expression of deontic modality through periphrastic constructions in some Romance dialects tackles the same general problem, in that it is concerned with the derivation of the cross-linguistically different meanings which can be associated with a single modal verb from the same underlying structure containing a pseudo-relative clause.
Regarding the remaining papers, we observe that, while they take many notions and formal tools from the Minimalist Programme, they share with the Cartographic programme the assumptions that the functional structure of language is crucially based on features carrying specific meanings, and that the inventory of features is the same in all languages and can be discovered only through a comparative approach. This seems to go against the stress, within the Minimalist programme, on uninterpretable features as the main trigger for syntactic derivations, and on the differences in the distribution of these features across categories as the main reason for language variation. In short, while these papers do not deal with cartographic fixed hierarchies of functional projections, they share the basic assumption that specific meanings are represented as interpretable features that project maximal projections.

The idea that syntactic derivations are driven by the same interpretable features in different languages can be clearly seen in the explicitly comparative papers by Lena Baunaz and Genoveva Puskás on wh-movement in French and Hungarian, and by Mélanie Jouitteau and Milan Rezac on possessive predication in different Breton dialects. In the former work, the authors propose that covert wh-movement has the property of “feature stripping”, i.e. the wh-item can get rid of a feature in order to move to a higher position. The authors then apply this hypothesis to wh in-situ in French, and to partial wh-movement in Hungarian. Jouitteau an Rezac consider the different ways attested in Breton dialects to express possessive predication to be on a “path” from a periphrastic “mihi est” construction to a fully lexicalised transitive verb “have”. The paper assumes that these different forms correspond to different underlying configurations, which are all connected by simple changes and reanalyses. The same basic assumption is also visible, we think, in those contributions which deal with a single language, namely Lena Baunaz’ paper on floating quantifiers and N-words in French, Daniela Isac and Alison Kirk’s work on the split DP hypothesis in Ancient Greek, and Michèle Vincent and Andrew Radford’s article on French transitive participle agreement. Baunaz’ paper crucially assumes that universal quantifiers have a universally fixed set of properties and tests N-words such as personne in French for these properties, to conclude that they are syntactically and semantically similar to universal quantifiers. Daniela Isac and Alison Kirk’s paper on discontinuous DPs in Ancient Greek follows standard minimalist assumptions in proposing that syntactic projections, in this case the DP, can iterate, and uses phase theory to motivate DP internal movement of phrases; interestingly, though, their analysis shares the cartographic assumption of a layered functional structure within DP, with each layer spelling out different semantic features. They also assume that these DP projections have their own CP layer, in a parallel way to what has been proposed for the VP periphery by Belletti. Finally, Vincent and Radford’s paper, while concerned with a central mechanism of the latest version of the minimalist programme, namely percolation of features from a
phase head down to the selected head, crucially use comparative evidence from complementiser agreement phenomena to sustain their view that percolation of uninterpretable features does not occur in participle agreement in French, and that the uninterpretable features in questions remain on the head throughout the course of the derivation.

All these papers, it seems to us, share a basic assumption, namely that the syntactic structure of language, even if not described in cartographic terms, must be the same for all languages, and variation must be derived from properties of the structure itself. The idea that basically all languages are alike has not been universally accepted within Generative Grammar, and in certain respects even within the cartographic framework. It seems to us very significant that all the papers we are presenting in some way share this assumption, which appears to be taken seriously by different authors working on different topics within different frameworks.

References