Introduction

Within linguistics there are various theories that describe syntax from a semantic point of view. To name a few: Lexical Functional Grammar (e.g. Bresnan 1982), Word Grammar (Hudson 1984), theories of Dependency Grammar, such as the work of Tesnière (1959) and the 'Meaning-Text' model of Mel'čuk (e.g. 1988), HPSG (Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar; e.g. Pollard and Sag 1994), strands of Generative Semantics (e.g. Seuren 1996), Dik's Functional Grammar (e.g. 1997; now Functional Discourse Grammar), strands of Cognitive Linguistics (see Croft and Cruse 2004) and various strands of Construction Grammar (see Hoffmann and Trousdale 2013). Besides these theories, there is also an older tradition of syntactic analysis within European Structuralism, which starts out from the idea of the Saussurian sign (form-meaning element) (de Saussure 1966). A notable example is the theory of *Semiotactics* developed by Carl Ebeling. This linguistic theory is based primarily on the work of Jespersen (in particular his *Analytic Syntax* of 1937) and on structuralist approaches to syntax (specifically the work of Jakobson and Martinet). The basic idea behind Semiotactics (in this name we find the Greek words *sēmeion* 'a sign' and *taktikós* 'fit for arranging') is that syntax concerns the relations between different form-meaning elements, and that these relations can be described with a limited set of syntactic relations, which are largely universal.

Ebeling explained his theory in various writings (including 'On the Semantic Structure of the Russian Sentence' 1954, *Syntax and Semantics* 1978, 'How Many Valences?' 1980, *Een inleiding tot de syntaxis* [An Introduction to Syntax] 1994 and *Semiotaxis* [Semiotactics] 2006). Most of these are of a rather technical nature or written in Dutch and therefore not accessible to a wider audience. Furthermore, the theory has been subject to ongoing development, and changes have been made in the practical application of the formalization (as well as the development in Ebeling's own works, culminating in his last book in 2006, see also e.g. the contributions of Kortlandt (1980, 2008) and Geerdink-Verkoren (2009), the various papers in Geerdink-Verkoren and van Engelenhoven (eds) 2011, and Fortuin 2014). In addition, there are many constructions in languages

other than Dutch that have not yet been analysed using the semiotactic approach. The aim of this book is to fill this gap and present the first comprehensive introduction to Semiotactics. Although the universal semantic-syntax approach to language advocated here is based on various versions of Semiotactics as proposed by Carl Ebeling and other authors who have worked within this framework, we also offer own contributions to the semiotactic theory, which sometimes differ from the ideas put forward by Ebeling. To emphasize the broad typological scope and nature of the theory, we use the term *Universal Semantic Syntax* for the version of Semiotactics presented in this book.

Universal Semantic Syntax offers a truly semantic approach to syntax, taking as its primary starting point the idea that syntax deals with the relations between meanings and that the same types of relations can be found cross-linguistically. In indicating these relations, *Universal Semantic Syntax* abstracts from phrase structure, and focuses on the syntactic relations between the meanings of linguistic signs. As such, it differs from Chomskyan generative approaches to syntax and also from some functional approaches to syntax, such as the 'Meaning-Text' model of Igor Mel'čuk, which separate syntax from semantics and are primarily concerned with how words are arranged within a sentence. The theory presented in this book does not reject formal approaches to syntax, such as generative grammar, but rather presents another and perhaps complementary view on syntax. *Universal Semantic Syntax* is informed by various functionalist approaches to syntax, and is in some respects similar to syntactic theories, such as Construction Grammar. What makes it unique is that it provides a comprehensive way of both analysing and formalizing linguistic constructions across languages. At present there are few, if any, sign-based (form-meaning) theories of syntax that offer tools enabling us to take *any* fragment of the grammar of *any* language and to describe, analyse and formalize that fragment. Without such tools it is difficult to show the importance of the semantic approach to syntax. Therefore, *Universal Semantic Syntax* provides a genuinely unique approach to syntactic theory.

This book consists of two parts. In Part I we will discuss the theory, the formalization of the theory and our own views and contributions to the theory. In Part II the theory will be further illustrated by providing semantic-syntactic analyses and descriptions of numerous examples in English (many of them taken from Jespersen's *Analytic Syntax* and from The British National Corpus[1]) and various other languages, European and non-European.

[1] http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc.