BOOK REVIEWS


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Any active science periodically renews the set of questions and concerns where its community focuses their research; the new concerns are a natural result of the fact that theoretical frameworks change across time, drop some previous assumptions and introduce new hypotheses. The set of papers compiled in *Hispanic Linguistics at the crossroads* is an excellent example of the current interests that the scientific community focusing on Spanish and their varieties displays within what can be called a real redefinition of our scientific paradigms.

This volume is divided into three parts that group the articles within three macro-classes: (i) *Theoretical and descriptive approaches*; (ii) *Language acquisition* and (iii) *Language contact and language variation*. Interestingly, these three groups correspond to the three main questions that energised the linguistic research in the 50s: the first part corresponds to the question of how the grammar of a language can be explained with a minimum of machinery; the second question is how speakers come to master such grammars in naturalistic settings, and the third part deals with the notion of variation.

It is very telling that the title of the book includes the expression ‘at the crossroads’. The crossroad, here, denotes the intersection between what previously had been considered independent, mutually exclusive avenues of research. It is likely that, if 30 years ago, we had asked any random linguist, that person would not have hesitated to ascribe himself or herself inside either theoretical or applied linguistics; either someone who is in favour of introspection, questionnaires and a deductive method, or someone who uses quantitative methods, corpora, statistics and the other methodologies more characteristic of inductive approaches. These divisions do not make sense anymore: a typical linguist these days starts from quantitative data, corpus analysis and statistics to drive from them deep theoretical consequences; no linguist can now ignore acquisition and learnability in an analysis, and variation has become an integral part of any kind of theoretical approach.
The two properties that group the seven articles in the section “Directions in descriptive and theoretical linguistics” are a common tendency to remove machinery from the computational system and the use of experimental and empirical methods to challenge the received wisdom. Take, for instance, Reglero and Ticio’s exploration in multiple “wh”-constructions: they convincingly argue that, against previous proposals where Superiority and Intervention effects were in complementary distribution, Spanish lacks both. Their solution is telling of the tendency to remove constraints from syntax in favour of other components: they argue that Spanish wh-words can be built syntactically or lexically; in the second case, movement is unnecessary. Herbeck, in the second chapter of the book, unifies PRO and pro, previously thought to be two completely different objects in terms of licensing, universality and interpretation, treating their empirical differences as following from the different availability of postsyntactic insertion of material into subject positions. Armstrong and Doroga, in their contribution, propose that the criteria for suppletion at the morphophonological component have to be loosened in order to allow lexical verbs containing a root node to be spelled out by non-phonologically related forms; they do so with diachronic and synchronic data relating mor-(ir) ‘die’ and mat-(ar) ‘kill’. In the fifth chapter, Marques, Silvano, Gonçalves, and Santos explore the sequence of tense phenomena in Portuguese, and succeed in demonstrating that most restrictions found have a semantic basis that directly connects the lexical semantics of the main verb with the tense(s) imposed in the subordinate clause.

Other articles in this section directly concentrate on interface phenomena. Sainz-Maza Lecanda and Horn discuss the different selectional and interpretative restrictions of two imperfective periphrases, andar ‘walk’ and venir ‘come’ in combination with the gerund, and eventually conclude that their differences lie in the speaker’s expectations with respect to what counts as a higher or lower frequency, a notion that is difficult to implement structurally but has a solid basis given world knowledge or pragmatic implications. In the realm of phonetics, Llanos, Dmitrieva, Francis, and Shultz use statistical and experimental methods to assess whether the interaction of the voice onset time and the onset f0 has a language-specific role in the perception of stop consonant voicing; comparing Spanish and English, they conclude that the use of onset f0 in perception is not affected by the language-particular properties of the input. Finally, Campos-Astorkiza argues that the voicing of /s/ is affected by a multiplicity of factors, both segmental (manner of articulation of the triggering consonant) and prosodic (stress and the existence of prosodic category boundaries).

The section entitled “New answers and new questions in language acquisition” consists of four contributions, where the common denominator is the use of acquisition facts in order to reach a deeper understanding of the nature of different
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phenomena of general relevance for a linguist. Camacho and Kirova set as their goal to see which theory of gender specification in Spanish is supported by the facts about the learning of L2 Spanish by L1 Russian monolinguals, and conclude that their results support an approach where feminine is lexically assigned and -o has to be viewed as a default word marker. Moreover, in their experiment they found out that Russian learners of Spanish treated bare NPs and DPs differently, supporting a proposal where Russians have acquired Spanish DPs but are not yet fully aware of their distribution inside the clause. In the light of data from Childes, Cuervo and Pérez-Leroux discuss clitic cluster combinations in children acquiring Spanish as L1, and find extremely low error rates and target-like use of repair strategies; illicit feature combinations are not attested. The omission of clitics in the cluster is attested in comparable rates to the omission of the same clitics in isolation. From this, they conclude that children are conservative in the sense that they might omit elements, but not in the sense that they overextend attested patterns to non-target-like contexts, contra Tomasello (2003), who predicts a higher rate of errors being made.

Markle LaMontagne and Cuervo note that in L1 acquisition of Spanish, the perfect (he comido ‘have eaten’) appears very early, around the time that the present tense (como ‘I eat’) is documented. This situation is surprising, given the semantic complexity of the perfect in most varieties. In their longitudinal exam of two children in Childes, they note that the evidence is compatible with the early uses of the perfect not involving a secondary reference time, but rather a non-specific perfective past interpretation. Thus, when children produce one form, this does not necessarily mean that they have also acquired its associated semantics in adult language. Finally, Cuza and Miller study the use of past tenses in bilingual heritage speakers of Spanish living in the United States. They observe that they show signs of attrition in the use of the imperfective past (cantaba), while the preterit (cantó) is unaffected. The length of exposure to English played no role in this effect.

Several of the papers in the “Language variation: linguistic and extralinguistic factors” section discuss how linguistic and extralinguistic factors jointly co-define variation phenomena. Cerrón-Palomino compares the use in Lima of the augmentative adjectival suffixes -azo and -ísimo in the corpora available, reaching the conclusion that -azo is more specialized in its meaning. Bullock and Toribio experimentally investigate whether the intrusive [s] in Dominican Spanish can be viewed as a form of hypercorrection. Contrary to this conclusion, they show that literate and semiliterate speakers do not differ significantly in the rate of intrusive [s] they produce. In the last chapter of this part, Lamy conducts a phonetic analysis of the rhotic trill in Panamanian Spanish, identifying eight realisations whose distribution is conditioned by lexical frequency, the nature of the adjacent segments and the age of the speaker.
Two chapters in this section discuss how subjects socially classify speakers according to their linguistic cues. Lang-Rigal discusses whether the lengthening of pre-tonic syllables -a prototypical feature of so-called 'tonada'– is enough as a cue for language users to identify a speaker as coming from Córdoba, Argentina, and shows that, regardless of their real geographical origin, the subjects in the experiment classified those that lengthened such vowels as coming from this city. As for Armstrong, Henriksen, and DiCanio, they explore the perceived attributes of women that use a hoarse voice in their speech and observe that the experimental subjects associate the attributes of ‘strong’, ‘rural’ and ‘apathetic’ more frequently to that non-modal phonation type.

We started this review noting that the gap between applied and theoretical linguistics has become much smaller in the last twenty years, as this collection of papers exemplifies. Several factors have contributed to this result. On one side, Generative Linguistics – and let us bear in mind that a fair amount of the authors in this volume would consider themselves generative linguists – has witnessed the rise of the so-called Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995, 2001, 2005, 2013). On the other side, during the same twenty years, other frameworks that focus on performance and quantitative methods – such as the family of approaches that we could call ‘Construction Grammars’ (Hoffman & Trousdale, 2013)– have emerged as solid alternatives, or perhaps as complements that are no longer possible to ignore, to the Generative enterprise.

Three properties of the Minimalist Program have redefined the methods and assumptions in the field (Chomsky, 2005). First, the hypothesis has been advanced that Universal Grammar is essentially empty, and perhaps should be reduced to the operation of merge that creates a set by combining two sets of elements. This has favoured a view where most of what seemed to be syntactic restrictions are now reanalysed as operations or constraints applying at phonology or semantics. Second, within what is left of the purely syntactic restrictions, there is the proposal that notions such as locality should be understood as the effect of general cognitive principles, a subset of what has come to be known as the Third Factor. Third, the reduction of UG has made the hitherto most widely accepted theory of variation, parameters, untenable in its traditional sense; variation is now at the core of debate, with some approaches suggesting that it is directly triggered by the input data (the Second Factor), which can be analysed by the speaker in different ways given the progressive impoverishment of the limits set by genetic endowment (the First Factor; see Gallego, 2011, for an overview).

Simultaneously, usage-based and performance-based grammatical models have become increasingly popular within the same time period. These frameworks have called into question the existence of a single grammatical model for a language, given the central role that context gets in some approaches as a way to
accommodate meanings, as opposed to a constellation of tendencies that are more or less strongly favoured by contextual and communicative factors (Janda, 2011). The emergence of these models has developed refined statistical tools that profit from the new available technology – such as easily accessible and rich corpora – to propose frequency-based accounts of acquisition (Tomasello, 2003), identifying fine-grained and detailed variation patterns, sometimes affecting one single word or a very specific construction (as in the collostructional analysis, cf. Gries & Stefanowitsch, 2004) and, in general, to provide evidence that surface generalisations might play a more important role than has been previously assumed in the shape that a particular grammar takes.

Interestingly, there is much that these apparently opposed views share, the least not being that both tend towards a model of grammar where what is innate in the speaker’s mind is reduced to a minimum, and as much as possible is derived from external factors (input and general cognitive principles) in order to explain the attested restrictions, which – both frameworks agree now – might be anyhow more flexible than what we thought 30 years ago. Even though some works still present the two views as radically opposed (for instance, Evans, 2014), it is not just naive optimism that gives us the impression that even researchers that ascribe themselves to one side have adopted hypotheses and methods of the other side, in an enriching dialogue that maximises our chances to advance in the real, deep, theory-neutral questions. Be it as it may, the articles compiled in this volume reflect this new situation where, rather than drawing a sharp line between theory and applications, in the field we are working on something that can be called, simply, linguistics.

References


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**Biographical notes**

**Antonio Fábregas** (PhD Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2005) is a full professor in Hispanic Linguistics at the University of Tromsø (Norway), and is affiliate to CASTL (a research center in theoretical linguistics), since 2007. His research concentrates on the relation between morphology and syntax, particularly on how syntactic principles account for what seem to be morphological processes both in word formation and inflection. He has written three books: *Las nominalizaciones* (Visor, 2016), *La morfología* (Síntesis, 2013) and *Morphology: From data to theories* (with Sergio Scalise, Edinburgh University Press, 2012). He is also the author of more than one hundred articles and book chapters (in journals such as *The Linguistic Review, Journal of Linguistics, Probus, Linguistic Analysis* or *Verba*), and has edited some volumes. Moreover, he is the editor-in-chief of *Borealis: An International Journal of Hispanic Linguistics*. 