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MAHIEU, Marc-Antoine and Nicole TERSIS (eds), 2009 *Variations on Polysynthesis: The Eskaleut Languages*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Typological Studies in Language, 86, 312 pages.

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2009   *Variations on Polysynthesis: The Eskaleut Languages*, Amsterdam and
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This book contains 18 papers from the proceedings of the 15th International
Congress of Inuit Studies. The papers are grouped into three parts. The first part,
"Polysynthesis," comprises 6 papers. In the first paper, Mithun revisits the concept of
polysynthesis to show how it has evolved over time and why most scholars working on
Eskaleut languages consider them polysynthetic whereas a recent and influential book
(Baker 1996) rejects this view. Through a review of the evolution of this concept since
Duponceau (1819) and the evolution of the related concepts of noun incorporation and
holophrasis, she shows that Eskaleut languages exhibit many features traditionally
attributed to polysynthesis. Her conclusion provides a bridge between Duponceau's
mostly semantic definition and Baker's highly constrained formal definition: "If
polysynthesis is defined as having many morphemes per word, Eskaleut languages are
clearly polysynthetic, just like Iroquoian languages, if not more so (p. 15)."

De Reuse also takes issue with Baker's restrictive definition. Drawing on
examples from Central Siberian Yupik Eskimo, Western Apache, French, and Dutch,
he suggests that polysynthesis does not refer to a type of language but rather to the
presence of a large quantity of productive noninflectional concatenation (PNC)
elements. These elements are distinguished from inflectional and derivational elements
by a number of features, the most important one being productivity. According to De
Reuse, morphology can be split into three types: inflectional, derivational, and PNC,
where derivational morphology is limited to nonproductive derivation as opposed to
productive PNC. The distinction between polysynthetic languages and other languages
would thus be described quantitatively by the presence of PNC instead of qualitatively
as a special type.

Fortescue takes a much more functional approach. He points to a parallel between
auxiliary constructions in Chukchi and some West Greenlandic suffixes with similar
functions. He hypothesises that this parallel came about through the Eskaleut tendency
to incorporate nouns and adjuncts. Once absorbed into the verb complex, these earlier
auxiliaries "would [lose??] any special discourse function they once have had, but
gaining more specialized semantic meaning on the way" (p. 48).

Tersis discusses construction of novel lexical entries. Whereas most stems are
nominal, adjectival, or verbal and suffixes are either denominal or deverbal, some

suffixes seem to escape categorisation or to belong to more than one lexical category. She proposes a continuum ranging from lexical incorporating suffixes to totally grammaticalised suffixes, which would be similar to inflectional suffixes.

Vakhtin takes issue with the levelling and ordering of morphemes generally suggested for Eskaleut languages. He suggests that morphemes might have different origins and been "incorporated" into polysynthetic structure at different moments in the evolution of these languages. He presents different phonological phenomena and repetition of some suffixes to support his claim and the possible "auxiliary" origin of some deverbal postbases.

Miyaoka looks at comparable constructions in Central Alaskan Yupik (CAY) to reject a simple "slot-and-filler" analysis. He suggests, through a resolutely functionalist approach, that polysynthesis structure is quite different in CAY and Chukchi or Athabaskan for example. He attributes these differences to limited use of prefixation, reduplication, noun incorporation, and a fair number of valency-increasing suffixes in CAY.

The second part, "Around the Verb," contains five papers. In the first paper, Sadock looks at the anaphoric relations between personal markers in verbs and case markings on nominal expressions surrounding them in Aleut. He shows that the anaphoric system in Aleut is quite efficient even though the case system has fewer distinctions in Aleut than in other Eskaleut languages. To achieve this efficiency, Aleut uses "not just the meaning of individual expressions, but the available contrasts with other expressions in the grammatical domain of the language that determines the communicative force of individual expressions" (p. 109).

Mahieu focuses on the distinction between subjective conjugation (morphologically intransitive) and objective conjugation (morphologically transitive) in Eskaleut and Uralic. He suggests that objective conjugations of both language families are structurally closer to each other than what some analysts have suggested. His main argument rests on the existence of a participial morpheme in Uralic that would correspond to the Eskaleut participial suffix –kaR/*–ðaR.

Pittman proposes that some verbal postbases are restructuring verbs (*yu uma, *–ðqə, *–ni/*–niRaq, etc., but not deverbal postbases). These verbs can be divided into three categories: functional verbs (*yu uma), where the postbase does not assign any thematic role; verbs that select a thematically saturated complement (*–ðqə), where the verb takes a light verb phrase (*v*P) as an external argument; and verbs that select a tensed phrase as complement (*–ni/*–niRaq). Some of his arguments are reminiscent of those used by Vakhtin and Miyaoka for different theoretical paradigms.

Cook and Johns suggest that all affixes are functional morphemes, i.e., a closed class of elements for which formal properties determine a unique vocabulary item. They reject the possibility of polysemy in these affixes and argue instead that the semantics are underspecified, i.e., meaning in an actual utterance is determined by the

semantics of the base they attach to and the scopal properties associated with the syntactic positions of the word.

Trondhjem looks at time reference in West Greenlandic. She thinks that time reference is given by a combination of subordinate moods, aspectual affixes, and tense affixes. These categories are not discrete, and some overlap caused by historical development and polysemy may occur. The different meanings of an affix also depend on the relative order of different affixes and the inherent aspectual meaning of the verb.

The last part, "Discourse and Contact," has seven papers. In the first paper, Berge compares discourse structure in Greenlandic and Aleut. According to her research, the Greenlandic ergative-absolutive structure co-indexes the person-markers on the verb and the typical patterns of information flow, generally using the absolute case to introduce new information. Case and pronominal inflection are less reliable in Aleut, which seems to use anaphoric marking, passive construction, and fronting of salient or new information for the same purpose.

Nowak looks at the correlation between argument structure represented by verb inflection and lexical representation of these arguments as lexical items in the same clause. She shows through analysis of a single corpus that pronominal arguments are rarely co-indexed with lexical representations. She also suggests that new information is mostly introduced in discourse through lexical representation as a single intransitive argument or as an incorporated argument.

Grove analyses the relations between text, prosody, and gesture to capture the essence of oral tradition in Greenlandic. Drawing on Hymes' Ethnopoetics and McNeill's research on gestures, he proposes a prosodic analysis and finds correlations between prosody and gesture. He also suggests that, in some cases, speech accompanies gesture as the main channel of communication to express spontaneity and accurate representation of inner ideas.

Langgård analyses nonstandard use of the ergative case in a corpus of essays by young students in West Greenlandic. She approaches the problem from a language planning perspective and offers her thoughts on the opposition between imposition of a norm and possible language change. Through analysis of transitive clauses and possessive noun phrases, she shows that the ergative is often replaced by fixed word order, and that displacement has already occurred in the plural with case syncretism undermining the distinction between the ergative and the absolute. She concludes that these changes should not simply be discarded in evaluation of a norm for Greenlandic.

Jacobsen looks at the Internet as a key medium for language contact. She analysed a corpus of 12 chat sessions in Greenlandic for indication of Danish and English borrowing and code-switching. She found an interesting mix of morphological innovations as well as some more or less universal Internet-specific spelling

innovations. These innovations raise a number of questions about contact between morphologically different languages.

Kaplan presents some evidence for language contact in the Bering Strait region. Evidence includes lexical borrowing, some phonological phenomena like syllable adjustment rules, consonant gradation, and maintenance of the fourth vowel present in Yupik languages and adopted by different Bering Strait Inupiat languages. Kaplan suggests three models for contacts between these languages.

Allen et al. propose a framework for code mixing (code switching) between Inuktitut and English. Using distinctions made by Muysken (2000), they analysed insertion mixes, alternation mixes, and congruent lexicalisation in a corpus of parent/children interaction. They found that insertion mixes were the most common kind of code switching and that most of the insertions were nouns. They attribute this pattern in large part to the structural typologies of each language.

Published proceedings often suffer from lack of focus and unity. The editors of *Variations on Polysynthesis* did a very good job in bringing the papers together into a coherent and interesting volume. Focusing on a single issue and a single language family also has the fascinating side effect of enhancing the history of the concept of polysynthesis and the differences in theoretical approaches. For Duponceau, Brinton, Boas, and even Sapir, polysynthesis was essentially a semantic phenomenon—the expression of many ideas in a single word. As morphemes, ideas would be oblivious to lexical units and be generated anywhere in an utterance. A word "takes in as much or as little of the conceptual material of the whole thought as the genius of the language cares to allow" (Sapir 1921: 32). As the concept of word evolved in linguistics from "a miniature bit of art" (*ibid*.: 35) to a lexical form, a syntactic unit, a function unit, or discourse unit, polysynthesis became a problem to be tackled and circumscribed within the units allowed by formal theories. But this concept cannot be reduced to a simple definition easily. Even Baker (1996: 4ff) saw that polysynthesis, like Sapir's notion of the genius of a language, should be seen as more than a mere parameter. It is in fact a macroparameter.

Variations on Polysynthesis offers many explanations for polysynthesis that might, or might not, convince the reader. Each paper seems to capture one of its features but none is able to capture its essence. For Sapir and his contemporaries, languages were objects of wonder, and polysynthesis was the name of an exotic and wonderful genius of many Aboriginal languages in America, nothing more, nothing less. As such, linguists should understand this concept as a pre-scientific belief and forget it altogether. Otherwise, they might have to reassess linguistic categories they take for granted and start wondering about languages again. *Variations on Polysynthesis* is a great thought-provoking book.

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McELROY, Ann
2008   *Nunavut Generations: Change and Continuity in Canadian Inuit Communities*, Long Grove, Waveland Publishers, 200 pages.

During Ann McElroy's first visit to Iqaluit in 1967, a Montreal student asked her why she was doing an anthropological study here [in Iqaluit], "These aren't *real* Eskimos" (p. 15). By "real" he meant a person who hunts and lives off the land, "not someone who works for a paycheck" (p. 15). Curious to learn more about what town-based Inuit themselves thought of their identity, McElroy returned to Baffin Island two years later to complete a dissertation project on Inuit children. Although not all Inuit youth identified with the same adult gender roles, McElroy learned that many desired to find a balance between finding work in town and having time to hunt, fish, and travel with one's family on the land.

The desire to blend tradition with town-based opportunities is a recurring topic in McElroy's ethnography of southern Nunavut society and culture. McElroy finds the concept of "real" Inuit problematic because it locates such Inuit outside Arctic towns, the locus of her research. What is more authentically Inuit to McElroy is the ability "to integrate traditional values and modern lifestyles," (p. 16) including working for a paycheck. The ability to integrate different modes of living provides the foundation of an overarching theme of McElroy's work: Inuit in South Baffin are fully bicultural. While survival in an increasingly urban environment has required Inuit to adopt many of the customs and values of the Qallunaat ("white people"), Inuit continue to emphasise their identity as a distinct people whose traditions and values differ from those of the Qallunaat. The lengthy process of negotiation that led to the creation of Nunavut in 1999, a territory that McElroy refers to as an Indigenous homeland,