

Rezension

Paul M. Postal. *Edge-Based Clausal Syntax*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010.

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Overview

In his book *Edge-Based Clausal Syntax* (hereafter, EBCS), Paul Postal (hereafter, PMP) sets two goals. The first is to present an alternative grammatical framework, one that deviates in crucial respects from available competing theoretical frameworks. The second is to show that by adopting this alternative framework, a number of facts mainly from the syntax of English and unaccounted so far for by the competing frameworks receive a rather straightforward treatment. In order to achieve this, PMP proceeds as follows. In the first part (corresponding to chapter 1), PMP gives an outline of the fundamental ideas characterizing the framework adopted by him. In the second part (corresponding to chapter 2), PMP convincingly shows that single objects occurring in postverbal position divide into three disjoint subsets. In the third part (corresponding to chapters 3–9), PMP illustrates the benefits of this three-way distinction for the analysis of a number of syntactic phenomena, including passives, pseudopassives, middles, and their interaction with control structures.

Summary of Chapters

In chapter 1, PMP lays down his views regarding languages and grammars and introduces his framework. Regarding the first issue, PMP assumes that a language is a class¹ of objects, viz. sentences, and a grammar is system that characterizes this class, that is, a system of conditions that specify membership to this class. One consequence of this view (as also expressed in the epigraph chosen for EBCS²) is that language is different from knowledge of language, that is, language is an abstract object, similar to numbers. Given this abstract character of languages, another consequence is that grammars are abstract objects too. Consequently, grammars are not psychological or biological entities. It is this latter view in which PMP sharply differs from other grammatical frameworks like Minimalism, which explicitly characterizes a grammar as a mental system. Concerning the second issue, PMP adopts the *Arc Pair Grammar* framework

¹ The use of the word *class* instead of the word *set* is intended because of the result presented in Langendoen & Postal 1984. In a nutshell, if languages were sets, then the number of sentences in any language should be countably infinite. However, it can be shown that the number of sentences in every language is uncountably infinite. Since sets are restricted to countably infinitely many elements, languages cannot be sets.

² “Distinct from logic, distinct from psychology, syntax has to search for its own law only in itself. It is autonomous.” Taken from Tesnière 1959, p. 42 (PMP’s translation).