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Book review of Jakob Steensig / Maria Jørgensen / Jan K. Lindström / Nicholas Mikkelsen / Karita Suomalainen / Søren Sandager Sørensen (eds.): Grammar in Action. Building comprehensive grammars of talk-in-interaction. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company 2025

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The anthology *Grammar in Action: Building comprehensive grammars of talk-in-interaction* edited by Jakob Steensig, Maria Jørgensen, Jan Lindström, Nicholas Mikkelsen, Karita Suomalainen and Søren Sandager Sørensen sets out to investigate how grammar writing could be enriched by analyses of actions in social interaction. Compared to previous studies on grammar in interaction, the authors not only analyse grammatical formats such as tenses and clausal combinations and their interrelation to social actions, but also suggest how interactional aspects of the grammatical formats could be included in comprehensive grammars of talk-in-interaction. As acknowledged by the editors, the integration of social interaction into such grammars is an enormous task. The volume is therefore a first and necessary step towards the future integration of social action into grammars.

The book comprises twelve studies from contributing authors, as well as an introductory and summarising chapter by the editors. The volume is divided into two sections, each containing six studies. The sections represent the two different points of departure in CA/IL: starting from form and starting from action. The section *From Action to Grammar* includes six studies where the authors depart from actions and discover their grammatical formats, and the section *From Grammar to Action* comprises another six studies where the authors investigate the actions conducted with various grammatical forms. The languages represented in the twelve studies are all from the Indo-European and Finno-Ugric language families, and the excerpts seem to be drawn exclusively from the Global North. As pointed out by the editors, the volume is thus not as typologically representative as one would wish.

In the first chapter, *Grammar in action. Social Interaction as a basis for a comprehensive grammar?*, the editors contextualize the volume within its field of research and introduce the reader to the methodological foundations of the volume. Methodologically, the book is knit together by Conversation Analysis (CA) and Interactional Linguistics (IL). The aim to explore grammar and social interaction is not new within CA/IL, and the volume is inspired by predecessors such as *Grammar and Interaction* (Ochs/Schegloff/Thompson 1996), *Studies in Interactional Linguistics* (Couper-Kuhlen/Selting 2001) and *Syntax and Lexis in Conversation* (Hakulinen/Selting 2005). However, grammar writing has rarely been the goal in CA/IL, nor have functional grammar theories been interested in grammar writing drawn on the empirical methods in CA/IL. Outside of IL, the interest in interaction in mainstream grammar has been scarce; even though functional theories of grammar, e.g. Construction Grammar, clearly express interest in incorporating interactional features into their grammar descriptions (e.g. Fried/Nikiforidou 2025), mainstream functional grammar still suffers from both a written language bias and an introspection bias. In other words, functional theories of grammar would clearly benefit from the emic and radically empirical approach offered by CA/IL. The book

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is thus a welcome contribution not only to CA/IL, but to any field of grammar taking interaction seriously.

The second chapter, written by Barbara A. Fox and Chase Wesley Raymond, addresses the importance of granularity in grammar and action, both in CA/IL in general, and for grammar writing in an online format. Fox and Raymond give an overview of previous studies on the particle *oh*, clauses beginning with *((do) you) want* ..., and request formats starting with *can you X*. In their review of the series of studies on these different phenomena, the authors show that each new study presents a more fine-grained analysis, which may pose a problem for grammar writing: How do we decide, for example, if two actions are to be treated as the same or not? What action labels in an interactional grammar would be meaningful to its users? Another thought-provoking question, albeit not new, is what an interactionally oriented grammar should contain: Do embodiment and prosody have their place in a grammar for social interaction, and if so, how should this information be incorporated?

These are essential questions that neither the chapter nor the volume can provide concrete answers to, and the questions themselves are of course familiar to similar research tasks in other fields, for example lexicography and its Construction Grammar equivalent constructicography (e.g. Lyngfelt/Torrent 2025). Fox and Raymond, however, suggest that granularity could be incorporated into written, online grammars by the use of hyperlinks in the sense of Wikipedia. Actions as well as grammatical forms could be massively hyperlinked, which would make the grammar attractive for both researchers withing CA/IL and researchers in more traditional linguistics. The authors also suggest that online grammars with this hyperlink approach could be linked between languages. With regards to the entries in the online grammar, Fox and Raymond suggest the onomasiological approach taken by the Danish grammar-writing project conducted by Steensig et al. (2023), in which the grammar is organized by social actions.

Both the onomasiological and the semasiological approach are discussed by Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen and Sandra A. Thompson in the third chapter, in which the authors illustrate the possibilities and challenges of the two different organizational principles with the action type *Idea-Suggestions*. With this action label, Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson describe suggestions occurring when speakers plan future events. In their corpora, they find five recurrent formats for Idea-Suggestions, each with different interactional profiles. The analysis of Idea-Suggestions is a case in point of Fox and Raymond's argument and illustrates well the different levels of granularity, both in terms of format and action. In contrast to Fox and Raymond, however, the authors do not take a stance for either an onomasiological nor a semasiological approach, but recognize both paths as useful depending on the purpose of the grammar and its user. The authors exemplify how the entries for an interactional grammar could be structured and what they could contain, adding arguments for the hyperlink structure put forward by Fox and Raymond. Although the hyperlink structure is a promising solution from my perspective, the authors will also need to consider the risk of information overload (e.g. Gouws/Tarp 2017) for the user of an online grammar, a problem well known in lexicography.

In the volume's fourth chapter, Jakob Steensig investigates grammatical formats of requests for immediate actions in Danish. The formats in question are either embodied only, phrasal, or clausal containing modal verbs. In contrast to the previous

chapters, Steensig's study is part of an actual grammar-writing project, namely the online resource *Samtalegrammatik.dk* (DanTIN 2024). Steensig shows how speakers of Danish recurrently use embodied-only resources to request immediate actions, and therefore argues that embodied-only expressions should be included as entries in an interactional grammar – perhaps organized by the body part(s) used. Further, he underlines the need to treat phrasal structures not as elliptical, but as "units in their own right", in contrast to the commonplace treatment of phrasal actions in many reference grammars. In addition to these suggestions for reconsideration of traditional core grammar items, Steensig uses figures to illustrate the inter-unit syntax of different request formats and argues for their place in grammar. The figures show pedagogically how requests are structured in their interactional sequences and are a suitable resource for all users of an online grammar.

Similarly to Steensig's analysis of phrases as complete interactional units deserving proper consideration in a grammar, Alexandra Gubina shows in the volume's fifth chapter that German deontic infinitives, i.e. free-standing infinitives not governed by a matrix verb, constitute relatively frequent formats for accomplishing actions in talk-in-interaction. The 163 deontic infinitives in Gubina's collection are mostly recruited to perform instructions and the author argues that they constitute a routinized pattern for such actions and should therefore be included in grammatical descriptions of spoken German, where they are missing at the moment due to their incomplete syntactic structure. In a comprehensive account of deontic infinitives for a grammar of talk-in-interaction, Gubina suggest to include not only lexical and morpho-syntactic information, but also features of sequentiality, multimodality, agency, epistemicity, and deontic positioning. She acknowledges, however, the incremental process needed for such comprehensive accounts: this level of granularity can only be achieved when a phenomenon has been investigated in various studies and contexts. Moreover, Gubina introduces the reader to a practical perspective that the first four chapters of the volume do not bring up, namely the need to include deontic infinitives – and other phenomena ignored or marginally treated by reference grammars – into the curricula of German as a Foreign and Second Language. This user group would clearly benefit from an interactional account of grammar, which is also pointed out in several of the following chapters in the volume. As the user group is key for the structure of an interactional online grammar, this perspective should – to some extent – be addressed in all chapters of the volume.

The sixth chapter, written by Maria Jørgensen, departs from responses to specifying *wh*-questions in Danish to show how grammar writing can be informed by naturally occurring interaction. Jørgensen shows that phrasal responses are sequentially embedded, whereas clausal responses treat the question as independent of its sequence and also convey independence on their own. The chapter is written for both an interactional and a descriptive grammar audience, which is visible in Jørgensen's discussion. She does not reject descriptive grammar, but suggests how it can be enriched with information about action, positional sensitivity, and action design. These aspects are tied together in a social action model reminiscent of interactional Construction Grammar formalisations of constructions in spoken interaction (e.g. Lindström 2025). As we will see below, Jørgensen's analysis is not the only one that bears much resemblance to constructionist approaches to grammar: readers familiar with Construction Grammar, for example, will undoubtedly find

similarities between CA/IL and Construction Grammar also in Fiedler's and Suomalainen's chapters. Like Steensig's chapter, Jørgensen's model is developed for the Danish interactional in-progress grammar Samtalegrammatik.dk.

The volume's seventh chapter, which wraps up the first section *From Action to Grammar*, is another contribution to the Danish grammar Samtalegrammatik.dk. In this chapter, Nicholas Mikkelsen reports on parenthesis in storytelling in Danish talk-in-interaction and how this action could inform an interactional grammar. Mikkelsen distinguishes between parentheses in early- and late-turn recalibrations and shows their different interactional work. Early-turn recalibrations are used by speakers to situate their stories with respect to characters and scenes, whereas late-turn recalibrations are recruited to set up the climax of the story. The chapter is concluded by a discussion in which Mikkelsen elaborates on challenges that an interactional grammar might face. While the chapter neatly discusses challenges for possible grammar entries and what an interactional grammar should include, it would benefit from concrete suggestions and drafts of how such a grammar could be designed. Such drafts are to some degree expected by the reader as the chapter follows Steensig's and Jørgensen's chapters, which add to the same grammar-writing project.

The second section, *From Grammar to Action*, opens with the volume's eighth chapter by Sophia Fiedler. Fiedler reports on past tense formats in German talk-in-interaction, combining both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. By doing this, Fiedler aims to explore the past tenses preterite and present perfect of the verbs *finden* 'to find', *meinen* 'to mean', and *glauben* 'to believe' from an interactional angle, something that is largely missing in the previous research on tense. The three verbs and their past tenses are routinely used for distinct social actions, which leads the author to consider them as different constructions in an interactional grammar. The use of *construction* is not connected to any constructionist approach to grammar, but could easily be reimagined from an Interactional Construction Grammar perspective; especially the quantitative data point to this. Fiedler concludes that a grammar-for-interaction should incorporate constructions for different tenses of verbs, supplemented with a statement that the constructions are based on spoken interaction. Similar to Gubina's chapter, Fiedler also relates the relevance of her findings to language learners and points to the need for a different audience design in a grammar-for-interaction directed to language learners as opposed to linguists.

An interactional grammar's potential to benefit language learners is also addressed in the ninth chapter by Karita Suomalainen, who reports from a study of second-person singular imperatives in Finnish. Suomalainen shows that imperatives, which are traditionally associated with directives, have a wider range of functions than previously assumed. The imperatives in question are *kat(s)o* 'look', *kuule* 'hear', the negative verb in its prohibitive form *älä/elä*, *a(j)attele* 'think', *o(d)ota* 'wait', *sano* 'say', and *arvaa* 'guess'. The analysis shows that the imperatives may be used as directives in line with descriptive, traditional grammars, but they can also be used as discourse particles or semi-fixed expressions. As Suomalainen points out, the boundaries between these different uses of the imperatives are fuzzy. Suomalainen proposes a continuum between traditional directives and more particle-like uses, and presents a draft of such a continuum for an interactional grammar. Readers familiar with constructionist approaches to grammar will no doubt find a lot of similarities between mainstream Construction Grammar and Suomalainen's

ideas of imperatives as part of a continuum of directive imperative verbs on the one end and particle-like expressions on the other, with semi-fixed expressions in between. Her interest in fixed expressions that are marginalised in reference grammars is also in line with constructionist approaches, as is her suggestion for second language teachers to use her results in construction-based teaching models.

In the tenth chapter, Søren Sandager Sørensen suggest other potential target areas for an interactional grammar, namely speech recognition, language proficiency assessment, and clear language evaluation. This is based on Sørensen's conversation analysis of 222 Danish present tense copula clauses with different phonetic realizations. The collection includes zero copula assessments and constructions with overt reduced or stressed copulas. The latter can sometimes be stressed, and Sørensen shows how this stress invokes a relation with previous turns, occasionally with a contrastive meaning. Stressed copula furthermore signposts the end of the current turn, as Sørensen shows in his analysis. Regarding the zero copula clauses, Sørensen suggests that their frequent occurrence may indicate an ongoing grammaticalization process. However, no numbers on zero copulas in the collected material are made available to the reader, which makes the hypothesis difficult to assess. Furthermore, Sørensen suggests two entries for Danish copula clauses in Samtalegrammatik.dk: one for reduced and zero copula clauses, and one for stressed copulas. These entries, according to Sørensen, will likely need to be more independent compared to printed grammar books due to the non-linearity of web-based grammars. Lastly, Sørensen points out that grammar-writing could also give something back to interactional analyses, namely improved terminology for e.g. assessments. This is an interesting idea; in a larger perspective, the author could also underline potential collaborations between interactional and more traditional functionalist approaches to grammar-writing.

The eleventh chapter by Simona Pekarek Doehler and Anne-Sylvie Horlacher addresses a phenomenon at the core of syntax, namely the wide distribution of insubordinate clauses. From an interactional perspective, the authors analyse four different types of French *si* 'if'-clauses in everyday interactions: incrementally composed patterns, co-constructed patterns like *si*-clause + main clause and main clause + *si*-clause, free-standing *si*-clauses and embodied completions of *si*-clauses. These patterns show how *si*-clauses vary functionally, syntactically, and prosodically depending on the interactional environment. Furthermore, the authors claim that the different *si*-clauses form a continuum from canonically subordinate *si*-clauses to autonomous and insubordinate *si*-clauses, with intermediate versions in between. Such an analysis was also suggested in Suomalainen's chapter on Finnish imperatives, and would surely be helpful for any reader interested in grammar writing. According to the authors, all different *si*-clauses need to be included in an interactional grammar, where they should be mapped to their functional potentials. In addition, the authors argue that the grammar entries should aim to include the positional sensitivity of *si*-clauses, their incremental composition, their connection to the grammar-body interface, and their prosodic formatting.

In the volume's twelfth chapter, Sofie Henricson and Jan Lindström demonstrate how Swedish pseudoclefts such as *what I don't like is her nasal voice* are used in talk-in-interaction and what needs to be included in a grammar entry on pseudoclefts. The pseudoclefts consist of two parts: an initial relative clause and a copula construction. The relative clause strongly projects the copula construction and thus

also exhibits a floor-holding function. Discursively, the pseudoclefts are used to create transitions, e.g. from one topic or stance to another. In terms of social action, the speakers in Henricson and Lindström's material use pseudoclefts in directive-commissive and evaluative actions. These actions are tied to the participation framework and speakers' epistemic positioning: the authors show that pseudoclefts are frequently used by speakers to position themselves epistemically as more knowledgeable when for example instructing and assessing others. According to the authors, a grammar entry on pseudoclefts should thus include information about the participation framework, as well as turn design, action formation, and discourse organization. Like in other contributions in the volume, the grammar entry is thought of as a potential resource within education, for example second and foreign language teaching.

Compared to the other chapters in section two, the thirteenth chapter by Virginia Calabria departs from a less fixed grammatical form, namely other-extensions, to explore the collaborative nature of grammar. As other-extensions the author counts clauses that are contingent on the turn of the previous speaker to some extent. According to Calabria, these extensions are interactionally advantageous for turn-taking, as the speaker producing the other-extension can contribute to the overall activity without risking to self-select for the turn. The chapter presents an analysis of the actions conducted through other-extensions in Italian and exemplifies three of the various actions implemented by other-extensions: providing additional information, verifying while displaying one's own understanding, and reframing prior talk as laughable. Calabria understands the other-extensions as part of what she calls a collaborative grammar, and argues for its inclusion in a comprehensive interactional grammar. More specifically, she suggests a section dedicated to collaborative turns in general and proposes that collaboratively achieved activities should be presented in entries for the corresponding actions. This would be a welcome contribution, since most grammars – according to Calabria – ignore the collaborative nature of grammar. Exactly what might need to be included in Calabria's suggested entries on collaborative turns could, however, have been more thoroughly elaborated in the chapter's concluding section.

In the final and concluding chapter, the editors of the volume summarise all the contributions and suggest possible directions forward for interactional grammar-writing projects. The editors point out that the target audience for the interactional grammars suggested in the different chapters seems to be not only Interactional Linguists, but also language teachers and learners as well as grammarians from other theoretical perspectives. As I have pointed out above, a comprehensive, interactional grammar ought to be especially interesting for Construction Grammar. This is also pointed out to the reader in the introducing chapter, where the editors mention several connections between IL and Construction Grammar, especially usage-based constructionist approaches. The constructionist idea of continua rather than binary categories finds its equivalent in Pekarek Doehler and Horlacher's chapter on *si* 'if'-clauses, in which they speak of continua of insubordination. Furthermore, the idea of constructions as conventionalised patterns of form and function is evident in several chapters, e.g. in Henricson and Lindström's contribution on pseudoclefts, which they regard as conventionalised "constructional patterns". The volume and its exploration of what grammar writing within IL is, should thus also be a much welcome contribution to grammarians with a constructionist approach.

In the final chapter, the editors further call for a rather wide audience, which is also visible in the choice of terminology. As highlighted by the editors, traditional grammatical concepts are useful even in interactional studies, at least if they are allowed to be questioned when necessary. This is a relevant solution for an interactional grammar that takes interaction seriously, but still wishes to be available for other theories of grammar. In that way, interactional analyses could be more accessible for grammarians outside of IL as well as to teachers and students within grammar education in general and second language acquisition in particular, where traditional grammar terminology most likely is still used. Hence, the interactional grammars suggested by the authors have the potential to bridge the gaps between IL, other functional theories of grammar, and traditional grammar in general. Interactional Grammar could also be more visible to other fields of grammar through the formalisations present in a few of the volume's contributions, e.g. in Steensig's and Jørgensen's respective chapters. Their modelling of grammar entries not only visualises interactional grammars, but also presents formalisations of grammatical patterns in interaction. As the editors highlight, this type of formalisation makes the analysis more available for grammarians in other fields. It is also a helpful resource for the readers of the chapter and the users of an interactional grammar in any physical format.

Another strength stressed in the final chapter is the presence of both qualitative and quantitative methods in some of the chapters, e.g. Fiedler's investigation of past tense in German. For reasons of representativity, quantitative methodologies will be important for the writers of a comprehensive grammar. As the authors point out, this also calls for a more systematic selection of corpora. Collection based analysis is useful for less frequent grammatical formats and IL is perhaps especially well-equipped to handle such cases, but a comprehensive grammar will also need to include more general grammatical patterns. A discussion of how general grammatical patterns, e.g. clausal patterns, are to be handled in an interactional grammar is largely missing in the volume. Jørgensen addresses this briefly in her chapter, suggesting that topological models of Danish could be included in an interactional grammar. But this raises further questions to the reader: Are topological formats a grammatical form in need of an action ascription, or are they rather abstract patterns outside the scope of IL? As pointed out by the editors, grammar writing is an incremental job that has to start somewhere, and naturally, interactional studies may therefore start from concrete, specific patterns before moving on to more general ones. A discussion of how general patterns are to be handled is unfortunately not present in the volume, but relevant for future studies on interactional grammar writing if the grammar in question is to be truly comprehensive.

Within the field of IL, the volume clearly distinguishes itself by taking the step from grammar in interaction to actual grammar writing. By doing this it also makes several contributions to grammar writing in general. The discussion of grammar writing could, however, have been given more space in many of the chapters. Except for Steensig's and Jørgensen's chapters, most authors comment on the perspective of grammar-writing rather briefly in the discussion or in the concluding section of their chapters. As a reader, the word "building" in the volume's subtitle *Building comprehensive grammars of talk-in-interaction* sets the expectation that the actual grammar writing process rather than analyses of interactional phenomena would be the focal point of the chapters. However, as pointed out by both the editors and

several contributing authors, the process of building an interactional grammar is incremental and has to start somewhere.

The discussions of grammar writing in the different chapters are definitely a good start of this process, and readers interested in building comprehensive interactional grammars will definitely get a lot of inspiration. The chapters in the first section, *From Action to Grammar*, bring a new, pragmatic paradigmatic perspective that is – to the extent of my knowledge – not present at all in traditional reference grammars, namely the possibility to "yield insights into why a specific format is chosen". Furthermore, the interactional perspective in all chapters expands the notion of grammar in a healthy way by "going beyond the sentence" and including the sequential context or "external syntax" – another point at which traditional reference grammars tend to struggle between sentence syntax and discourse syntax beyond the level of the sentence. The editors advocate for a broad and open view of grammar that recognizes the value of descriptive grammar and formalisation, but do not shy away from adapting it to a truly usage-based analysis, incorporating embodied behaviour. The anthology could be considered an invitation to functional grammarians into the rich, in-depth analysis of grammar-in-use that the different chapters forefront. In sum, this is a much welcome contribution not only within IL, but for any usage-based grammar writer who takes interactional aspects seriously, and I highly recommend any grammarian interested in combining grammar and interaction to read, learn from, and get inspired by the chapters of this book.

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