

Introduction

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Pages ix–x of

Discourse, Grammar and Typology: Papers in honor of John W.M. Verhaar

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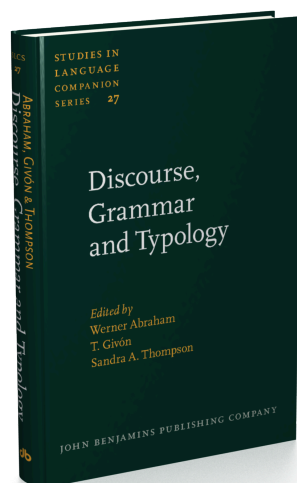
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Introduction

This book is on three topics which, at first sight, do not have an awful lot to do with each other. Yet, there is a common bond uniting them: the linguistic journal *Studies in Language* and the individual John Verhaar, researcher, academic teacher, and managing editor of the journal since its inception.

John Verhaar was one of the founders of the - at its time and long thereafter - extremely influential linguistic-philosophical journal *Foundations of Language* and the supportive foundation to this enterprise back in 1965. (Cofounders were Frits Staal, Peter Hartmann, and Pieter Verburg.) And, what is hardly any less, John Verhaar was its managing editor all along and long beyond the time when the name of the journal changed to *Studies in Language* in 1989. Either journal was accompanied by equally successful and influential monograph series, the *Foundation of Language Supplementary Series* and the *Studies in Language Companion Series*, respectively, of which John Verhaar was co-editor, too. Except for the initial phase of the *Foundations of Language*, when fundamental methodological and linguistic-philosophical discussions were carried by the journal, and certainly, and most evidently, in its later phase and with the inception of *Studies in Language*, the journals, under John Verhaar's academic management, grew to become a clearing place for research on language typology (much in the sense as the concept was given shape by Joseph Greenberg), on linguistic description based on keen methodological awareness (discipline and consistency at the descriptive level, but also awareness of prior assumptions that the linguist entertains), and, what is most important, openness in the sense that no theoretical 'non-negotiables' are maintained or any heroes are worshipped. Nonetheless, theory, in this sense, could always be a shorthand for insights about how results from consistent findings add up. One such finding, in Verhaar's sense, should be that grammar, as well as the theory, are 'non-autonomous'. They will always be taken to result from findings in data, from a large number of languages. There is conviction that such findings need to be retested all the time, that the linguist has blind spots when he looks at data, and that it is all too easy to have tacit assumptions one does not know about. All too often, such an

overall theory will amount, for all practical purposes, to the idea that one does not have such blind spots. New findings often result from the removal of such blind spots, perhaps as often as from consideration of more data.

It is against this 'methodological' background that *Studies in Language* grew to be the journal that it is nowadays: with a strong data orientation, open for text and discourse-based research (much in the sense with which this strand of linguistic research was pursued by people like Givón, Toulmin, Thompson, and Hopper, to name but a few), with strong encouragement for people working on linguistic paths not pursued according to mainstream efforts, i.e. with encouragement to work in several unrelated languages to arrive at typological conclusions. The journal offered room for the paradigm that language is not, at any stage, a system which is fixed and stabilized in itself. It thus encouraged work in a type of 'synchronic linguistic description with diachronic, vectorial indices'. Furthermore, at no stage and in no single language it was to be taken for granted that these linguistic categories are fixed, autonomous concepts, but, rather, their 'squishy' nature was emphasized, or at least considered. It comes natural that the category of language mix, its types and different and distinct stages come into focus, in the shape of creoles and pidgins, where the diachronic movements can often be caught *in statu nascendi*. Bearing on this directly, John Verhaar himself has been deeply engaged with *Tok Pisin*, the creole of Papua New Guinea, as well as with *Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia)*.

In this sense, the present collection of essays written by linguist friends and, in many instances, co-trail-blazers with John Verhaar represent not only an homage to John Verhaar, the linguist, but they also reflect the spirit in which the journal *Studies in Language* contributes as to the scientific policy and organization of our field.

The editors