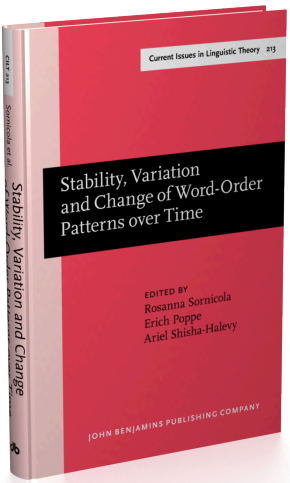
Current Issues in Linguistic Theory
213

Introduction

https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.213.02int



Pages ix–xxxi of
Stability, Variation and Change of Word-Order Patterns over Time
Edited by Rosanna Sornicola, Erich Poppe and Ariel Shisha-Halevy
[**Current Issues in Linguistic Theory**, 213]
2000. xxxii, 323 pp.

INTRODUCTION

The subject discussed in this volume was originally proposed for a workshop on "Stability, variation and change of word-order patterns over time" held at the XIIIth Conference of the International Society for Historical Linguistics (Düsseldorf, 14th August 1997). Guidelines were prepared centred around two main problems: (a) the relationship between stability and variation of word-order (WO) patterns and (b) the relationship between synchronic variability and change of WO patterns. This partition, which as a mere device for organizing the debate certainly had an element of artificiality, nonetheless reflects the implicit assumption that variation and variability are the intermediate link between stability and change in a manner that is far from being clear and uncontroversial.

Each problem prompted further issues. Thus participants were asked to present criteria for assessing stability and variation and to discuss the nature of stability and variation; in particular, the impact of internal and external factors and the role of grammaticalization of WO patterns in determining stability were suggested as possible factors affecting the nature of stability and variation. As to the relationship between synchronic variability and change, two factors were proposed as further themes for debate, i.e. the relationship between internal flexibility of WO patterns and change and the influence of pragmatic factors on trends of change.

The present collection of papers includes some of the contributions presented at the workshop in Düsseldorf, as well as additional invited articles. One of the criteria inspiring the preparation of the workshop and of the volume was gathering an array of studies covering a significant range of languages, in order to have problems and conceptions specific to the various linguistic and philological traditions reflected in the discussion of synchronic and diachronic 'movements' of WO. It is, in fact, a basic belief shared by the editors that themes like WO flexibility and change, which are currently being debated in contemporary research on diachronic syntax, can benefit from detailed studies and fresh theoretical and historical visions stemming from diverse scholarly traditions. The range of languages investigated here includes Hamito-Semitic languages like Egyptian with its later stage, Coptic, an ancient Semitic language like Akkadian, Caucasian languages like Georgian, Mingrelian, Svan,

Laz and Indo-European languages. Among the latter there are ancient languages like Hittite, Greek, Latin and modern ones like Russian, Welsh and various Romance languages. Germanic languages are represented by Old Norse, Modern Scandinavian languages and by English. The detailed study of WO patterns from this wide range of languages can balance, test and perhaps allow a critical reconsideration of large-scale typological pictures that – from Greenberg's, Vennemann's and Givón's works onwards – have characterized a non-negligible part of contemporary research in diachronic syntax. Moreover it can also prompt a critical consideration of formal models of syntactic change like the ones put forward by Lightfoot.

Almost all contributions concern languages which are no longer spoken. The special theoretical and methodological foundation and properties of what one may therefore term 'dead–language linguistics' are as yet relatively underplayed in linguistic analysis. Three aspects seem particularly relevant to the issues under discussion in the present volume, and call for caution in appreciating linguistic features: (a) The properties of written texts as 'testi di lingua': considerations of genre and style, possible hyper–dialectal or inter–dialectal status, relationship with spoken language, even ecdotics (*variatio* here acquires a very different meaning). (b) The problem of the written text, and of its transmission, in linguistic diachrony: a chronological sequence of written texts does not necessarily constitute a diachronic continuity that can be taken, without special unscrambling, as a database for tracing grammatical change. (c) The methodological and 'technical' problems of analytic and heuristic work on ancient languages which are attested only in a limited corpus of written texts, and in particular the methodological position of non-attestation of linguistic features.

The book exhibits a lively *concordia discors*. Although the overall perspective is functionalist, formal paradigms are assumed in some papers as a stimulating source for more general reflections. Some articles show a pronounced orientation towards a truly 'historical' analysis of data, while others have a stronger theoretical inclination. On the whole, however, a non-dogmatic spirit pervades all papers: rather than proposing all-encompassing models or sweeping generalizations, the authors tend to raise questions, point out problems deriving from current models and give outlines for further possible directions of research.

Non-dogmatism and a certain amount of skepticism may not be unwelcome. If the reflection on stability, variation and change of every single aspect of syntax inevitably leads to general problems of both synchronic and diachronic linguistics, with a still open bicentennial debate behind them, the

state of the art in WO studies does not unravel less controversial scenarios. A centuries-old subject of research, WO (and perhaps it would be better to adopt the more comprehensive term 'constituent order', which would also better suit the range of phenomena covered in this volume) embraces a series of phenomena of primary importance for the understanding of syntactic structure. The models elaborated in the last decades show conceptual similarities but also differences in their assumptions and results that make a comparison difficult. In recent years, rather than producing a cumulative growth of knowledge, research on WO has instead leapt forward partially neglecting former results. This is hardly a unique situation in the history of sciences, and linguistics is no exception. Sometimes recent models opened new views, like typological studies on correlations or 'harmonies' of WO patterns, which have revealed regularities linking individual structures and produced an attempt to globally represent linearization processes. Yet this result had its costs, as linearity was – perhaps inevitably – singled out as a parameter independent of structure and this was at times represented simplistically with consequent misrepresentation of data (cf. the observations in Deutscher's, Loprieno's, Poppe's, Shisha-Halevy's, Sornicola's papers).

Although a conspicuous mass of reasearch, with data from a vast number of languages, has been carried out over the last twenty years (cf. Hawkins 1983, Hawkins 1994, Harris & Campbell 1995), it is perhaps possible to question the soundness of the overall representation of diachronic 'cycles' and single 'stages' of a given cycle. This may be due, not only to the difficulty in determining a specific linear property, for any given period of a language, but also to the more general theoretical problem of how to represent individual structures and correlations of structures over time (see further on). Thus it would not be too pessimistic to say that we still do not know much about continuities and discontinuities of WO patterns over time and their range of synchronic flexibility. Even after twenty-five years Charles Li's evaluation of Greenbergian typology does not seem out-of-date. In his view, although "invaluable as a pioneering source of stimulation in modern studies of language typologies", it "does not constitute an unshakable foundation for diachronic syntax". Moreover "the SVO, SOV, VSO typology does not provide a trichotomy of the vast majority of languages in the world. At best, it represents three points of idealization in the continuum of word orders and a wide array of ancillary grammatical properties. The precise nature of this continuum remains somewhat of a mystery to date" (Li 1977:xiv).

Further problems with a more specific explanatory dimension can be considered. For example, the explanations of typological 'cycles' and correlations of WO patterns are often based on functional factors of a semantic, pragmatic or cognitive nature (like Hawkins's principle of ease of perception), which are singled out as having an independent and unconditional role. Functional factors – and in particular semantic and pragmatic ones – certainly play a central role in the functioning of syntax. Yet, it is possible to entertain doubts as to whether they can per se explain the complexities of macroscopic diachronic processes like the setting up of a new type or the alignment of a pattern with another within the same language. These phenomena can hardly be *observed* by linguists, as they go through large-scale historical processes like those that bring about new cultural norms within a society. The locus of the cognitive factors considered in functional-typological models is instead the speaker conceived as an abstract individual who is always and everywhere the same and as such is placed 'beyond history'.

It seems therefore profitable to reconsider the problem of 'movements' of WO patterns over time from a perspective which combines the historical-philological approach with the functional-typological one. In this view, the search for 'cycles' and harmonies can be usefully integrated with studies on individual structures/patterns. Yet an attempt to bring together the two traditions of research meets the preliminary difficulty of having to relate assumptions, methods and results that may be very different and in some cases even at variance.

On the other hand, a reflection on stability, variation and change has to face the additional difficulty of having to handle concepts of broad epistemological interest that are not unique to linguistics and that – although frequently employed in human sciences – seem to escape unitary definitions. In fact, they are found more or less implicitly in various historical, sociological and economic models, with different meanings. Even their use within the same discipline may considerably differ.

In recent historiographical models invigorated by a critical reception of structural ideas, the notion of stability is connected with 'permanence', 'duration' of a historical structure. Some French scholars identify periods in European history described as "grandes plages d'équilibre, qui, dans le long terme, anulent le mouvement" (Burguière 1971:v), which nonetheless may not necessarily include a true 'stationary state' but also minor periodical cycles of change. What seems particularly interesting, however, is that within contemporary historiographical models 'stability' – be it conceived as permanence /

duration or recurring cycles of change – is part of a more general interest in change and the times of change.

It is in mathematical and physical sciences that stability is considered per se as a first rank theoretical problem. The properties of being in 'stable' vs 'unstable' equilibrium are defined for a simple pendulum in lower upright position: "pour tout voisinage arbitrairement petit de l'équilibre, le pendule demeure dans ce voisinage pour toutes les perturbations suffisamment petites (les perturbations affectent la position et la vitesse, toutes deux nulles à l'équilibre). Le pendule est aussi en équilibre en position verticale supérieure, mais à l'opposé du cas précédent, cet équilibre est instable" (EPHU, 2: 2449a). This meaning, which has an obvious intuitive content, seems very close to the one that is found directly or indirectly associated with the terms 'stability, 'stable' in various human sciences. Likewise in economics the notion of 'equilibrium state' implies the possibility of minimal fluctuations not substantially affecting it. Here 'stability conditions' are defined as "the conditions for a system to tend to revert to its original conditions after a disturbance" (Black 1997:440). The equilibrium state to which a system reverts is not necessarily a stationary state, but may also be "a steady-state growth path or some form of limit cycle" (Black 1997: 440). Incidentally, the notion of 'cycle' is one of the economic models that have admittedly influenced conceptual tools of contemporary historical reasearch.

More than other sciences, mathematics has assigned a central place to the theoretical interest in stability developing many formal models. Yet even mathematicians admit that "there is no unitary rigorous definition of stability encompassing all the meanings of this word in contemporary scientific research" (Milani 1981:418 [translation ours]); however, various models have been worked out, each amenable to a particular theory. This is why some scholars – following Thom – suggest a definition of meta-mathematical nature: "a property defined within a mathematical structure is a property of stability or instability if it either positively or negatively determines the susceptibility of a mathematical object of the structure to be employed as a model of reality" (Milani1981:418 [translation ours]). In this sense the notion of stability is connected to the traditional scientific problem of the possibility to predict events by mathematical models. In Milani's words, "the problem of stability is to predict the maximum limit to errors induced by measurements, simplifications of calculations, and schematizations of mathematical models" (Milani 1981:419 [translation ours]).

In post-second-world-war diachronic linguistics, different models of stability seem to coexist, some implying the simple intuitive notion of 'stationary state', others the idea of minimal oscillations that do not alter the overall equilibrium of a system or – in a different version – of a grammar (cf. also Currie's considerations on stability and its relation to variability, in this volume). If elementary physical intuitions may ultimately be latent in such representations, the decisive role played by traditional linguistic ideas (like the notion of a 'dynamic statics of language' of the Kazan School and of the Prague School, or the more recent sociolinguistic conceptions of variability) is certainly indisputable. The meta-mathematical conception of stability also seems to have found its way into diachronic linguistics. It can be felt in Lightfoot's view that "languages are consistently changing gradually and in a piecemeal fashion, but meanwhile grammars remain in equilibrium, unchanged in their structural properties" and that nonetheless from time to time grammars "undergo more radical, catastrophic restructuring, corresponding to new parameter settings" (Lightfoot 1991:173). In fact, what Lightfoot has presented in his works is a conception of grammar as a meta-mathematical model of stability, in that the setting of parameters can be considered to determine the limits of possible fluctuations or variations with respect to predictions made by grammar.

Conceptions of change are no less diverse than those of stability. General critical perspectives come from the productive debate on the role of structure in the study of change, which has affected historical research of the second half of XXth century. For example, it has been observed that there is an inevitable ideological component in every representation of change. As the French historian Burguière said (1971:iv), the dynamic models of change have developed out of the philosophical context of evolutionism and meet the expectations "d'une pensée militante qui attend de l'histoire une vérification expérimentale de l'idée de progrès"; besides, they project the system of values of the industrial world, "son culte du changement et de l'innovation". This ideological aspect, which could have the salutary effect of relativizing representations considered absolute and objective, has been almost completely overlooked in contemporary diachronic linguistics.

Whatever the definitions of stability and change may be, the notion of variation is associated with both, in a way that raises the question of criteria for studying the amount and/or the nature of variation itself. Insofar as it can be 'kept under control' or even disregarded (either because it is of modest dimension or because it is unordered and chaotic) no real change is believed to be able to set in. An example of this view can be found in Lightfoot's models,

where variation seems to be understood as a minor chaotic change. But such representations are not exempt from problems. More in general, it is possible to wonder whether 'variation' is a notion with a clear and strict definition in human sciences and in particular in linguistics and whether we explored all its possible implications for stability and change.

The issues discussed so far call into question the position of both synchronic and diachronic linguistics with respect to themes of general epistemological nature. In the last decades linguistics seems to have been untouched by the vast epistemological debate that has shaken and perhaps rejuvenated other human sciences, like history and geography, and even "hard sciences" like mathematics. Yet linguistics could play a significant role in the general reflection on themes like stability, variation and change, in spite of biases like the prominence given by structural research to the aspect of structural invariance and the delay in facing as central the study of variation within structure.

However, considering that the notions of stability, variation and change belong to a general inventory of conceptual tools that are not specific to linguistics, they must be interpreted, before being used, within this field of research. If they are considered properties or attributes, it is necessary to define the exact domain in which they hold. Here lie problems that occasionally come to the surface in various linguistic disciplines.

A first dilemma is whether stability, variation and change should be considered *internal* or *external* properties of structures. In the first interpretation stability, variation and change are related to the shape of the structure, its inner balance or unbalance, its potentialities to persist or be altered, apart from the time factor (this meaning is particularly evident in Cherchi's, Deutscher's, Janse's, Rosenbach & Vezzosi's and Sornicola's papers, where it is also found in various combinations with the other). In particular, an example of an internal property is the notion of typological stability referred to, from different perspectives, in Deutscher's, Harris's and Justus's articles. On the other hand, the consideration of stability, variation and change as external properties leads to focus 'structure' as a function of time, i.e. in this case time is the main factor determining stability, variation and change of structure (this meaning seems to be predominant in Currie's, Loprieno's, Poppe's, Shisha-Halevy's and Sornicola's papers). Although the two alternatives can be found intertwined in various studies, the distinction has a logical interest that can help to clarify the notions in question. The two perspectives perhaps also imply different views of classic problems in diachronic syntax, which have been variously addressed in this volume, like the abrupt vs gradual nature of syntactic change and the

possibility of syntactic change being caused by external factors (such as borrowings, literary influences, etc.).

A second dilemma is whether stability, variation and change are properties of structures conceived as 'traditional techniques' (in the sense of Coseriu 1982), i.e. 'external' products of the discourse activity that can be observed in historical texts, or of structures conceived as mental objects belonging to grammars as theories of speakers' competences. An examination of the bulk of literature on linguistic change shows that the two perspectives, pursued in different scientific environments, involve different systems of assumptions, methods and results. Again, it may be useful to be aware of this bifurcation in order to better understand and compare the various approaches.

The papers in this volume reflect either option. Benoist, Janse, Poppe, Rosenbach & Vezzosi, Shisha-Halevy, Sornicola refer to stability, variation and change as properties of structures conceived as traditional techniques, whereas Faarlund and Harris view these notions as properties of structures conceived as mental objects of grammars. Koopman & vand der Wurff, on the other hand, provide a comparison of the different results obtained from applying the two approaches.

It may be useful in this context to review a number of theoretical implications of the two options that seem to be strictly interrelated, as they are relevant to the overall discussion. In the first approach, which usually adheres to historical models, (a) structure is considered as the product of the impact of a given socio-cultural context on discourse and indirectly on language; (b) a gap is envisaged between text and the underlying grammar/competence that is not believed easy to bridge; (c) the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic analysis of the phenomena of order does not necessarily assign any model of mental representation to structure, nor *a fortiori* is any attempt made at reconstructing diachronic sequences of mental representations of structures. Besides, following the route of Geneva structuralism (d) in this approach the relationship between synchrony and diachrony is often viewed as a problem per se. An interesting symptom of the latter opinion can be detected in the various indications of theoretical and methodological difficulties in reconstructing diachronic paths of order (cf. Benoist's, Poppe's, Shisha-Halevy's papers in particular). On the methodological level the articles of this group are also characterized by a more conspicuous interest in the analysis of registers and styles, as well as of possible cultural influences on continuities and discontinuities of WO.

Another consistent set of assumptions seems to underlie the approach envisaging structures as mental objects related to grammars. Note that no

necessary endorsement of the formal models in the generative framework is implied here. In fact, syntactic change can also be conceived in various functional models in terms of change in cognitive representations (see for example here Faarlund's and Harris's papers). Interestingly, however, scholars supporting this perspective from a functionalist stand often criticize the innatism of generative models and claim, with Harris' words, that "change be understood... rather as the result of language fulfilling its discourse and communicative functions" (Harris & Campbell 1995:45).

To the extent that this approach is centred on structures as mental objects (or – in a different version – as cognitive representations) grammar is considered to be the locus of change. As a consequence, some important assumptions are made about two problems of unending theoretical interest and vital importance for the study of stability, variation and change, i.e. the conception of diachrony and the relationship between synchrony and diachrony. Diachrony is conceived as a sequence of grammars/systems of cognitive representations. Even more far-reaching is the idea that (apart from resorting to a model like reanalysis, which has the specific aim to explain syntactic change) diachrony can be studied in principle with the same theoretical tools employed for contemporary synchrony, where mental images of linguistic phenomena can be inferred by testing native speakers. Here lies a major dividing line in the approaches to understanding stability, variations and change. The adaptation of diachronic to synchronic models is another aspect where some functional approaches may come close to formal ones like generative grammar. In fact, in both directions of research, whatever their real or assumed discrepancies, an influence of the Prague School on the relationship between synchronic and diachronic methods can be detected, either directly (possibly, through Roman Jakobson) or indirectly (perhaps through the influential paper of Lehman 1968). A well-known passage from the Prague School *Thèses* seems relevant to this supposition. Drawing attention to the idea that the conception of language as a functional system must be applied not only to synchronic analysis of present-day phenomena, but also to the study of past stages of language, the Prague School scholars stated:

> On ne saurait poser de barrières infranchissables entre les méthodes synchronique et diachronique comme le fait l'école de Genève. Si l'on envisage en linguistique synchronique les éléments du système de la langue du point de vue de leurs fonctions, on ne saurait juger non plus les changements subis par la langue sans tenir compte du système qui se trouve affecté par lesdits changements. Il ne serait pas logique de supposer que les changements linguistiques ne sont que des atteintes destructives s'opérant au hasard et hétérogènes du point de vue du système. *Les changements linguistiques visent souvent le système, sa stabilisation, sa reconstruction, etc.* Ainsi l'étude diachronique, non seulement n'exclut pas les notions de système et de fonction, mais tout au contraire, à ne pas tenir compte de ces notions, elle est incomplète (*Thèses*, 8-9, [italics ours])

The emphasis on function rather than structure in the study of linguistic change is certainly a common heritage of all traditions of functionalism, but the idea that structural rearrangements determining a more stable equilibrium of the system underlie most changes – an idea that contains an element of teleology – seems to have more deeply affected the functional-typological approaches to diachrony.

Reanalysis is a pivotal issue in contemporary views of change as aiming at a more stable equilibrium of grammar. Although the model had already been described in Delbrück's and Paul's works, it has gained a fundamental place in the study of diachronic syntax only in the last decades. Faarlund and Harris independently assert the double dimension of stability and change which characterizes reanalysis. It seems interesting, however, that – as in other contemporary studies – the main implicit perspective of investigation seems centred on change rather than stability.

Of special interest in this respect is the paper by Koopman & van der Wurff. It is an attempt by scholars inclined to see structures as textual objects to discuss the alternative point of view which emerges in recent research on change in grammar. The authors address important theoretical and methodological problems, such as the abrupt vs gradual nature of change, and in particular the possibility to identify cut-off points in change of grammar. Consistent with the textual orientation of their approach, they detect – for the patterns of order investigated – a much slower path of change than is usually admitted and, more generally, argue in favour of the importance of gradualness and long-term coexistence of competing structures in processes of change. But the divergencies in modelling change might be – at least in part – an effect of the clash of theoretical paradigms.

An interesting range of issues concerning the notions of stability, variation and change and their interrelations emerges from the articles in the volume. In some stability is considered a key concept, though to different degrees, with a focus either on its synchronic (as in Currie's and Poppe's papers) or diachronic (as in Deutscher's, Shisha-Halevy's, Sornicola's papers) dimensions. Despite

these minor divergences, however, there is a common interest in pragmatic principles that contribute to stability and in factors which limit or resist change. Baudouin de Courtenay's conception of a 'static' vs. 'dynamic stability', which was defined with respect to phonetics, could find a continuation and a reformulation here for WO: "Static stability, i.e. resistance to changes at a given moment in the existence of a language. Dynamic stability, resistance to historical changes. A limit is placed on the changeability of WO" (for the original passage dealing with 'sounds' cf. Baudouin de Courtenay 1876-77:94).

The notion of 'WO change' is addressed from different functional perspectives in various contributions, which raise a multitude of problems (cf. sections III and IV). It seems worth noting that, whatever the theoretical approach adopted, change is unanimously considered to be related to stability. In particular it is independently argued by many authors that in any process of change continuities and discontinuities are strictly interlaced, an idea that results from detailed observations of historical data. In some papers, however, the complicate interplay of permanence and alteration (or substitution) of structures is interpreted in the light of two models that have played a fundamental role in contemporary syntactic research, i.e. reanalysis and/or grammaticalization (for a discussion of their relations cf. Harris & Campbell 1995:92). A further leit-motiv of theoretical interest is the impact of the form - function relation on WO change (cf. Faarlund's, Harris's, Justus's and Rosenbach's & Vezzosi's papers).

Currie, Janse and Koopman & van der Wurff draw attention to the problematic definition of WO change from various perspectives. They indicate the crucial importance of analyzing textual and cross-textual WO variations in synchrony and diachrony for understanding change. A number of aspects of variation are discussed, like synchronic oscillations, multiple diachronic and diatopic variation, the permanence of patterns and their competition with others. The problematic relation between stability and variation is especially dealt with by Currie, whose contribution brings to mind Coseriu's thought-provoking aphorism "linguistic change doesn't exist".

An issue addressed in all contributions is the impact of semantic and pragmatic functions (which are variously interpreted as 'theme', 'topic' and 'focus', or as perceptual and cognitive factors) on stability, variation and change of WO patterns. While there is a consensus on the general importance of these functions in determining stability, variation and change, the role ascribed to them is a matter of debate. Two main options emerge. According to some, pragmatic factors are initiators of WO change. This idea, which finds broader support in the volume, seems to reflect a widely accepted view in

functional-typological literature, where it can be traced back to the influential paper of Vennemann 1974. Other contributors, however, maintain that semantic and especially pragmatic functions do not trigger WO change, but rather principles of linear structuring always present across time, and delimiting – in the Prague School terms – the 'field of tension' of a structure, i.e. its range of variability or flexibility; therefore as such they are factors of synchronic and/or diachronic stability. This dichotomy is interesting and poses a problem that perhaps deserves further scrutiny.

Taking into account the issues discussed so far, the contributions have been arranged in four sections, respectively: I. Stylistic and pragmatic principles in stability, variation and change, II. Stability and diachrony, III. Reanalysis, grammaticalization and change, IV. Variation and change.

The three articles in Part I. share the leit-motiv of the fundamental importance of stylistic and pragmatic principles for the understanding of synchronic variability and possibly trends of change. They reveal various interesting theoretical and methodological approaches and different nuances in their conclusions.

Benoist's contribution examines – from a philological and functional standpoint – the fundamental stages of 'internal' and 'external history' in the formation of Modern Russian WO. According to the criteria of Prague School structuralism, diachronic representation is conceived as the analysis of synchronic states, each of which constitutes a stratum. The Praguian and more generally Pan-Slavic functionalist approach is evident in the attention paid to differences in register and style, as well as in the insistence on the interplay of syntactic and pragmatic functions and particularly in the central role given to intonation.

The historical dimension emerges from the detailed presentation of the slow and complex development of the principles governing the WO in Modern Russian. With particular regard to the literary language, this process is studied considering the influence of external factors such as rhetorical normative models as well as foreign models – above all French – still in use up to the first decades of the XIXth century. Benoist underlines the limitations in the descriptions of the historical process under study, which have not taken into account these factors. The internal dimension of the process is also considered by analyzing the arrangement of the constituents of the main sentence, of the subordinate sentence and of phrases. Benoist questions the notion of 'freedom of WO' in Modern Russian as a general typological feature. He claims, on the contrary, that its validity is limited to the Lomonosov period.

Loprieno's article considers a possible shift from VSO to SVO order in the long-term diachrony of Egyptian. This gradual shift reaches its peak in Coptic, the final stage of Late Egyptian. Loprieno makes use of current synchronic and diachronic typological models. However, he mentions some difficulties in describing Coptic as a SVO language. Furthermore, he addresses the theme of 'predictability' of change, and compares the trends of movement of Egyptian WO to analogous trends of other VSO languages that have likewise developed SVO patterns. Important historical problems are also discussed, such as the possibility of Greek influence on the WO patterns of Coptic, which makes Loprieno favour a productive and non-mechanical influence.

The emphasis in this work is on the synchronic flexibility of the SVO structure in the life-span of Coptic. The author maintains that the SVO pattern has in synchrony a paradigmatic nature, which is not weakened by the existence of alternative structures with the VS pattern. In fact, these constructions have a relatively limited synchronic functional load.

Special attention is given to a particular structure with the VSO pattern, the rear extraposition of S by means of the *nci*-marker. This occurs frequently and has the function to rhematize an informationally heavier S, with a symmetrical increase in the thematicity of the SV-predicate phrase. According to Loprieno, the *nci*-construction is no exception to the unmarked SVO order. In fact, it reorganizes patterns of information distribution in the sentence "according to the same pragmatic pressures that motivated the change from VSO to the SVO order in the history of Egyptian". This suggestion seems to imply the existence of mechanisms which conspire to recompose the theme - rheme sequence of the sentence in synchrony and which also work in diachrony. This amounts to saying that pragmatic factors have a predominant explicative power. The symmetry suggested here between synchronic and diachronic forces is also interesting.

Poppe's article highlights the importance of an 'overall pragmatic principle' for stability of WO within a given synchronic stage of a particular language. This point is demonstrated through an analysis of syntactic structures and their relative patterns of order in Middle Welsh, which are shown to be consistently governed by pragmatic principles (except in certain types of clauses). A special emphasis is given to performance-related factors; in particular, Poppe underlines that topichood is not an automatic process independent of the speaker's communicative intention, but that – on the contrary – the speaker's choice is crucial in selecting a constituent in order to assign topichood. Thus the overall pragmatic principle is to be understood as distinct from stylistic and random *variatio*, as well as from automatic selection

for the fronting of constituents, or types of constituents, in specific syntactic contexts.

Based on a corpus of stylistically differentiated texts, Poppe's analysis shows the considerable structural complexity of WO variation within a specific synchronic stage and in so doing opens problematic scenarios for the reconstruction of diachronic trends. In fact, the statistical data presented point to a conspicuous amount of variability in neutral main clauses, in which neither a basic nor a dominant order can be identified. 'Preferred' orders only emerge for negative main clauses and subordinate clauses with the format Conjunction + finite V. The only regularity identifiable for neutral affirmative main clauses is that V is preceded by (at least) one other constituent and a pre-verbal particle (or 'Verb-second' order according to another descriptive approach, Willis 1998). This structure, which has been a matter of hot debate in Welsh grammaticography (where it has been called 'abnormal sentence'), is of interest to diachronic typology, in that it marks an apparent discontinuity in the development of Welsh WO patterns. Poppe maintains that this structure "is abnormal only in comparison with dominant neutral VSO order in Modern Welsh, and presumably in Old Welsh as well", an opinion of methodological and theoretical consequence for the study of this supposed discontinuity, and of discontinuities in general. Being aware of the possibly deceptive character of some discontinuities – which in fact may fade away when they are investigated with attention to stylistic variation across text (cf. Currie's contribution), Poppe cautions against premature reconstructions of diachronic paths of WO and reinforces the point of view that – before sketching trends of change - syntactic phenomena should be studied synchronically and with reference to the complexities of their textual distribution (for some important refinements of Poppe's positions, mainly with regard to 'multiple frontings' and Verb-initial clauses, compare now Willis 1998).

The articles in Part II. argue in favour of stability being considered central in the diachronic study of WO.

On the basis of data from the *Restsprache* Akkadian, Deutscher addresses a problem which reverses a traditional approach of historical linguistics, predominantly oriented towards change, by drawing attention to why in the case he investigates no change at all occurs over two millennia. According to current typological models, Akkadian should be an ideal candidate for change, as it shows very inconsistent patterns of order. The fact that Akkadian goes against expectations is all the more puzzling since the language underwent a loss of case-endings, a factor traditionally (though not unanimously) believed a possible determinant of change from SOV to SVO order. Deutscher claims

that, despite the 'unfavourable' conditions mentioned above, stability of WO was protected by other factors, such as semantic and pragmatic ones, which prevented ambiguities in the identification of S and O, as well as a syntactic factor like verb-agreement. Of special interest here is the idea that typological 'inconsistency' does not imply instability.

The author refutes three lines of argument which attempt to predict and justify the development of harmonic patterns from conditions of typological inconsistency. In particular, he rejects the explanation based on processing mechanisms, arguing that the inconsistent and supposedly difficult-to-process Akkadian structures investigated can function perfectly (i.e. they are common and productive) – over the whole documented history of the language – because of some notable syntactic factors, which are then carefully examined. Observing that "isolating word order from other structural properties of the language can create a misleadingly simplified picture", Deutscher concludes that the Akkadian case shows that stability can be accounted for by the complex functioning of structural devices. The fact that this complex functioning has often been ignored helps to understand "why so many of the cross-linguistic word order universals are observed more in the breaking than in the keeping".

Shisha-Halevy's article is characterized by an approach that is decidedly critical of functional-typological models and their implications for the study of stability, variation and change of WO. The author's arguments are based on his philological experience of Egyptian and in particular Coptic. From the perspective of a linguist engaged in the study of 'linguistic diversity' rather than of 'universals', he brings up once more theoretical and methodological problems of syntactic analysis considered classic in various scientific traditions. He warns against the use of supposedly universal categories, as this may create the deceptive idea that languages can easily be compared; additionally this assumption leads to the levelling of specific features of languages. A general problem is addressed here that calls into question the possibilities and limits of linguistic description and comparison. This point is exemplified by the analysis of a number of structures from the long-term diachrony of Egyptian. The author suggests that a language like Egypyian can only be analyzed through a descending distributional procedure "from full-text level down". Another theoretical issue dealt with – which is more specifically related to WO – is the distinction between'syntagmatic sequencing' and 'structural sequencing'. Order of constituents is denied the status of a "prime, independent, overruling, governing or motivating feature of syntax" that is endowed in itself with typological value. This is a radical position, with some

important consequences of both theoretical and methodological import. One of particular interest is the impossibility to extrapolate WO patterns from structural patterning, a thesis that is in agreement with Deutscher's and Sornicola's appeal for the need to consider order and structure together. After reviewing constructions that are characteristic of various historical stages of Egyptian, Shisha-Halevy detects a "remarkable stability of sequencing within the enveloping diachronic system", though he underlines that the notion of 'stability' is not to be perceived as absolute. However, his main conclusions have implications for the possible time span of linguistic stability, insofar as the property described here can be observed over a period of four millennia. Stability is the key theme of Sornicola's article, which is devoted to an examination of WO patterns in main clauses in the history of the Romance languages, in particular French, Spanish, and Italian. The discussion sums up the results of syntactic-pragmatic and statistical analysis of corpora of texts which cover different chronological stages of the three languages, from the Middle Ages onwards. The results are discussed against the background of standard accounts from Romance linguistics. In addition, differences in register and genre are taken into account (for the contemporary stages, the variation of WO between spoken and written text is also considered). The author addresses various theoretical and methodological issues relevant to the study of stability, variation, and change in WO patterns. She argues, moreover, that such studies demand the use of *dynamic models*, which have to satisfy various prerequisites, mainly the necessity to consider order in close conjunction with structure and to adopt a perspective defined both 'microscopically' and 'longitudinally', in order to conduct detailed studies of WO in single languages or across a language family and over different chronological periods. Such a perspective, which stands in opposition to current typological models, will allow the description and evaluation of the nature and extent of oscillations in WO patterns over time.

The microscopic and longitudinal analysis of the three Romance languages demonstrates a remarkable stability of the SVO order and of the pragmatic functions with which it is associated. This convergence of WO patterns between French, Spanish, and Italian over a long period a time would seem to contradict their conspicuous differences, and leads to a reconsideration of some problems of diachrony with their own long history, such as the path of change from Classical Latin to Romance.

The articles in Part III. have in common the centrality assigned to reanalysis processes and/or paths of grammaticalization in WO change. Furthermore they all follow models that could be called 'pragmatic-typological', like those

developed by Vennemann and Givón. They are characterized by the fact that pragmatic factors are considered main determinants for the initiation of mechanisms of change. In fact, the articles in this section, compared to others, show greater confidence in the view that pragmatic factors can decisively influence historical change.

Faarlund analyzes two changes in North Germanic which he believes are both due to reanalysis. He assigns considerable importance to the discourse function of, and to the more general functional conditions for, a structure of order. In particular, he thinks that in many languages the weight of constituents and/or their discourse functions are responsible for the deviations from the basic and unmarked WO. The first phenomenon analyzed is the shift from OV to VO in North Germanic. According to Faarlund, the factor which has determined the process of change is the extraposition of O to the right of V when O is focalized and the O constituent is heavy. The author maintains that it is the relaxation of the conditions in the use of VO order which causes an increase in the frequency of this pattern, and the consequent reanalysis of VO as the basic form. After this process, the movement of O in the opposite direction is no longer possible and therefore the OV order disappears. A second point which deserves to be considered is the fact that in this case the change proceeds through an alteration of the order and not of the structure. In particular, the change leads to a better match of the new linear order with the principles of information structure.

In contrast, what occurs in the second phenomenon investigated is a change of the structure, with the order remaining unaltered. The shift, observable in the history of Norwegian from Old Norse, is represented by Faarlund as a reanalysis, whereby an extraposed S was reinterpreted as complement of V, a process which was facilitated by the loss of case-endings. Faarlund also tackles an interesting theoretical issue which concerns the permanence of residual properties of Subjecthood in the post-verbal NP of the VS structure of Modern Scandinavian languages. His suggested solution uses a model of modularity from Autolexical Syntax.

The harmonies of WO and their relevance for processes of change are at the core of Harris's work. This is a strictly typological theme with a broader cut and is tackled by combining typological methods with textual analysis. Two objectives are proposed: (a) to describe WO change from Old to Modern Georgian, (b) to show the relevance of 'construction reanalysis' for WO harmonies. In particular, this process is claimed to be the origin of the change in WO in two dyadic configurations in Kartvelian languages, i.e. the comparative adjective construction in Georgian and the V - Aux structure in Laz.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in ascertaining the order of the major constituents in Old Georgian, Harris demonstrates that "most of the unmarked orders are those harmonious with VO", with Po and Vaux the only exceptions. In Modern Georgian, on the other hand, the main constituents appear in SOV order. The sequencing of the other constituents is far more complex, with numerous cases of ambivalence and multiple options. In the case of the linear relationship between the Standard of comparison and Adjective, where Old Georgian showed an Adjective - Standard order, in harmony with VO, Modern Georgian has an additional Standard – Adjective order. Harris claims that such a pattern has originated through a process of 'construction reanalysis', insofar as the comparative construction conforms to the pattern of the Adjective + Complement order. The same general process is said to be responsible for the V – Aux order in Laz. In this case the pattern develops in correlation with the order of the embedded clause and of the verb of the main clause. In effect, the reanalysis of the verb of the matrix clause as an auxiliary is a diachronic process found in various languages. The author gives examples from Japanese and compares them to the Laz ones. Of significant theoretical interest is the suggestion that processes of reanalysis like the ones described not only create, but also preserve and even extend WO harmonies.

Justus's work raises a stimulating problem, which has not been explored in depth previously, i.e. grammaticalization of the first person imperatives – functionally defined as 'directives' – in Indo-European languages. It concerns a complex process of change, studied along two paths: (a) the emergence of new mechanisms for the coding of first person imperatives from older verbal paradigms with different imperative suffixes for the grammatical person; this development was achieved through the creation of new auxiliaries gravitating around semantic nuclei such as 'let', 'get', 'give'; (b) the change of WO correlated to such a slow shift. This process of grammaticalization is accomplished over an extremely long period of time, as it spans from Hittite texts of the second millennium B.C. right up to contemporary English. Justus observes that it is part of a broader trend of innovation, which also affects the strategies of codification of the second and third persons of the imperative. The overall trend shows a long-term persistence of multiple coexisting strategies, which are often realized by variant morphosyntactic and semantic structures. Comparing the path of grammaticalization followed by directive auxiliaries in Indo-European languages to that of directive imperative structures of Japanese, Justus notes that in the former the new auxiliaries are placed at the beginning of the sentence, while in the latter directive auxiliaries are placed at the end. This conforms to typological expectations, insofar as the Japanese order is

consistent with that of a V-final language, while the order of Indo-European languages reflects "the movement away from verb-final to verb-initial patterns". However, the author cautions against all-too-easy comparison of languages as well as against premature sketches of long-term trends, stressing the importance of taking into account the form - function relationship in diachronic analysis.

Part IV deals with the relationship between variation and change.

Synchronic variation and parameters underlying variability in linearization are the main themes addressed by Cherchi, in his discussion of one aspect of Kartvelian verbal morphology, i.e. the order of elements preceding the verbal root. The article takes up a theoretical issue of great consequence for modelling variation and change, i.e. the consideration of relationships between grammatical levels, and more particularly of phenomena in transition from one level to another. The author investigates alternative arrangements of pre-radical morphemes of the verb complex in Old and Early Middle Georgian, Mingrelian and Svan. These reflect aspects of the broader phenomenon of tmesis. However, the chief aim of the analysis is an investigation of orders deviating from those standard in tmesis, insofar as their study can help to understand "the limits and types of flexibility in morpheme ordering". This in turn constitutes a prerequisite to determining the parameters underlying variability.

The range of variation in pre-radical constituent ordering is considerable. Similarities and differences emerge for the patterns of order in the three languages, which are partly due to differences in the inventory and function of pre-verbs. In particular, the author suggests that the flexibility of ordering is directly related to the size of the inventory of pre-verbs and their combinatorial possibilities. Variation of order may also affect the structures of individual languages - such as the asymmetry in Svan between the inner and the outer layer of pre-verbs, which the author believes to be related to a difference in the respective paths of grammaticalization. From a theoretical perspective, his conclusion is also relevant that the languages investigated cannot be placed along a single scale of grammaticalization insofar as the phenomena in question are "governed by multiple (and different) grammatical categories". Currie explores the implications of various sociolinguistic models for the understanding of WO stability and WO change. On the basis of a detailed syntactic, pragmatic and stylistic analysis of a corpus of Early Modern Welsh texts, Currie also calls attention to the importance of studies of the internal stylistic coherence not only within textual genres, but also within single texts. In fact, the frequency of absolute V-initial structures in his Early Modern Welsh corpus demonstrates differences not only across textual genres (like in

Modern Welsh), but also within the same textual genre, and even in the works of authors sharing the same cultural background. The author also considers the impact of discourse-pragmatic factors and the possible functional equivalence of absolute V-initial order with two other constructions, the dummy subject construction and the S(pers.pron.)V order. He believes that this interchangeability may have constituted a syntactic and stylistic resource that authors "could use to extend radically the range of absolute-initial verb order, and so develop a new prose style".

Currie raises various interesting theoretical issues. A large portion of his article is assigned to discussions on the concept of stability. In particular, he emphasizes that this is difficult to define and not necessarily related to the concept of invariance, since – as has been proven in sociolinguistics – "stable patterns of variation" can exist. For Currie the interest of such a concept consists in providing "a starting point for investigating WO variation and change from a range of different perspectives".

In his contribution Janse gives a multi-faceted description of convergences and divergences in the ordering of pronominal clitics from Ancient Greek and Classical Latin to Modern Greek and Romance languages, within a framework which combines the philological approach with grammaticalization models. His emphasis is on the multiple pathways of grammaticalization of the position of clitics. Orders are compared not only with regard to different structural environments in different chronological phases of a language, but also with regard to synchronic dialectal variations within a single language. Janse's analysis shows that the same processes may recur at different times in different languages, but also that a cascade of innovative patterns of order – with respect to a structure assumed as the starting point for the investigation – may sometimes emerge even within a single language. Variation therefore assumes a fundamental role in Janse's contribution. It implies not only synchronic oscillation, but also oscillations that will become grammaticalized diachronically. Instead of 'change', the author uses terms such as 'gradual evolution', 'development', 'survival', as he declares himself to be sceptical about models of abrupt change.

The overall process described illustrates the divergences from Greek and Latin patterns of order – conceptually represented by the well-known 'Wackernagel Law', which Janse reinterprets in the light of pragmatic principles. The development of the multiple structural options of Modern Greek and of Romance languages is a process conforming to two main principles: (a) the evolution towards a system with a verb at its centre and

pronouns floating around the verb, immediately before or after it; (b) the tendency to grammaticalize the position of clitics with respect to the verb.

Koopman & van der Wurff address the theme of variability and optionality in grammar, on the basis of two case-studies from the history of English syntax, i.e. the relative order of the Direct and Indirect Object and the relative order of Direct Object and verb. The authors examine a characteristically historical problem, that is to say the need to study the survival of older patterns in a phase where they are no longer dominant. This necessitates not only a reconsideration of the problem of gradualness, but also a discussion of models of variability and grammatical optionality different from those suggested within the framework of generative grammar. Koopman & van der Wurff present a detailed description of the two changes from Old to Modern English.

This results in an interesting theoretical discussion on the adequacy of the models of WO change which use the notion of 'grammar competition'. According to the authors, this notion is far from being satisfactory, for more than one reason: it does not allow an in-depth study of the intricacy of historical data and does not stimulate research into the reasons for discontinuities of change. Instead, they identify two areas deserving further scrutiny: "the nature and locus of the competition between the two grammatical systems and the length of timespans that can be involved". The latter problem, involving the relationship between abruptness and gradualness, has important implications for Koopman's & van der Wurff's argument. In fact, the two changes examined are much slower than adherents of the theory of grammar competition would admit.

The permanence of patterns and non-linear pathways in linguistic change is also focussed in the paper by Rosenbach & Vezzosi which concerns the genitival constructions in Early Modern English. On the basis of rich textual documentation, the authors detect a trend in the history of the *s*-genitive which contradicts the widely accepted account, and argue for a very gradual substitution of the inflected genitive by the *of*-prepositional phrase. Their results lead not only to a new proposal for the overall configuration of the change – with a stagnation and a successive rise in the frequency of the structure – but also for a new chronology of the entire process. This confirms the need for great care when determining chronological boundaries for linguistic developments, and for further reflection on the relationship between stability and change. The authors claim that stability and change are strictly interconnected and substantiate their conclusion with an analysis of formal and functional aspects of the genitival construction. They identify stability as a

property related to form and change as a property related to semantic and pragmatic functions.

The issues debated certainly do not exhaust the range of problems which may emerge from the study of stability, variation and change of WO patterns. The editors, however, hope that this volume will stimulate further research on these themes.

Rosanna Sornicola, Erich Poppe, Ariel Shisha-Halevy

Naples, Marburg and Jerusalem, September 2000

REFERENCES

Black, John. 1997. *A Dictionary of Economics*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Burguière, André. 1971. "Histoire et structure". *Annales* 3-4.i-vii.

Baudouin de Courtenay, Jan. 1876-77 [1972]. "Podrobnaja programma lekcij... v 1876-1877 uč godu, *IKU*, 1877" [A Detailed Program of Lectures for the Academic Year 1876-1877], quoted from the English translation in *A Baudouin de Courtenay Anthology* ed. by Edward Stankiewicz, 88-107. Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press.

Coseriu, Eugenio. 1982 [1988]. "Linguistic Change does not Exist". *Energeia und Ergon. Schriften von Eugenio Coseriu (1965-1987)* ed. by F. Albrecht, J. Lüdtke & H. Thun 1,147-157. Tübingen: Narr.

EPHU = *Encyclopédie Philosophique Universelle*, publié sous la direction d'André Jacob, Paris: PUF, II: *Les notions philosophiques*, volume dirigé par Sylvain Auroux, Tome 2. [1990].

Hawkins, John A. 1983. *Word Order Universals.* New York: Academic Press.

_____. 1994. *A Performance Theory of Order and Constituency.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harris, Alice C. & Campbell, Lyle. 1995. *Historical Syntax in Cross-linguistic Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lehmann, Winifred P. 1968. "Saussure's Dichotomy Between Descriptive and Historical Linguistics". *Directions for Historical Linguistics* ed. by W. P. Lehmann & Y. Malkiel, 3-20. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Li, Charles N. 1977. "Introduction". *Mechanisms of Syntactic Change* ed. by Ch. N. Li, xi-xix. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Lightfoot, David. 1991. *How to Set Parameters: Arguments from Language Change*. Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press.

Milani, Andrea 1981. "Stabilità/instabilità". *Enciclopedia Einaudi* 13.418-452. Torino: Giulio Einaudi.

Thèses = *Mélanges Linguistiques dédiés au Premier Congrès des philologues slaves. Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* 1 [1929]:7-29.

Vennemann, Theo. 1974. "Topics, subjects and word order: from SXV to SVX via TVX". *Historical Linguistics I: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Historical Linguistics* (Edinburgh 2nd-7th September 1973) ed. by J. M. Anderson & C. Jones, 1. 339-376. Amsterdam: North Holland.

Willis, David W. E. 1998. *Syntactic Change in Welsh. A Study of the Loss of Verb-Second*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.