Book reviews

Book review: Michael Brody (2002) *Towards an elegant syntax.* London: Routledge.

Reviewed by Cedric Boeckx

Michael Brody's new book, *Towards an elegant syntax* (TES), is a collection of essays written from 1981 to the present. TES is divided into four parts. Part I ("Principles and Parameters") consists of early essays, written during the Government-Binding era (roughly, the 1980s), focusing on issues of indexing, chains, and empty categories. Part II ("Beyond Principles and Parameters") reviews Chomsky's *Knowledge of Language* (1986) framework, elaborates what has come to be called Single-Output Syntax model, and critically examines the nature of the theta-criterion. Part III ("Towards an elegant syntax") and Part IV ("Aspects of mirror theory") best illustrate Brody's relentless refinement of linguistic theory.

Brody is best known for developing a precisely articulated representational alternative to the largely derivational character of minimalist analyses (see especially Brody 1995; see also essay 10 of TES, "On the status of representations and derivations"). As Brody clearly states,

> Having both [representations and derivations duplicating each other] would weaken the theory in the sense of increasing the analytic options available (…), hence very strong arguments would be needed to maintain that both concept-sets are part of the competence theory of syntax. (Brody 2003: 186)

Consider the logic of Brody's argument in the context of the following situation in Lebanese Arabic [LA] (a situation not discussed by Brody).

Like many other languages, LA uses resumption in interrogative contexts. Although resumptives in LA are not confined to island environments, Aoun and Li (2003) note an important difference between resumption inside and outside of island contexts. Whereas resumption outside of islands allows for reconstruction, reconstruction inside islands is impossible. Witness the contrast between (1) and (2).

(1) *ʔayya   taalib   min   tulaab-a$_i$ fakkarto   ʔ<ə>nno   k<ə>ll
     which   student among students-her thought.2pl.   that   every
     m ʕallme$_i$ ħatna ʔ-ii
     teacher.fs   will.3fs.choose-him
     'which of her$_i$ students did you think that every teacher$_i$ would choose (him)?'

(2) *ʔayya   taalib   min   tulaab-a$_i$ ʔ<ə>nbasatto la ʔinno   k<ə>ll
     which   student among students-her   pleased.2pl because   every
     m ʕallme$_i$ ħatna ʔ-ii
     teacher.fs   will.3fs.choose-him
     'which of her$_i$ students were you pleased because every teacher$_i$ would choose
     (him)'

Based on this contrast, Aoun and Li distinguish between "true" and
"apparent" resumption. True resumption is understood as the absence of a
wh-chain. It is the only strategy available in island contexts. Apparent
resumption involves the presence of a wh-chain linking the the resumptive
pronoun and the wh-operator. One can (slightly misleadingly) understand
the resumptive pronoun as a pronounced trace left behind by wh-
movement. This strategy is available outside islands.

      Aoun and Li are now able to capture the reconstruction asymmetry
noted above by tying reconstruction effects to the presence of a copy left by
wh-movement. Since no wh-movement is allowed to take place from
within an island, reconstruction in such contexts is impossible.

      Aoun and Li (2003), however, provide data that makes the picture
much more complex. This time the data come from superiority effects. As
expected under Aoun et al.'s view on "apparent resumption", superiority
effects are found in the context of resumption outside islands, as shown in
(3).

(3) a. *miin ʔanna ʕto-u   yzuur   miin
        who persuaded.2pl-him to-visit who
        'who did you persuade (him) to visit who'
     b. *miin ʔanna ʕto   miin yzuur-u
        who persuaded.2pl   who to-visit-him
        'who did you persuade who to visit (him)'

If superiority is analyzed as Closest Attract or Shortest Move, we expect no
superiority effects in the context of true resumption (resumption inside

islands). However, Aoun and Li show that superiority effects obtain in such contexts.

(4) a. *miin ʔənbasatto   laʔinno   saami   ʕarraf-o   ʕa-miin*
        who pleased.2pl because Sami introduced-him to-whom
        'who were you pleased because Sami introduced (him) to whom'
  b. **miin ʔənbasatto laʔinno saami   ʕarraf   miin   ʕəl-e*
      who pleased.2pl because Sami   introduced whom   to-him
      'who were you pleased because Sami introduced who to him'

So from the point of view of superiority, true and apparent resumption strategies are symmetric: they behave in exactly the same way. But from the point of view of reconstruction, they behave asymmetrically. To resolve this paradox, Aoun and Li propose "that chains can be generated either derivationally or representationally. The derivational process is at work when Move applies. (…) We further argue that minimality constrains all chains" (3–4). As they note (49),

> [Such an] approach unfortunately goes against Brody's (1995) claim that derivations and properties of LF representations duplicate each other and that a parsimonious theory of syntax should dispense either with representations or with derivations. Grammar seems to contain redundancies.

The important word here is *unfortunately*. The term refers to the fact that Aoun and Li's solution falls short of the desiderata, laid out very clearly in TES, for an elegant syntax. (For an alternative analysis of the LA facts, consistent with Brody's desiderate, see Boeckx and Hornstein 2004.) Throughout TES, Brody reviews similar 'inelegant' situations involving theoretical concepts such as levels of representation, projection and phrase structure, chains, c-command, syntax-morphology mapping, and thematic relations, to cite but the most prominent ones. I cannot, in the space of a review, provide a detailed overview of the kind of solutions Brody proposes. Suffice it to say that Brody's general strategy consists in a relentless evaluation and re-evaluation of the tools used in linguistic theory, an exploration of all the unstated consequences of theoretical proposals, and a rare sense of what is essential and what isn't.

    Students of Brody's work will benefit greatly from his research strategy. Not only will TES provide them with elegant solutions to difficult problems that await to be extended to other complex areas of research, it

will also allow them to understand current, often abstruse theoretical concepts much better, thanks to the great clarity with which TES is written.

In TES, Brody illuminates central issues, concepts, and analyses in modern linguistic theory. It is, in my opinion, required reading for anyone who seeks a deeper understanding of the structure of current linguistic theory.

References

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