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Review: [untitled]

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*kwásimav* does not seem to be indefinite; but I will leave the matter there, particularly since G effectively ignores definiteness when it comes to quantifying topic continuity. Nonetheless, I think that when the term 'definite' figures in category distinctions, some clear statement should be made of what it means.<sup>3</sup>

(d) Cooreman's paper on Chamorro, in addition to confirming the trends in topic-continuity marking established elsewhere in the book, includes an interesting comparison of voice constructions. The ANTIPASSIVE is used in backgrounding—it topicalizes the agent, and if the affected participant is present, it will typically be new and often non-referential. The ERGATIVE is used in foregrounding; it codes highly topical agents with low lookback and high persistence, whereas affected participants have low topicality. The *-um-* construction codes equally topical agents and affecteds. In the *-in-* PASSIVE, affecteds are more topical than the singular identified agents with which they mostly occur; nevertheless, these agents are more topical than the actual or understood plural agents of the *ma-* PASSIVE, which is normally agentless. This is the most passive of all these constructions, being the converse of the antipassive.

*TCD* is a useful handbook. My serious complaint is that it fails to bridge the gap between the formal indicators of referent continuity, whose cross-language characteristics are so clearly demonstrated, and our intuitions of 'aboutness' which lead to recognition of the discourse topic or theme of a text. I must also comment on the abysmal proofreading: there are literally hundreds of irritating typos, plus other evidence of carelessness. Thus the discussion of Japanese texts on pp. 64–65 refers to examples not printed in the book. E.g., 'Examine, for instance, A72 in which the verbal *kawaisoo da* "is pitiful" occurs': there is no A72. 'Similarly, the fact that *kiita* "heard" in A44 requires ...': there is an A44 (p. 89) which reads *aa, soo ka* 'ah so QU (Oh really).'

Hinds defines only some of his abbreviations, but G explains NONE of his. Some minor inconsistencies also exist in G's translations from Ute; cf. p. 155, ex. 37, with p. 202. In Table 15 (p. 123) the third column should be headed 'Without *-m*'; for Chart 5 (p. 193) divide the vertical axis by ten. It seems likely that, on p. 359, 'see Table VIII below' should refer to Table VII above. And so on. These are not substantial faults, especially in an exploratory handbook of this kind; but it would be an even better book with fewer of them.

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**What people say they do with words:** Prolegomena to an empirical-conceptual approach to linguistic action. By JEF VERSCHUEREN. (Advances in discourse processes, 14.) Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1985. Pp. x, 265. Cloth \$35.00, paper \$22.95.

Reviewed by GREG URBAN, *University of Texas, Austin*

Among the functions of language are the METALINGUISTIC, to refer to itself as a structure, as in glossing, and the METAPRAGMATIC, to refer to its own use, as in reported speech. Corresponding to these functions is their crystallization in a formal apparatus of metalinguistic and metapragmatic DEVICES, which occurs in varying degrees and ways in different languages. Verschueren's book

<sup>3</sup> Brown identifies kinds of definiteness in the following parentheses: 'The drinks (previous mention) came. The glasses (knowledge of world) were dripping with condensation ... Bond thought of the London (restriction) he had left the day (restriction) before' (337).

is intended as a contribution to the study of metapragmatic devices: the words and idiomatic phrases, in English and Dutch, that are used to talk about the uses of speech.

As the iconic title indicates, V has his sights set upon the philosophical tradition of speech act theory associated with J. Austin and J. Searle. He scorns that tradition as a 'prodigious excrescence from the body of language studies' (p. 5); yet he is mesmerized by its terminology. In the performative verbs of English, Austin and Searle found a window to the language/world relationship, and they built a philosophical system around it. Through a comparative study of words and phrases, in which it can be seen how languages differentially and similarly crystallize metapragmatic function, V hopes to triangulate an understanding of what people do with words.

Yet it would be incorrect to characterize V's work as philosophical; instead, it is a product of the linguistic/anthropological tradition that has developed at Berkeley, an outgrowth of cognitive anthropology and lexical semantics. Working with some of its more innovative concepts (e.g. prototype, basic-level term, scene, and frame), V endeavors to apply its methods to the problems of how language is used. Indeed, the last chapter, 'Basic linguistic action verbs', is an outline of how the project described in the classic *Basic color terms* of B. Berlin & P. Kay (University of California Press, 1969) could be translated into a study of metapragmatic verbs. V's book is divided into three parts: 'Theoretical and methodological preliminaries', laying bare the problems in speech act theory, and showing how they could be remedied through comparative lexical (and phrasal) semantic analysis; 'Four exploratory exercises', constituting the main empirical contribution of the work; and 'Theoretical and methodological epilogue', reviewing the empirical results and outlining a further approach on the Berlin & Kay model.

Methodologically, two aspects of V's work are worthy of note. First, in addition to monomorphemic lexemes, he examines idiomatic and partially idiomatic phrases—*to beat around the bush*, *to seal one's lips*, *to pull someone's leg*. Since V has arbitrarily excluded nouns and other non-'verbials' from consideration, this extension is puzzling. He justifies it by claiming that these 'complex lexicalizations', like simple lexemes, reflect 'conceptualization habits' (32); and it is in these habits that he is interested. In other words, his concern is with what might be called 'folk theories' of language use. But then why does he limit the study to phrases, when conceptualizations of language use are also reflected in broader patterns of speaking? Of course, the methodology in that case would be wholly different. Second, V criticizes and finally rejects classic feature analysis in favor of what he calls 'semantic dimension comparison'. The dimensions referred to are gradable variables with respect to which lexemes and phrases can be compared—e.g. degrees of 'directivity', duration of silence, and illocutionary force of lying. Unfortunately, these dimensions are as problematic as the older features, and their actual selection seems ad hoc.

The 'empirical/conceptual' core of the work is found in the four chapters of Part II, in which V attempts to analyse subsets of English/Dutch lexicon and idiomatic phrase inventory. Chap. 3 considers the metapragmatic devices for talking about silence; Chap. 4, the devices pertaining to lying; Chap. 5, those concerned with directing or commanding; and Chap. 6, aspects of language use for which there are no corresponding metapragmatic devices.

The lexical/phrasal subsets themselves are unmotivated with respect to any language-internal analysis of English or Dutch. Nevertheless, they make sense from the viewpoint of speech act theory and the questions it poses. Thus, in Chap. 3, V is concerned with the *verba tacendi*, verbal phrases serving metapragmatically to refer to the absence of speech (*to be silent*, *to seal one's*

*lips, to keep one's trap shut*). These devices highlight a curious aspect of the language/world relationship: discourse as zero sign. Such phrases point to the absence of discourse as itself a sign vehicle. In Chap. 6, V takes up the problem of 'forgotten routines', linguistic interactions (e.g. saying *God bless you*) for which corresponding metapragmatic devices are lacking. Although he offers a seemingly circular explanation for this lack ('the gaps ... are due to the low cognitive salience of the corresponding acts', 204), his observations are intriguing. However, this poses a problem for V's own method. He proposes to investigate empirically how different languages construe the language/world relationship. However, in the case of these gaps, the language does NOT actually construe the relationship—which is, rather, conceptualized by the investigator, who then looks for the gaps in the metapragmatic system. In fact, V is not faithful to his own assertions about the 'unity of concept and practice'.

The more general question posed by a critical reflection on V's work is: What is the significance of the crystallization of metapragmatic function in lexical and phrasal devices? Intuitively, it seems always possible for a language, through direct quotation, to reprise an instance of language use—or, through extended discourse, to describe it. The pragmatic meaning of an original utterance can thus be communicated metapragmatically to any degree of delicacy (short of that which depends upon having actually been in the original context). The realization and institutionalization of such metapragmatic discourse is a proper object for ethnographic description. But what is the significance of the fact that a given language has LEXICALIZED some particular metapragmatic description?

This is in some measure an empirical question. We would need to examine the pragmatic functions of the metapragmatic devices, in order to determine for what purposes native speakers use them. This cannot be accomplished through the lexical approach itself, but requires examining actual instances of language use; but Verschueren did not make this his task. Had he actually followed up the Berlin & Kay approach which he proposes, his book might have been a major contribution. As it stands, it is only a preliminary attempt—albeit one suggesting some of the possibilities of a comparative ethnosemantic approach to speech act theory.

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**The social construction of literacy.** Edited by JENNY COOK-GUMPERZ. (Studies in interactional sociolinguistics, 3.) Cambridge: University Press, 1986. Pp. x, 248. Cloth \$37.50, paper \$13.95.

Reviewed by SUZANNE SCOLLON, *Haines, Alaska*

Linguists would do well these days to pay attention to the currently perceived 'literacy crisis' and its historical roots, since the entire phenomenon is at least partly a consequence of linguistic activity. As descriptions written by linguists turn into the prescriptive grammar taught in schools, they come to affect the spoken language of citizens. This book contributes to an understanding of the historical process by which literacy became associated with schooling, as well as the interactional processes by which schooled literacy is inculcated in modern classrooms. It attempts to focus on 'what is perhaps one of the most urgent