Introduction: Analysing English Syntax Past and Present

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This book is an exploration of categories, constructions, and change in English syntax. A great many books are published on the syntax of English, both monographs and edited volumes, and yet another may seem unnecessary. However, we felt more than justified in adding to the sizeable literature here for two reasons. The first, to borrow from Richard M. Hogg and David Denison's justification for *A History of the English Language*, is that 'one of the beauties of the language is its ability to show continuous change and flexibility while in some sense remaining the same. And if that is true of the language, it is also true of the study of the language' (2006: xi). Central to our book is a focus on the syntax of the English language, through a wide variety of orientations that a collective work makes possible. Thus the volume aims to embrace the wide variety of approaches and methodologies in the current analysis of English syntactic structure, variation, and change, both past and present, through a careful curation of new case studies by established and emerging scholars in the field. Such breadth of scope, together with a specific focus on English syntax, sets the collection apart from most others.

The second reason is that this book is dedicated to David Denison, Professor Emeritus of English Linguistics at the University of Manchester, former Smith Professor of English Language and Medieval Literature, Honorary Doctor of Uppsala University, and Fellow of the British Academy, but above all, academic supervisor, colleague, and friend to the editors and contributors. This volume offers chapters based on original research and serves to celebrate David's rich, diverse, innovative, and inspiring work over the years as well as his legacy as supervisor, colleague, and greatly valued friend. Each of the editors was fortunate enough to be supervised by David. Our time at the University of Manchester coincided with the 'Langwidge Sandwidge', an informal lunchtime meeting where

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staff and students met 'to socialise and to share interesting nuggets of data, perplexing questions of theory, or trial drafts of work-in-progress' (Sylvia Adamson, personal communication). Although David was never any less than very generous with his time, this gave his students and colleagues even more access to his kindness (manifested in the sharing of his chocolate biscuit tin) and his keen intellect (which was always worn lightly). Not all scholars are able to be both conscientious and convivial, but this combination has endured throughout his career. When we were writing this introduction, Bettelou Los reminded us of David's love of a 'shindig': occasions that were not just sociable – they often resulted in compelling and significant research outputs (see, for instance, Denison and Vincent 1997). David encouraged us to start with the data, to work with others to best understand it, and, in doing so, to continue inching the field forward. In the words of Olga Fischer (personal communication), he has always been 'good at the nitty gritty', with a 'keen eye for any new constructions arising in English'. Whilst not a Festschrift, we think that this volume reflects all of David's best characteristics.

The fourteen chapters herein, written by nineteen scholars, are grouped into three parts: (I) approaches to grammatical categories and categorial change (five chapters); (II) approaches to constructions and constructional change (five chapters); and (III) comparative and typological approaches (four chapters). The contributors in Part I all deal with the fuzzy status of different grammatical categories and explore syntactic change across categories: **John Payne** on the special status of pronouns in the *of*-PP of genitive constructions; **Bas Aarts** on the analysis of *for* as a preposition or as a subordinator/complementiser; **Dan McColm and Graeme Trousdale** on the recent development of *whatever*; **Elizabeth Closs Traugott** on the converging and diverging development of the comparative modals BETTER, RATHER, and SOONER; and **Cynthia L. Allen** on the existence of the definite article in Old English (OE). The chapters in Part II are concerned with factors involved in English syntax and syntactic change that often go beyond the strictly syntactic. Thus, **Bettelou Los** revisits the way in which patterns spread with regard to the *to*-infinitival complement as a case of analogy and diffusional change; **Ayumi Miura** explores the interface between syntax and lexico-semantics with regard to impersonal and non-impersonal constructions in OE and Middle English (ME); **Laurel J. Brinton** examines the rise of the intersubjective comment clause *if you ask me* in terms of its syntax and pragmatics; **Sylvia Adamson** addresses the role of misreading and prescriptivism in language change from the perspective of literary and textual criticism; and **Merja Kytö and**

Erik Smitterberg investigate the role of sociohistorical factors in the use of the conjunction *and* and its double function in phrasal and clausal structures. The shared focus in Part III is on the analysis of English syntax from a comparative and typological approach, comparing British English with other varieties of English and with other Germanic languages, as well as Romance. **Olga Fischer and Hella Olbertz** reconsider the role of analogy by comparing the case of English HAVE-*to* and Spanish TENER-*que*; **Kersti Börjars and Nigel Vincent** analyse the history of WILL-verbs in various Germanic languages in addition to English such as Danish, Dutch, German, Icelandic, and Swedish; **Benedikt Heller and Benedikt Szmrecsanyi** investigate genitive variation in nine varieties of English; and **Christian Mair** closes the volume with a corpus-based analysis of a number of variants in American and British English.

One of the (many) strengths in David Denison's work is his artful ability to explore the syntax of English by combining synchrony and diachrony. Back in 1993, he observed that a 'renewed interest' in historical change brought together the two traditions of diachronic and synchronic linguistics, and that '[t]he explicitness of current linguistic theory should provide better explanations of historical change, while historical facts can play their part in testing and shaping linguistic theory' (Denison 1993: ix). Both synchronic and diachronic work on English syntax are currently thriving, and the range of research being done in this field would not be adequately reflected if we were to restrict the volume to either Present-day English (PDE) syntax or to historical work. In an attempt to remain faithful to Denison's core approach, we offer a number of case studies concerning the syntax of English that are synchronic (Aarts, Heller and Szmrecsanyi, Payne), that trace the recent history of English (Brinton, Mair, McColm and Trousdale), and that deal with the earlier history of English (Adamson, Allen, Fischer and Olbertz, Kytö and Smitterberg, Miura). In this way we also adhere to one of the guiding principles of *The Cambridge History of the English Language* series of volumes in that 'a satisfactory understanding of English (or any other language) cannot be achieved on the basis of one of these [i.e. synchrony or diachrony] alone' (Hogg 1992: xvi).

A second major strength in Denison's work is his dexterity in combining theoretical considerations with traditional philology, and, furthermore, combining these with meticulous analyses of data made possible by methodological advances in recent corpus linguistics. As he himself put it, before the 1970s '[h]istorical syntax was largely synchronic, concerned as it often was with the description of patterns in one author or text or period', but increasingly, as new and more corpora became available, these resources

'were mined for the relative frequency of rival [syntactic] patterns' (Denison 2012: 247). Denison himself comments on his 'eclectic' methodology in his 1993 book: '[n]o linguistic discussion is ever wholly value- or theory-free, of course, but my choice of an eclectic approach is deliberate' (1993: x). Similarly, our aim has not been to present a volume that focuses on a specific theoretical approach; rather, we aim to show the wealth and breadth of the study of syntax (including morphosyntax where relevant), both theoretically and empirically. So, chapters concerned with theory address the state of the art in the study of English syntax from the perspective of grammaticalisation and intersubjectivity (Börjars and Vincent, Brinton, Mair, Traugott), gradualness (Allen, Los), Lexical-Functional Grammar (Börjars and Vincent, Payne), Construction Grammar (McColm and Trousdale, Traugott), analogy and diffusional change (Fischer and Olbertz, Los), historical sociolinguistics (Kytö and Smitterberg), and literary and textual criticism (Adamson). Comparative and typological approaches also feature prominently, including analyses of (morpho)syntactic features in national and regional varieties of English (Heller and Szmrecsanyi, Mair) and in other Germanic (Börjars and Vincent) and Romance languages (Fischer and Olbertz). Methodologically, this volume includes studies conducted using traditional methods such as conscientious philological work (Adamson, Allen), thorough work based on large corpora (Brinton, Kytö and Smitterberg, Mair, McColm and Trousdale), alongside work with newly applied methods such as conditional inference trees in probabilistic grammar (Heller and Szmrecsanyi), and dictionaries for the study of historical syntax (Miura). All in all, the chapters provide materials for investigating some of the central topics currently under discussion in English syntax, relating to both data and analysis (see Denison 1993: ix).

Empirically, in addition to the types of change dependent on internal factors and factors below the level of conscious awareness, there are changes brought about or influenced by external and social factors, including the speaker's conscious choice of competing variants. As Barbara Strang has noted, 'the possibilities of variation, the matrix of change, in grammar, are very great indeed' (1970: 69), and in Hogg and Denison's words, '[f]rom the continual, dynamic interaction of internal and external factors comes what is by any standards a richly varied language' (2006: xii). Hence the present volume includes contributions that consider some of these latter kinds of factors, namely gender and social class (Kytö and Smitterberg), prescriptive norms (Adamson), and the role of standardisation (Mair). Overall, the emphasis is laid naturally on the syntax of written language,

but an attempt has also been made to consider speech-based or speech-like data in some of the chapters, both in earlier historical periods (Kytö and Smitterberg, Traugott) and in recent English (McColm and Trousdale). Rissanen observed that '[i]t is a constant source of frustration for the language historian that all observations and analyses of early periods have to be based on written evidence only, while the importance of speech in the development of the language is self-evident' (1999: 188). Yet Rissanen also pointed out that 'by a careful comparison of texts which stand at different distances from spoken language [. . .] it is possible to present hypotheses about whether a certain construction is favoured or avoided in the spoken language of the period' (1999: 188).

As previously mentioned, the contributions in each part share a focus on syntax from a similar angle, yet they vary in terms of the feature(s) examined, the theoretical perspective, and the methodology adopted. Our ultimate aim is to maintain and stimulate interest in a widely investigated subject in which much work has been done and yet much more remains to be done; the varied range of perspectives within each part allows us to achieve this. We believe that the result is a body of research which substantially adds to the current study of the syntax of the English language.

What follows is an outline of each chapter in the volume, summarising the main objectives, methods, and results.

Part I

Part I concerns approaches to grammatical categories and categorial change, with contributions addressing the 'fuzzy' status of various grammatical categories and exploring syntactic change across categories.

John Payne opens the volume with research into PDE which questions old categorial distinctions. He raises the issue of what is special about pronouns, in particular (the restrictions in) the use of personal pronouns in the genitive construction with *of*-PP, which contrasts with the alternative patterns *s*-genitive and oblique genitive, as in **the brother of him*, *his brother*, *that brother of his*, respectively. More precisely, he provides a new corpus-based study of 'the semantic relations permitted to the *of*-PP construction as a totality' which offers an innovative approach: the restriction lies not in the head of the construction, as is common in previous work (see Heller and Szmrecsanyi this volume), but in the personal pronoun dependent. This approach, it is argued, allows us to identify semantic relations between the head and the dependent where the genitive

alternation is not possible, whereas recent studies based on sophisticated regression models naturally exclude truly categorical contexts and contexts in which variation is not attested. The data are drawn from the *British National Corpus* (BNC*web*), both spoken and written material (1960–1993). In terms of relative token frequency, the results show that three semantic relations predominate: (i) quantity, as in *And there was a rare lot of them*; (ii) theme, as in *Some even had photographs of it on their walls*; and (iii) location, as in *she had fallen on top of him*. A further two are relatively frequent: (iv) part-whole, as in *You are that part of me that I cut off*; and (v) property, as in *too stunned by the sheer beauty of it all*. The remainder are 'a diverse residue of other examples', including sixteen different subsets, some of which are attested with just a single example. The analysis provides new insights not only with regard to the semantic relations participating in the genitive alternation between *of*-PP and *s*-genitive (e.g. theme, location, part-whole, property), but it also sheds new light on the behaviour of semantic relations in which there is no alternation and only the *of*-PP is attested (e.g. quantity, subset, collection, container). Thus, this case study qualitatively confirms claims made in previous research that 'the set of semantic relations available to the *of*-PP construction is a superset of those available to the *s*-genitive'. As far as the status of pronouns is concerned, Payne's data argue against Lyons' (1986) intuitive judgement that personal pronouns only reluctantly occur as dependents in *of*-PP constructions, showing rather that they can occur in a wide range of semantic relations, including those in which the *s*-genitive is prone to occur.

Like Payne, **Bas Aarts** deals with PDE and also revisits old categories, in this case taking the range of functions of English *for* as the basis of his study. He proposes an analysis of the lexical item *for* as always being a preposition, which can then take part in constructions with phrase complements or clausal complements. He does not find previous analyses of *for* as a subordinator or complementiser convincing, and considers some of the labels used in the literature ambiguous. The chapter first offers a detailed account of the guises of *for* in a wide array of constructions: (i) [*for* + NP], the traditional conception of the item as a preposition, whether as a complement, as in *You can't blame her for that really, can you?*, or as an adjunct, as in *Hold it for a moment*; (ii) *for* + finite clause, commonly seen as a formal subordinating conjunction, as in *'I'm afraid I've always been bad at names,' she told him for she'd no recollection of him*; (iii) [*for* [NP *to* VP]], which can occur syntactically as a subject or subject predicative, as in *The idea was for me to see the material*; as the complement or modifier of

a head (typically verb, adjective, noun), as in *where the Mayor has given permission for them to sleep*; or as the focus element in a pseudocleft construction, as in *What I want is for it to continue the way it is at the moment*. Before presenting his own analysis, Aarts discusses the labels and arguments put forward in the literature and critically reviews a number of works. He takes issue in particular with Huddleston and Pullum *et al.* (2002) and Radford (2004) for considering *for* to be a subordinator, questioning each of their arguments on syntactic and/or semantic grounds. In his view, there are strong reasons in favour of categorising *for* as a preposition instead of a subordinator. Aarts' analysis simplifies the lexicon entries for a number of verbs, as illustrated with *long* and *prefer*, and the treatment of the constructions [*for* [NP *to* VP]] and [*for* [(NP) V-*ing*]], solving the close parallelism in the syntactic role of *for* and *that* in sentences such as *That's the best course for you to take* and *That's the best course that you can take*. Furthermore, it simplifies the historical account of *for . . . to* constructions without resorting to theories of reanalysis from preposition-*for* to subordinator-*for*.

Dan McColm and Graeme Trousdale study the fuzzy category of interjections; in particular, the development of *whatever* as a new interjection and discourse marker in the recent history of English, within a Construction Grammar framework. Methodologically, the authors offer a quantitative and qualitative analysis of data drawn from the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA, 1810–present) and the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA, 1990–2017); the qualitative analysis is supplemented with data from the ENCOW16A subcorpus of *Corpora from the Web* (2012–2014). The three corpora were searched for *whatever* plus a number of additional variants, such as *wev* and *whatev(s)*. In addition, in ENCOW16A the authors observe forms such as *whoevs*, *howev*, *whenev*, and *wherev* which also function as discourse markers. This study has two main aims: first, to complement previous work by Brinton (2017) on the pathways of change in the evolution of pragmatic markers, and, second, to extend the discussion by means of a quantitative analysis of the patterns identified which can help us distinguish interjections from other word classes.

Theoretically, the authors argue that the form and function of *whatever* in contemporary English is not satisfactorily explained by the processes of grammaticalisation, lexicalisation, or intersubjectification alone, since the diachronic path followed from *whatever* > *whatevs* > *wevs* is atypical, and, besides, according to Brinton (2017), there are two potential syntactic sources for the development of its pragmatic function – a type of general

extender and a clause of the type *whatever you say/think*. Instead, McColm and Trousdale carry out a closer inspection of this fuzziness from the perspective of constructionalisation, looking at aspects of the nature of directionality in language change and considering what the authors here refer to as *bolstering*. The study is thus driven by research questions highlighting the central quantitative and qualitative aspects of developments in the recent history of the forms.

Before dealing with the data and the results, the chapter offers an account of the forms and functions of *whatever* in PDE. The authors classify the use of *whatever* into nine different types. The diachronic trends and the synchronic distribution of the item and its variants reveal that some functions of *whatever* have decreased in frequency (e.g. exhaustive conditional, as in *Whatever was the purpose of his visit, it was not long continued*); some have increased their use (especially the reduced forms, as in *No one ever made the argument you just summarized there, so whatevs*); while some others have remained frequent (relative determinative, as in *I will partake of whatever you have for supper*). All in all, McColm and Trousdale argue for 'an approach to grammatical change which privileges a view of language as a conceptual network of constructions at various levels of generality, and change as a change to the links between nodes in that network'.

Elizabeth Closs Traugott focuses on categorial change of the comparative modals BETTER/RATHER/SOONER. Her chapter explores the historical syntax of each form and complements accounts of the development of these from a grammaticalisation perspective (reported in the literature) with a constructionalisation perspective. The former approach suggests that by means of reduction and erosion the three comparative modals have converged overall, that is, they have evolved in the same direction and thus are part of the same category in PDE, taking discrete micro-steps and changing one feature at a time. The Construction Grammar approach, however, points to a different perspective on directionality, in particular that BETTER has diverged from the path followed by RATHER and SOONER. The theoretical question raised and addressed by Traugott is thus how to conceptualise these diachronic syntactic changes. The underlying argument is that historically each of these changes is considered a 'constructional change', and that the accumulation of these constructional changes 'may lead to constructionalisation', that is, 'the development of a form$_{new}$-meaning$_{new}$ construction'. The three research questions raised in the chapter evolve around the evidence for the emergence of the three micro-constructions under consideration, the type of

subschema relationship between the three constructions, and the kind of contribution added by a constructional approach to a grammaticalisation approach to the data.

The evidence discussed by Traugott is rich and varied, including the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*), *A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760* (CED), the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler* (CEECS), and the *Old Bailey Corpus* (OBC). On the rise of the comparative modals, Traugott argues that RATHER was constructionalised as a modal by Shakespeare's time, and that its use often involved negative semantic prosody. Similarly, SOONER seems to be well established as a modal in the sixteenth century and also shows a tendency for being used with negative semantics. Slightly different is the emergence of *had better*: its comparative modal meaning is not entrenched until the early eighteenth century, when the new meaning is paired with the new form (i.e. a case of constructionalisation). In a second step, the author considers the late Modern English (lModE) period, a crucial era for exploring the directionality of change and how the micro-constructions were organised. A clear picture emerges here, in that *had* occurs with the three modals, but the differences observed in their historical distribution point to RATHER and SOONER forming a subschema together, vis-à-vis BETTER. In the course of their development, the three comparative modals have become more similar in terms of their formal reduction but distinct in terms of their semantics. Regarding the analytical frameworks, constructionalisation has the added value of considering semantics as well as a formal analysis. Crucially, this leads to different clines: BETTER > SOONER > RATHER in the grammaticalisation approach; BETTER > RATHER > SOONER in the constructionalisation approach.

The final chapter in Part I is also diachronic in nature, but focuses on OE. Like Payne, **Cynthia L. Allen** is concerned with categories within the noun phrase, and, like Payne and Aarts, she revisits old labels with new data and from a new theoretical angle. The category involved here is the 'definite article'. More precisely, this chapter addresses the question whether this category already existed in OE by considering new evidence on the use of SE. A crucial point is made by the author at the start: the fact that surviving OE texts do not document an element which behaves exactly like what in PDE is labelled 'definite article' does not necessarily imply that OE did not have this category. The two inspiring sources for Allen's research are Crisma (2011) and Denison (2006). According to the former study, the definite article was in regular use in OE prose from the late ninth century

onwards, consistently in some syntactic positions, variably in others. The latter study is relevant for the pathway of change of this category. In Denison's re-examination of the similarities and differences in OE between a number of categories such as pronouns, adjectives, and determiners, he argues that the boundaries across categories are blurred in OE, and that in ME they continue to be so, developing not through sudden reanalysis but through incremental change.

In her chapter Allen turns to Ælfric's *Grammar*, a late OE text which is not often used for evidence on syntax, given that it is a grammar of Latin, not of English. Allen meticulously checked the English translations of Latin sentences in the *Grammar* that lacked any determiner, arguing that Ælfric's use of SE in such cases gives evidence that can help us to identify contexts in which he considered its use to be essential. This method contributes to previous work in early English by presenting negative evidence that cannot be retrieved in corpus studies. The qualitative analysis, based on a careful philological study of each instance documented in Ælfric's *Grammar*, supplementary data from Ælfric's homilies, and a case study of the noun *cyning*, corroborate Crisma's (2011) claims. On the one hand, definiteness was marked obligatorily for subjects and objects ('direct arguments') in the *Grammar*. Allen thus argues that the reverse can also hold true, that is, the absence of SE is likely to imply that 'Ælfric intended his readers to understand an indefinite interpretation'. On the other hand, the use of the definite article SE was optional and variable in the context of prepositional objects (PObj), which in some ways behave differently from PDE; their use is difficult to pin down to one particular reason or context, be it lexical or grammatical. A search for the definite count noun *cyning* indicates that definiteness marking of *cyning* was more or less the rule at a time when such marking exhibited more variation with other nouns as PObj. Thus Allen recalls and supports Denison's argument that the increasing use of definite articles in this kind of construction may have developed through gradience rather than through an abrupt change in the use of the definite determiner in general.

Part II

Part II in this volume concerns approaches to constructions and constructional change; more precisely, the chapters here consider diverse factors involved in English syntax and syntactic change that often go beyond the strictly syntactic.