

Philip Holmes & Ian Hinchcliffe. *Swedish. A Comprehensive Grammar*. London & New York: Routledge. 1994. x + 628 Pp. ISBN 0-415-08208-0.

This book by Holmes and Hinchcliff is the most extensive grammar of Swedish to be published after Noreen's unfinished *Vårt språk*. It is, as the authors put it, "unashamedly comparative in nature", which means that it is also of use to Swedish readers who want to brush up their English.

One of the aims the authors have with this book is "to provide a source of reference for the student and teacher, in order to help learners develop fluency when speaking and writing Swedish." Consequently, both the approach to grammar and the terminology are traditional: Most readers of this book will probably be more interested in learning the language than in the ins and outs of linguistic theory, and hence prefer the kind of grammar they have been used to since the days they went to school. But one may wonder whether this traditional approach makes it possible to gain a more

than superficial understanding of the structure of the language. Many of the shortcomings of this grammar find their origin, I think, in too uncritical an attitude towards traditional grammar, and, more especially, towards its implicit norms. But before expanding on this criticism I will say what I like about this book.

To start with, the authors pay much attention to the stylistic variation found in Modern Swedish: the book abounds with examples from everyday language and slang, as well as from officialese and old-fashioned speech. Forms such as *barna* (*barnen*), *våran* (*vår*), *vart* (*blev*), *ser'u* (*ser du*), *självaste*, etc. which are frequent in the spoken language, but hardly ever to be found in writing, are discussed; there is an interesting chapter on interjections (pp. 486-490), which contains a useful section on the representation of animal sounds in Swedish (here we learn e.g. that Swedish pigs say *nöff-nöff*); and the section on direct and indirect address (pp. 131-135) is excellent.

Another strong point of the book is that it offers very detailed information on those points where Swedish and English differ most. The best example here is H & H's discussion of the Swedish prepositions (pp. 359-459), which is both accurate and lucid. Sections such as 446 "Translation of 'some' and 'any' into Swedish" are extremely useful, too, not only for English speaking students learning Swedish, but also for Swedes (and others) who want to improve their English.

Reading this grammar, one gets the impression that the authors are more interested in words and their uses than in the ways in which words are combined into phrases. This is in principle a healthy reaction against the dominance of linguistic theories that overestimate the role of syntax in natural language, but I don't think that the authors were well-advised to return to a grammatical tradition that borrows its syntax from (a primitive kind of) logic (*i.e.* traditional sentence grammar). In this tradition less attention is paid to what is said (or written) than to what 'logically' *ought to be said*. How else could one write that "in spoken Swedish an element is often duplicated *unnecessarily* (my italics)" (p. 570), or using the language of a 'modern' version of this kind of grammar, that an apposition is "usually a deleted relative clause" (p. 556)? Grammar is not a subdivision of logic: "Appelle an die Logik sind in der Grammatik verdächtig und sind meistens gleichbedeutend mit schlechter Sprachwissenschaft", as Weinrich (1964:212) rightly puts it. There is no *a priori* reason why

utterances in natural language should have the structure of logical propositions. Hence, there is no need to search for a subject and/or a predicate in each and every utterance, and/or to supply them if they are not present at the so-called surface level. By paying close attention to the structures that do occur in actual language one may avoid many of the pitfalls of a grammatical tradition that takes its starting point in 'ideal' (in the Platonic sense) sentences and meanings.

To give an example: in the paragraphs 1103 (pp. 494-5) and 1127 (pp. 526-7) constructions like *Det sitter två patienter i väntrummet* are analysed in the following way: "When the subject of a sentence is postponed, i.e. moved to the right in the sentence, an anticipatory *det* (= there, it) must be inserted." In this analysis the construction found in actual language is reduced to a simple subject (*två patienter*) - predicate (*sitter i väntrummet*) structure. It is then suggested that the construction "is used to avoid beginning a sentence with an indefinite noun phrase, i.e. a new idea." This does not make much sense. Lots of sentences start with an indefinite noun phrase, as is shown by the following examples which are all to be found in H & H's grammar: *varje språk har sina svårigheter, stövlar är omodernt, en sådan söt liten kissemissa du är, egna barn är en fröjd att ha, öl gillar han inte, men vin älskar han, hur stor ledare han än är, måste han lyda lagen*, etc. etc.

Contrary to popular belief among generative linguists (see e.g. Reuland & ter Meulen 1987), it is not true either that the construction is restricted to indefinite noun phrases. In all of the following sentences we have a presented definite NP: *det finns de som påstår.*; *det kom följande dumma svar.*; *det ställdes det villkoret att.*; *Det fanns bara jag i hela världen som skydd mellan honom och kulorna, mellan honom och gränsen, mellan honom och svälten. Bara jag.* (Göran Tunström *Det sanna livet*, 1991, p. 188) etc. etc.

Finally, it is clear that *det* is not merely a "place-holder, occupying the vital subject position and thereby indicating sentence type" (p. 527): I cannot detect any difference in sentence type (as defined by H & H on p. 506) between *För att bevaka ett så stort område krävs det rejäla röstresurser* and its counterpart without *det*: *För att bevaka ett så stort område krävs rejäla röstresurser*. There is, however, a slight difference in meaning between sentences with and without *det*, which according to H & H is "devoid of real meaning", compare e.g. *Här är varmt* with *här är*

det varmt, or *Här finns ingenting av värde* with *Här finns det ingenting av värde*: the presence of *det* suggests that the sentence gives an overall picture of a situation or state-of-affairs.

I have great difficulty in understanding why H & H, who otherwise seem to be keen observers, did not notice the discrepancy between traditional linguistic theory and the facts of language. Slavish adherence to a bad tradition does not pay, as must have become apparent to the authors when embarking on the task of explaining the use of the reflexive pronouns in Swedish. Here tradition has only the concept of 'subject' to offer, which rarely is of any use in explaining the complexities of natural language. In his book *Riktig svenska* Wellander introduces therefore the concept of *tankesubjekt*, a catch-all term for all those cases in which a reflexive is not coreferential with the sentence subject. The idea seems to be that the relation between the following elements is identical: (a) subject and predicate; (b) noun and adjective; (c) noun phrase and preposition phrase; (d) noun phrase and infinitive; (e) possessor and possessum; (f) noun (phrase) and apposition. Some examples: (a) *hon tycker om sin man*; (b) *en i sina detaljer nästan otrolig historia*; (c) *han gick in genom porten förbi vaktens i sin glasbur*; (d) *jag såg honom sparka sin hund*; (e) *det tyska folkets förhållande till sina bilar*; (f) *Han bor i Lund, sin födelsestad*. This covers a great deal of the cases, but not all. In the spoken language one may for example come across utterances like *Har du gett honom sitt bröd?*, which Wellander and others do not consider to be correct Swedish, and a good author like Vilhelm Moberg did not hesitate to produce sentences like *Enligt hans bevarade testamente ägde han vid sin död 22 stora jordagods i landet* with unreflexive *hans* in one adverbial (*enligt hans bevarade testamente*) and reflexive *sin* in another (*vid sin död*).

It has to be admitted that the behaviour of this fascinating pronoun poses some problems to descriptive linguistics, but that is no excuse for the mess H & H make of it in their grammar. On p. 153 the main rule is given: "*sin* should be used only when *both* of the following conditions are fulfilled: 1. The possessive pronoun must relate to the subject of the clause, which may be a noun or a 3rd person pronoun [...]; 2. The possessive pronoun must qualify the object of the clause (the object may be a direct object, indirect object or prepositional object)." One of the examples H & H give to illustrate the rule shows that the second condition is no condition at all: *I sina tal nämner han ofta krigstiden*. Although the

possessive does not qualify any object, it is, and has to be, a reflexive. On p. 155 H & H comment on the use of the reflexive pronoun in constructions like *Ylvas kärlek till sin man är uppenbar* in the following way: "the possessive pronoun does not relate to the grammatical subject of the clause. The apparent anomaly is, however, explained if we consider that the constructions above are ellipted forms: in the expanded versions the relationship of *sin* to the subject of the clause becomes clear. *Ylvas kärlek till sin man är uppenbar*. = *Den kärlek som Ylva har för sin man är uppenbar*." Paraphrasing a sentence does, of course, not constitute an 'explanation' of the structure of that sentence. But it gets even worse. A similar example, *Jag tvivlar på hennes intresse för sina studenter*, is on the next page (p. 156) explained as a case of 'attraction': "Attraction occurs primarily because the distance between the true subject and the possessive pronoun is greater than the distance between the possessive pronoun and another expression which readily 'attracts' the pronoun in the mind of the speaker/writer." On the same page the use of a reflexive pronoun in *Tavlan föreställer en man omgiven av sina fiender* is explained as a case of attraction, too, but on p. 158 a similar construction: *Resan gick till Italien, berömt för sina viner*, is described in the following abstruse way: "In short appositional phrases, and in relative clauses with no relative pronoun or finite verb, *sin* is used even though it does not necessarily qualify the object or refer to the subject of the sentence or clause."

Conclusion

The strong points of this grammar are: (a) it concentrates on everyday informal language; (b) it gives a wealth of examples; (c) by being "unashamedly comparative" it highlights some aspects of the Swedish language that are hardly ever touched upon in Swedish grammars written by native speakers. Its weak point is that the authors rely too heavily on an obsolete philosophy of grammar that tries to reduce the variation found in natural language to some basic structures that are not defined linguistically, but logically. Most of the sections on syntax are therefore of little value.

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