

Robert D. Borsley, Tallerman, Maggie, and Willis, David. *The syntax of Welsh*. (Cambridge Syntax Guides) Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. (xix, 388)

This concisely constructed text is represented not as a reference grammar but a survey of a range of topics, treated with approaches oriented toward Principles and Parameters theory and to Head Driven Phrase Structure Grammar. The text progresses through eight chapters devoted to structural components, ending with a chapter on the history of Welsh and one on its VSO typology. The long Introduction situates Welsh historically and genetically among Celtic languages, notes highlights of its development and variation, discusses its status as a head initial and VSO language and its clause structure, and introduces the intriguing processes of the well known phenomena of mutation that characterize Welsh morphophonemics. This first chapter not only provides a thorough introduction for the present text, it would serve splendidly in an anthology of articles about major and well-known languages.

Scholarship of this type typically begins with a descriptive account of the language items under discussion and progresses to account for them using one or another theoretical construct. In clarifying the problems of the typological indexing of VSO in the literature of Welsh in Chapter 10, among other places, the general explanatory inadequacy of TG is exposed. In Chapter 7, where mutation is discussed in detail, the discussion of elaborate attempts to account for syntactic SM break down, and it is observed that the question yields to more “surface oriented” approaches. Generative accounting for the Noun – Adjective order of Welsh also breaks down, as it is noted that “children acquiring Welsh do not go through a stage of producing adjective – noun orders” (187). Interestingly, the absence of typical tests for Aux (46 – 7) calls the class into question, yet the operation of the category is clearly present. Theory may have a place for everything, but it cannot put everything in its place.

After VSO word order, as the authors point out, Welsh is best known for the mutation of the initial consonant in lexemes in certain contexts. The facts that trigger mutation can be represented in a list (see 195 – 197 for triggers in noun phrases), and that homophonous morphemes trigger different mutations (e.g., 3S Masc. Sg. proclitic *ei* triggers soft mutation (lenition) while 3P Fem. *ei* triggers aspirate mutation, 21, 22) suggest that mutation is an item-oriented syntactic process (and not a phonologically conditioned one). Likewise it is shown that prepositional *yn* ‘in’ triggers nasal mutation, while progressive marker *yn*, for whatever reason in the current state of the language, does not trigger mutation (ibid.).

Mi is a mutation trigger, but it does not trigger mutation in contexts where historically accusative particle ‘*i*’ intervened, i.e., the mutation rule did not operate when an item intervened (323). Students in a comparative historical approach might conclude from this data that during the time that rule was productive, the particle ‘*i*’ intervened, but that subsequently, even though the particle was lost, mutation still does not occur, i.e., that the mutation rule is no longer productive, and an induction model of language acquisition would suggest that the item following *mi* was acquired in its radical form where it was not mutated in those (accusative) contexts. These seem preferable to setting up a rule whereby something that is not there blocks from happening something that does not happen, accompanied by the complex set of theoretical entailments associated with that approach. These preceding observations raise the question as to whether mutation occurs as a (transformational) process or the items are acquired in their mutated (or radical) state in those contexts as they appear in the synchronic system.

A fascinating aspect of Welsh syntax, for students of Indo-European varieties, is the pattern of concord among verbs, pronouns, and nouns, whereby number agreement occurs with pronouns but not with nouns, as in the following examples:

Gwelon ni
 See.PAST.1P we (10d)

Gwelod y-bechgyn
 See.PAST.3S the-boy.P (from 11) at p. 34

Somewhat reminiscent of the morphophonemics of the articles (*an/a, the*) in English, where the process figured into word formation, e.g., *an ekename* → *a nickname*, the Welsh clitic definite article is realized as *r /r/* (enclitic to preceding word, if it ends in a vowel), or as *y /əɾ/* or *y /ə/* (proclitic on next word in noun phrase) depending on whether the next word begins with a vowel (155). This fascinating morpheme figures into mutation, as well, as it triggers mutation in some numerals (but not others).

I take issue with the authors on some minor points. It is pointed out that “a colour adjective may be used alone ... particularly to refer to the color itself” e.g., *yn y coch* ‘(financially) in the red’ (n. 3 at 182). But here ‘in the red’ does not refer to the color itself, but metonymically to the situation of losing money (traditionally recorded in a ledger book using red ink) in this obvious calque. In the body of the text the smorgasbord of terminology and abbreviations, even those associated with rarified theoretical constructs, are generally used with the presupposition that readers all know them, but some glosses of fundamental items appear, e.g., “zero marked morphology” (282). This raises a question as to the intended audience for the present work.

Errata: At 209, “more concrete frameworks such as LFG an HPSG” are contrasted with “more concrete frameworks, as in P&P.” The second element should probably read *abstract* in the context. At 259, in (22a) and (23a) *cysgu* glossed as ‘sing’ should be ‘sleep’.

Every section of this text is richly supplied with well analyzed example data that clearly depict the syntactic and morphological arrangements under discussion. The excellent

introduction provided in the first chapter, if that is all that is read, will provide a moderately prepared reader with a solid understanding of the basic characteristics of the language, while throughout, despite the occasional deep occupation with theoretical speculations, the important range of topics and issues that the authors promise to investigate are treated in a thorough and comprehensive manner, and our knowledge about the language is richer as a result.

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