Reviews

Joe Trotta. Wh-*clauses in English: Aspects of theory and description*. Amsterdam – Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000. 237 pages. ISBN 90-420-1284-6 (hardback). Reviewed by **Claudia Claridge**, University of Greifswald.

Comprehensive accounts of the *wh*-clause phenomenon as a whole are not that common (eg Grimshaw 1985; Hirschbühler 1985). This makes the work under discussion here, which seeks to offer a 'description-oriented, theory-neutral account of *wh*-clauses in late twentieth-century English' (p 2), a necessary and welcome contribution to the field. The emphasis of the book is on a formal description of the syntactic properties of *wh*-clauses, and more precisely on (i) the distinctive features of each clause type, (ii) the relation between clause type and *wh*-phenomena, and (iii) problems of clause-type classification (p 2). Two points are especially noteworthy about the design of this study. First of all, theoretical aspects are not neglected – indeed, a wide range of views from generative to 'traditional' syntacticians is integrated into the present treatment; nevertheless, no single theory is taken over as the dominant framework. This approach should make the research results accessible for linguists of various persuasions. The second point concerns the fact that the work makes use of a healthy mix of data, aiming at a more thorough investigation of *wh*-structures than would otherwise be possible. The *Brown* Corpus provides the major empirical basis, supplemented by other corpora (*BNC, LOB, CoBuild*), and examples from dictionaries, grammars and miscellaneous sources, as well as by introspection and some elicitation testing.

The book is divided into seven chapters, the first of which sets out the aims and methodology as explained above. Chapter 2 ('Preliminaries') paves the way for further treatment by giving working definitions of concepts to be taken up and fleshed out later, namely *wh*-phrase, *wh*-feature, *wh*-clause and *wh*-movement. Furthermore, problems of classification with regard to interrogative, exclamative and relative (bound and free) clause types are highlighted here and items and constructions which are not the concern of this study are excluded. Starting with more or less brief definitions of aspects that are fundamental for

the whole book is certainly a good idea, although this does raise the question why this was not also done for perhaps the most important notion of the enquiry, namely the clause types themselves. The author emphasizes again and again that he intends them to be taken as 'categories of grammatical form rather than meaning or discourse function' (p 30), but no precise formal definition of the four types is given here. This would have been a helpful preparation for the reader before Chapters 3–6, which deal with each type individually. It thus remains somewhat unclear not only which aspects motivated the division into these four groups in the first place before proceeding to further and more detailed analysis, but also what role semantic characteristics, mentioned in several places but not given prominence, played in this process. The analysis of embedded *wh*-clauses as interrogative is not unproblematic on formal grounds, for example (cf eg Givón 1993: II,262ff). A more explicit general discussion of the formal *vs* semantic aspect of clause types would thus have helped to put the approach adopted here into perspective.

Chapters 3–6 deal with the interrogative, exclamative, free relative and bound relative types, respectively. Each of these chapters has a similar structure, providing a thorough description and discussion of the following phenomena: the form of the *wh*-phrase; the possibility of preposed elements (percolation of the *wh*-feature); the occurrence of simple *vs* complex phrases; the syntactic functions of the *wh*-phrase within the *wh*-clause; the form of the *wh*-clause as such and its constituency in a matrix clause; movement of the *wh*-module; and an account of which elements license the respective *wh*-clauses.

According to the *Brown* Corpus data, bound relatives are the most frequent type (54 %), followed by free relatives (24 %), interrogatives (21 %) and exclamatives (<1 %). What they all have in common is that the clause contains a *wh*-module (minimum unit of a potentially larger *wh*-phrase) that appears *initially* in this or a higher clause (*wh*-feature); that the *wh*-phrase has a syntactic function within its clause, ie is not a simple conjunction-like connective; and that a gap is present from where the *wh*-phrase has moved (cf *tell me who you love*). The differences lie in formal details, which can often be linked to the functions the clauses fulfil. The four clause types make use of a different range of *wh*-words and phrase structures, exclamatives and bound relatives being the most restricted types, the former using only *what* and *how* and the latter employing only three *wh*-module structure patterns. Preposed elements (eg *on the basis of what knowledge*) are not permitted in free relatives, while they are common in bound relatives; interrogatives and – in particular – exclamatives only rarely allow them. The range of syntactic functions performed by *wh*-phrases is similar in all four types, but the preferences for one or the other function differ (inter-

rogative and free relative: adverbial; exclamative: subject predicative; bound relative: subject). Only interrogatives and exclamatives can function both as main and subordinate clauses, whereas free relatives are always incorporated into their matrix clause, and bound relatives form a constituent together with their antecedent. Interrogative main clauses (with *wh*-phrase other than subject) exhibit subject-predicator inversion, which can as a rule distinguish them from main clause exclamatives. In subordinate clauses, however, word order does not provide a clue, which makes the distinction between interrogatives, exclamatives and free relatives harder to draw. A peculiarity of interrogatives in contrast to the other types is that it is the only one that freely admits a *to*-infinitive clause. With the exception of bound relatives, which are part of a larger constituent, the syntactic functions realized by the *wh*-clauses are again similar: they fulfil a nominal function, interrogatives and exclamatives preferably occurring as direct objects and free relatives as adverbials.

Despite the differences listed above, there is considerable overlap between the clause types with regard to the *wh*-items, phrase and clausal patterns used, and the phrasal and clausal syntactic functions, so that clear structural distinctions are problematic (cf the discussion of gradience, fuzziness, ambiguity and merger in section 2.6). Thus, Chapters 4–6 also contain sections on demarcation problems between different clause types, namely between (i) interrogative and exclamative, (ii) interrogative and free relative, and (iii) free and bound relative. The last case is one of potential merger, with no really reliably distinguishing structural tests available, while various tests can be used for the first two, such as meaning (for i) or type (for ii) of *wh*-word, word order possibilities, insertion of *what a*/*very* (for i), number concord (for ii), preposed prepositions (for ii) etc. It also becomes clear at various points throughout the book that semantic aspects play a considerable, sometimes decisive role, such as the *wh*-word expressing unspecified information (interrogative) or degree (exclamative), question- vs answer-orientation, or the semantics of licensing predicates. Given the theoretical concerns of the study, and also for the benefit of the reader, it would have been a helpful idea to devote a complete chapter to a discussion of the categorization problem in its various aspects. This could have contained a concise overview of the similarities of and differences between the four clause types (ie the useful chapter-final summaries reworked in a comparative perspective) and the demarcation-problem sections from Chapters 4–6, rounded off by a more exhaustive general treatment than is presently found in section 2.6.

The short final chapter in fact concludes with 'remarks on indeterminacy', highlighting the importance of this point and belying its somewhat scattered treatment throughout the book. The other aspects raised in the conclusion are

issues of theoretical or descriptive importance that the study has contributed to, such as the correlation between percolation possibilities and clause types, the landing site of the *wh*-phrase (pre-S, except in the case of bound relatives), preposition fronting/stranding in connection with percolation tendencies, and of course the clause type distinction as such. This conclusion again underlines the great strength of this study, namely the elegant integration of theory and data-based description.

References

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Grimshaw, Jane B. 1985. *English* wh-*constructions and the theory of grammar.* New York/London: Garland Publishing.

Hirschbühler, Paul.1985. *The syntax and semantics of* wh-*constructions*. New York/London: Garland Publishing.

Linda Ehrsam Voigts and **Patricia Deery Kurtz**. *Scientific and medical writings in Old and Middle English: An electronic reference*. CD-ROM. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2001. ISBN 0-472-00279-1. Reviewed by **Peter Grund**, Uppsala University.

The field of English vernacular scientific writings from the Middle Ages has long been a neglected area of study, mainly because the vast number of texts is only available in their original manuscript format. The electronic research tool provided by Voigts and Kurtz (henceforth: *eVK*) is a substantial contribution to this field of research. The *eVK* makes available previously inaccessible material that is of importance not only to editors of medieval manuscripts, cataloguers, and students of scientific history, but also to researchers and students interested in language history, and the development of English scientific prose.

The *eVK* provides a catalogue of incipits (15–20 first words) of scientific texts written in English. The periods included are slightly more limited than the title indicates: scientific writings from the Old English period derive mainly from the 10th and 11th centuries, and the Middle English writings come from

the end of the 14th century and the 15th century (in the period in between, scientific texts were the domain of Latin and French). The CD-ROM comprises an impressive number of manuscripts and texts contained in the manuscripts: almost 1,200 manuscripts have been included and more than 8,000 entries are found in the *eVK*. Admirably, the compilers have followed the medieval conception of 'science' and have consequently included areas of so-called pseudo-science in the collection, such as alchemy and astrology, as well as disciplines of science in the modern sense of the term, such as medicine and astronomy. The type of texts comprised by the CD-ROM reveals the meticulousness of the compilers in assembling their material: simple recipes and notes as well as learned tracts and treatises, written in prose as well as verse, have been recorded. Regrettably, the compilers have decided to limit their recording of recipes, but this strategy is understandable since recipes of various kinds bulk large in the extant body of Middle English scientific writings.

The incipits of the texts have been modernised into standard American to simplify searches, removing such complicating factors as spelling variation. The text entries are amply cross-referenced. Studies or editions of the manuscript or the text are cited in the entries and are listed in an appended, voluminous bibliography. For example, references are given to Thorndike and Kibre (1963), connecting the vernacular text with a Latin source or Latin tradition. Furthermore, prologues and the main body of text have been given separate entries. This strategy facilitates the identification of texts, since prologues often have a transmissional history of their own.

The database of incipits can be searched automatically by key words, and various Boolean and wild card search options are available. The data obtained in the search can be processed by different modes of sorting, including sorting by order in the manuscript, by author, or by reference to Thorndike and Kibre (1963). In addition, the CD-ROM provides searchable indexes of authors, manuscripts, titles, subjects, and translators. These indexes give valuable insights not only into the dissemination of texts and the structuring of whole manuscript codices, but also into patterns of vernacularisation in different subjects.

Although the array of possible searches and sorting options is impressive, the user sometimes encounters problems. It is very difficult to navigate between some of the indexes and search options since no simple *return* or *back* option is provided. In addition, on occasion the user is advised to return to the content page, when he or she wants to go from one index to another, instead of being able to navigate between the two by the help of the options in the drop-down tool bar. There are three saving slots that help the user to return to earlier

searches, if saved, but these slots are not always of help. The saving option is not available for, eg, the title index. Consequently, if several similar titles are listed that the user wishes to check, the search for the title will have to be repeated, after the first title has been followed up. Furthermore, if the search has been sorted, the sorting is not retained in the save, but must be performed again when the saved search is re-consulted. In the case of the sorting mode, which provides a large number of valuable options, the user is left to experiment for herself or himself, since explanations of the options are not provided and the terms are not always self-explanatory.

The level of transcription accuracy of the incipits is very high in the instances that I have spot-checked against the original manuscripts. However, as is inevitable in a work of this size, there are inaccuracies. Minor transcription errors appear in eg Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 1490 (f 93r)[1] 'there' > *eVK* 'here', and Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R. 14. 44 (Part IV, f 15v) 'this' > *eVK* 'the'. Whereas these forms are unlikely to cause problems for searches, there are items that may complicate searches and identification: MS Ashmole 1490 (f 162r) 'then' > *eVK* 'thou', Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O. 2. 33 (Part II, f 1r) 'donum' > *eVK* 'domum'[2], Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 226 (f 45r) 'sal preparate' > *eVK* 'saltpeter preparate'. In a few incipits, the modernisation strategy in the CD-ROM seems to have led to misconceptions: Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 226 (f 24v) 'lesyn' (obsolete *leese;* related to Present-day English *lose)* > *eVK* 'lessen', (f 37v) 'Inow' (Present-day English *enough)* > *eVK* 'now', (f 43r) 'to for' (=*tofore;* related to Present-day English *before)* > *eVK* 'to for', British Library MS Sloane 3747 (f 117v) 'ethremogenies' (related to Present-day English *heterogeneous;* see MED sv *ethromogenie)* > *eVK* 'other medicines'.[3]

As mentioned above, the *eVK* contains a remarkable number of texts. It has been the strategy of the compilers to include even post-medieval texts, if the texts may be suspected to be of medieval origin. This strategy has led to the inclusion of a large number of 16th and some 17th century writings, not necessarily of medieval origin. This inclusiveness makes the CD-ROM valuable also for researchers of scientific texts in English from later periods, since it provides information on texts written in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the vernacularisation of medieval texts in the Early Modern English period. For example, *eVK* records a large number of post-medieval translations of *Medulla Alkemiae*, allegedly written in 1476 by George Ripley. To my knowledge, these writings have never been systematically recorded before. Considering the large number of manuscripts comprised in the *eVK*, it seems 'picky' to point to the very few omissions that exist. For alchemical writings, the bibliography provided by

Singer (1928, 1930, 1931) is cited extensively. However, not all of the Middle English texts recorded by Singer are included in the *eVK*, as eg British Library MS Harley 3542, containing a version of the pseudo-Albertan treatise the *Mirror of Lights*.

It is also unclear in some cases of attribution whether the compilers of the *eVK* disagree with earlier attributions of texts to specific authors or whether attributions have been omitted for other reasons. For example, British Library MS Sloane 2 128 contains a Middle English version of the alchemical treatise entitled *Semita Recta*, and is listed as such in Singer (1928: 24–25), whereas the *eVK* forgoes the attribution. Furthermore, the choice of subject or genre designation of some texts is unclear. For example, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 226 (ff 110r–113r) is described as a collection of recipes on medicine, bloodletting etc, although all the recipes are alchemical apart from one culinary recipe; and (f 96r) is described as a lapidary, although the text is an alchemical tract or recipe (cf Singer 1928: 155).

The *eVK* was originally planned as a book and envisaged as a vernacular counterpart of and a supplement to the catalogue of Latin incipits provided by Thorndike and Kibre (1963). In many respects, the *eVK* in its CD-ROM format surpasses Thorndike and Kibre (1963) in its scope and accessibility, and it may have a wider field of application than even imagined by the compilers, as shown above. Furthermore, the price of USD60 is surely a bargain for a CD-ROM of this quality and content. Although some of the aspects noted earlier detract from the overall excellence of the CD-ROM, the *eVK* is an indispensable and invaluable research tool for anyone working in the field of scientific writings in English from the Middle Ages.

Notes

1. I refer to the manuscripts in the following way: 'f' stands for *folio* or leaf; the number given is the folio number, and 'r' or 'v' refers to the front (recto) or back (verso).
2. 'donum' is Latin for *gift*, and 'domum' is Latin for *house* or *home*.
3. This phrase is followed by a question mark showing that the compilers are uncertain about their interpretation.

References

MED=*The Middle English dictionary.* Http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med/. (As accessed 2002.)

Singer, Dorothea Waley. 1928. 1930. 1931. *Catalogue of Latin and vernacular alchemical manuscripts in Great Britain and Ireland, dating from before the XVI century.* Vols. 1–3. Brussels: Maurice Lamertin.

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