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The <i>ass</i> camouflage construction: Masks as parasitic heads.....	<i>Robert D. Levine</i>	265
Dvandvas, blocking, and the associative: The bumpy ride from phrase to word	<i>Paul Kiparsky</i>	302
What 'you' and 'I' mean to each other: Person indexicals, self-ascription, and theory of mind	<i>Stephen Wechsler</i>	332
Cognitive constraints and island effects	<i>Philip Hofmeister & Ivan A. Sag</i>	366
Review Article:		
Corbett & Noonan (eds.): Case and grammatical relations: Studies in honor of Bernard Comrie.....	<i>Peter M. Arkadiev</i>	416
Reviews (see back cover)		429
The Editor's Report.....	<i>Gregory N. Carlson</i>	476
Recent Publications		479

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Abstracts:

THE ASS CAMOUFLAGE CONSTRUCTION: MASKS AS PARASITIC HEADS

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Collins et al. 2008 offers a principles-and-parameters-based analysis of an AAVE construction first described in Spears 1998, in which nominal phrases such as *John's ass* appear to have exactly the same denotation, and behavior with respect to familiar conditions on anaphora, as the possessor [*John*, and similarly for pronominal possessors. Agreement, however, reflects not the properties of the possessor, but of the possessed nominal *ass*, which belongs to a small, closed class of lexical items that behave in parallel fashion and which the authors call 'mask' nominals. Collins and colleagues convincingly argue that the class of NPs consisting of possessors attached to mask nominals have the same syntactic structure as ordinary NPs displaying (pro)nominal possessors. In order to account for the split between anaphora and agreement, however, they are apparently forced to invoke a very complex derivational mechanism that includes a lowering rule, along with a number of other highly stipulative components, in order to encompass certain related constructions. I offer a far simpler and empirically more comprehensive alternative treatment in which mask nominals are nothing more than semantically parasitic heads, based on Kathol's (1999) dichotomy between AGR(eement) and INDEX specifications within head-driven phrase structure grammar representations. Collins and colleagues adduce what they take to be empirical arguments against such an approach, but these arguments are, as I show, all predicated on a basic technical misinterpretation of the nature of indices in the HPSG syntax/semantics interface, and thus have no force.

Comparison of the two approaches is interesting not only in the context of the phenomenon described by Spears, but also in terms of broader, cross-framework issues—in particular, the question of whether or not movement and feature matching are merely two alternative, interconvertible ways of expressing linkages between structurally distant categories.

Keywords: HPSG, movement, AAVE, anaphora, agreement, indices

Back to TOC

Next abstract

DVANDVAS, BLOCKING, AND THE ASSOCIATIVE: THE BUMPY RIDE FROM PHRASE TO WORD

Paul Kiparsky

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The oldest form of Sanskrit has a class of expressions that are in some respects like asyndetically coordinated syntactic phrases, in other respects like single compound words. I propose to resolve the conflicting evidence by drawing on prosodic phonology, stratal optimality theory, and the lexicalist approach to morphological blocking. I then present an account of the semantic properties and the historical development of these expressions. The analysis points to a solution to the theoretical problem of nonmonotonic trajectories in diachrony, a challenge for causal theories of change that claim that analogical processes are simplifying or regularizing. The idea is that optimization of such a highly structured object as a language does not proceed monotonically, but via a sequence of local optima.

Keywords: co-compounds, lexicalization, Vedic Sanskrit, prosodic phonology, associative, dual

[Back to TOC](#)

[Next abstract](#)

WHAT ‘YOU’ AND ‘I’ MEAN TO EACH OTHER: PERSON INDEXICALS, SELF-ASCRPTION, AND THEORY OF MIND

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This article offers a DE SE THEORY of person indexicals, wherein first- and second-person indexical pronouns indicate REFERENCE DE SE (also called SELF-ASCRPTION). Long observed for first-person pronouns (Castañeda 1977, Kaplan 1977, Perry 1979, inter alia), self-ascription is extended here to second person as well. The person feature of a pronoun specifies the speech-act roles that must be played by the self-ascribers: the speakers (uttering a first-person pronoun), the addressees (interpreting a second-person pronoun), or both (for first-person inclusive). Other agents who are not among the designated self-ascribers for a given pronoun interpret the pronoun indirectly by inferring the self-ascriber’s interpretation, a process requiring THEORY OF MIND, that is, the cognitive ability to impute mental states to others (Premack & Woodruff 1978). This de se theory is supported by convergent evidence from multiple domains: (i) It explains a typological universal: first- and second-person plurals always allow associative semantics (‘speaker(s) plus others’, ‘addressee(s) plus others’) rather than requiring regular plural semantics (‘speakers only’, ‘addressees only’) (Greenberg 1988, Noyer 1992, Cysouw 2003, Bobaljik 2008). (ii) It belongs to a family of approaches that solve the problem of the essential indexical (Perry 1979). (iii) It correctly predicts observed patterns of indexical pronoun production and comprehension by two populations lacking a fully developed theory of mind: typically developing children in the stage before theory of mind has developed, and children with autism. (iv) It correctly predicts the interpretation of second-person pronouns in utterances with multiple addressees.

Keywords: indexical, person, pronoun, theory of mind, self-reference, acquisition, autism

Back to TOC

Next abstract

COGNITIVE CONSTRAINTS AND ISLAND EFFECTS

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Competence-based theories of island effects play a central role in generative grammar, yet the graded nature of many syntactic islands has never been properly accounted for. Categorical syntactic accounts of island effects have persisted in spite of a wealth of data suggesting that island effects are not categorical in nature and that nonstructural manipulations that leave island structures intact can radically alter judgments of island violations. We argue here, building on work by Paul Deane, Robert Kluender, and others, that processing factors have the potential to account for this otherwise unexplained variation in acceptability judgments.

We report the results of self-paced reading experiments and controlled acceptability studies that explore the relationship between processing costs and judgments of acceptability. In each of the three self-paced reading studies, the data indicate that the processing cost of different types of island violations can be significantly reduced to a degree comparable to that of nonisland filler-gap constructions by manipulating a single nonstructural factor. Moreover, this reduction in processing cost is accompanied by significant improvements in acceptability. This evidence favors the hypothesis that island-violating constructions involve numerous processing pressures that aggregate to drive processing difficulty above a threshold, resulting in unacceptability. We examine the implications of these findings for the grammar of filler-gap dependencies.

Keywords: syntax, islands, processing difficulty, filler-gap dependencies, WH-phrase complexity, WH-movement

Back to TOC

Book Reviews

BOOK REVIEWS IN THIS ISSUE

Anderson: Auxiliary verb constructions	<i>E. J. Vajda</i>	429
Bickerton: Adam's tongue: How humans made language, how language made humans	<i>M. A. Arbib</i>	431
Bowern: Linguistic fieldwork: A practical guide.....	<i>A. Terrill</i>	435
Evans: Dying words: Endangered languages and what they have to tell us.....	<i>W. F. Hanks</i>	438
Filppula et al.: English and Celtic in contact	<i>R. Coates</i>	441
Fradin et al. (eds.): Aperçus de morphologie du français	<i>L. Bauer</i>	444
Kurzon & Adler (eds.): Adpositions: Pragmatic, semantic and syntactic perspectives.....	<i>Ö. Dahl</i>	448
McNally & Kennedy (eds.): Adjectives and adverbs: Syntax, semantics, and discourse	<i>R. Eckardt</i>	450
Ninio: Language and the learning curve: A new theory of syntactic development.....	<i>R. Hudson</i>	452
Raimy & Cairns: Contemporary views on architecture and representation in phonology	<i>S. Duanmu</i>	455
Rischel: Sound structure in language	<i>K. J. Kohler</i>	458
Rohdenburg & Schlüter (eds.): One language, two grammars? Differences between British and American English	<i>S. Johansson</i>	462
Sandler & Lillo-Martin: Sign languages and linguistic universals	<i>J. Quer</i>	467
Stassen: Predicative possession.....	<i>B. Heine</i>	470
Vanhove (ed.): From polysemy to semantic change: Towards a typology of lexical semantic associations	<i>J. Newman</i>	473

Back to TOC