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Natalia Knoblock (ed.), *The grammar of hate: Morphosyntactic features of hateful, aggressive, and dehumanizing discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xvi + 293.

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The book *The grammar of hate: Morphosyntactic features of hateful, aggressive, and dehumanizing discourse* by Natalia Knoblock is a most welcome and timely contribution to the debate on the many diverse facets of hateful discourse and verbal aggression (henceforth HATE SPEECH for simplicity), standing out as one of a kind in being the first collection that explicitly sets out to focus its distinctive morphosyntactic features.

Natalia Knoblock's Introduction to the volume presents an excellent state of the art, with a focus on the gaps in scholarly knowledge of the grammatical aspects of hate speech. It admirably dispels the 'oversimplified version of linguistic relativism' (4) and the illusion that getting rid of nefarious linguistic practices will magically wash away the discriminatory attitudes that lie at the basis of those practices. Moreover, Knoblock offers a nicely balanced and self-aware presentation of the goals and limits of the volume, including its potential social impact and practical applications and reminding the reader that the grammatical structures recurrently employed in hate speech must not be confused with the communicative intentions that motivate their use by hateful individuals. All these undisputed merits of the introduction chapter raise expectations which, as often happens, are satisfactorily fulfilled in some, but not all the following chapters.

Chapters 1–4, 9 and 10 deal with morphology, in particular with the lexicon-morphology interface; Chapters 5–8 tackle the use of pronouns in dehumanization and infrahumanisation (which is also an important aspect of Chapters 1 and 4); Chapters 11–13 mainly centre on lexical and discourse patterns. Clearly, the order of the chapters is largely inspired by thematic considerations; while this is certainly valuable, the book would perhaps have benefitted from an explicit division in parts such as the one proposed above.

In Chapter 1, 'Animacy and countability of slurs: Shifting grammatical categories', Knoblock scrutinises the use of the words *vata* 'cotton wool' and *ukrop* 'dill' as derogatory terms for opponents and supporters of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution, respectively, in both Russian and Ukrainian. Interestingly, these semantic shifts came about via very different processes (metonymy for *vata*, sound correspondence for *ukrop*), but in both cases, a mass noun denoting an inanimate substance was recruited as a slur for human beings. Also very

interesting is the discussion of the frequent use of plural inflexion in words syntagmatically related to these uncountable nouns. It is a pity, though, that the author does not explicitly address the contrast between purposefully dehumanising lexical selection and the aforementioned mismatches in grammatical agreement, which by treating the referents concerned as countable individuals would appear to enact their (partial) rehumanisation, and therefore to indicate that, subconsciously, even the most heated haters cannot help conceiving of the opposing faction as human beings.

Chapter 2, 'Language aggression in English slang: The case of the *-o* suffix', by Elisa Mattiello, examines the potential for verbal aggression of the English suffix *-o* from a morphopragmatic perspective (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994), combining a lexicographic study with quantitative and qualitative corpus-based investigations. The methodology and analysis are generally solid, except for two aspects. First, Mattiello's core hypothesis is that the meaning of *-o* is essentially derogatory (35), but the lexicographic analysis is said to only focus those senses that 'revolve around aggressive languages' (39): in this way, uses of the suffix that could (potentially) falsify the hypothesis were excluded since the beginning. Second, the author's ranking of the derision, criticism and insult functions of *-o* as 'increasing degrees of verbal aggression' (55) would have deserved more detailed discussion. Otherwise, the argument is theoretically sound, and the findings support the aforementioned hypothesis.

In Chapter 3, 'Adj+*ie/y* Nominalizations in Contemporary English: From Diminution to Pejoration', Elizaveta Tarasova and José Sánchez Fajardo explore the cognitive link between diminution and pejoration. The chapter is potentially innovative in proposing, like Mattiello's, an integrated lexicographic and corpus-based approach. It is however not convincing in several respects. Methodologically, the semantic decomposition into features performed for 63 English derivatives in *-ie/-y* is illustrated with a single example, so its merits cannot be evaluated. Theoretically, different levels of analysis (cognition, pragmatics, semantics and morphology) are not always accurately distinguished. As regards the argumentation, several proposals that the authors claim to have 'demonstrated' look rather like their own assumptions. Clear examples are the general idea that A>N nominalisation always involves the ellipsis of a noun and the more specific one that the 'fluffy toy' sense of *softie* (which is not even recorded in dictionaries) is conceptually prior to both the 'weak' and the 'sensitive' meaning of the same word.

In Chapter 4, 'Grammatical gender and offensiveness in Modern Greek slang vocabulary', Katerina Christopoulou, George Xydopoulos and Anastasios Tsangalidis present an interesting and theoretically well-embedded analysis of pejorative nominal suffixes in Modern Greek and the effects of gender shifts in such formations. Based on a questionnaire designed to collect native speakers' intuitions, the authors demonstrate that (i) augmentative affixes are more prone to increase the pejorative effect of the derivative than diminutive ones, (ii) cumulation of affixes further increases the perceived pejoration and (iii) gender shifts are also associated

with pejoration, (iv) especially when the shift is to the feminine gender. The latter finding is straightforwardly explained with the strongly patriarchal mentality that pervades Western societies.

Chapter 5, 'Unseen gender: Misgendering of transgender individuals in Czech' (Jonáš Thál and Irene Elmerot), addresses the use of pronouns and inflexion for de- or infrahumanising transgender people in the Czech media. The theoretical background is somewhat weaker than in the previous chapters, and the use of the linguistic terminology is often imprecise. On the other hand, two merits of the paper are that it singles out a clear set of research questions and hypotheses (which are then systematically checked in the discussion and conclusion sections) and that the corpus design is very well thought out, being informed by the purpose of systematically comparing the morphosyntactic strategies used for de-/infrahumanisation by in-group and out-group speakers and their respective frequencies. In all, the main finding of the paper is that, in Czech, de-/infrahumanisation is more prominently realised inflectionally and lexically than through the use of neuter pronouns.

In terms of general evaluation, more or less the opposite of the above may be said of Chapter 6, 'The neutering neuter: The discursive use of German grammatical gender in dehumanization' (Miriam Lind and Damaris Nübling): the paper is well-embedded within the framework of Frame Semantics (Fillmore 2006), but the research questions and hypotheses, the presentation of quantitative findings and the progression of the argument are not particularly clear (including a puzzling shift from raw to per cent frequencies as the authors move from the first to the second section of their corpus). The main conclusion of the paper, viz., that extralinguistic/grammatical gender mismatches in German illustrate 'how deeply ingrained cultural meaning is into the language system' (137) is interesting in itself but certainly not new.

Among the papers that (mainly) deal with dehumanisation, Chapter 7, 'Neutering unpopular politicians: The neuter gender and 'It' as a dehumanizing grammatical metaphor' (Natalia Knoblock and Yaroslava Sazonova), stands out in terms of analytical and terminological accuracy. Particularly valuable is the theoretical positioning of the authors' analysis of Ukrainian political discourse with respect to the fields of linguistics and social psychology. Their most interesting conclusion is that conscious manipulation of extralinguistic/grammatical gender mismatches is especially meaningful when the language would permit more than one agreement option. On the downside, throughout the chapter, one senses a discontent with discriminatory linguistic practices directed at Volodymyr Zelensky which does not emerge from the discussion of discourse about Vladimir Putin. While this is perfectly understandable in view of the current geopolitical situation, such attitudes should ideally not come through in an otherwise objective scientific publication.

While a few examples of dehumanisation in racist and sexist speech are also discussed, Chapter 8, 'The power of a pronoun' (Linda Flores Ohlson), mainly addresses the views voiced by fictional characters about the human or non-human status of monsters (especially, zombies). It is not clear to me how this topic fits the

general goals of the volume, and indeed the focus of the chapter and the analytical tools it avails itself of are not linguistic in nature. Accordingly, the main argument – that humans need the monstrous to define themselves – although certainly interesting, concerns psychology and literature rather than language.

The focus shifts back to grammar in Chapter 9, ‘Is play on words fair play or dirty play? On ill-meaning use of morphological blending’, where Natalia Beliaeva investigates English morphological blends in which one lexical formative is a proper name. The paper is theoretically and methodologically very sound; it presents a convincing psycholinguistic argument to the effect that blending has a significant language-aggression potential and shows that this is particularly true of name blending, especially when the referent is a political personality. The only desideratum that is left unfulfilled is that a few more actual examples could have been reported to support and exemplify the author’s analysis.

The focus remains on compounds in Chapter 10, ‘Expressive German adjective and noun compounds in aggressive discourse: Morphopragmatic and sociolinguistic evidence from Austrian corpora’, by Katharina Korecky-Kröll and Wolfgang Dressler. Their comparison of German compound adjectives and nouns is remarkably well-embedded within the relevant literature (covering morphology, pragmatics and sociolinguistics). The flow of the argument is sometimes hard to follow, due to some ellipses and sudden shifts in focus between nominal and adjectival formations (especially in Section 10.3, which could fruitfully have been divided into two subsections). Otherwise, particularly welcome aspects of the chapter are the explicit definition of aggressive discourse and distinction of different types thereof, as well as the discussion of the prosody of expressive compounds. The finding that compound adjectives are less common than nouns in verbal aggression is convincingly explained with the argument that, syntactically, the former are unlikely to occur outside assertive speech acts.

Like Chapter 8, Chapter 11, ‘Kill the invaders’: Imperative verbs and their grammatical patients in Tarrant’s *The Great Replacement*’ (Robert Bianchi), is very interesting and makes a pleasant read, but only marginally relates to the overarching topic of the volume. The fact that it focuses on the usage of one specific morphological form (the imperative) of ‘violent’ verbs in the monstrous pamphlet of fascist terrorist Brenton Tarrant does not automatically entail that it is a paper about grammar or even about the grammar–pragmatics interface. Bianchi’s discussion of Tarrant’s exhortations as a means to deny the (perceived) out-group’s right to life, assert their own in-group’s identity, and establish themselves as a leader is undoubtedly convincing. The chapter, however, does not add much to our knowledge of THE GRAMMAR of hate.

From the standpoint of Construction Grammar, where, by definition, any form-meaning pairing is a grammatical construction, Chapter 12, ‘I am no racist but...’: A corpus-based analysis of xenophobic hate speech constructions in Danish and German social media discourse’ (Klaus Geyer, Eckhard Bick and Andrea Kleene), is indeed a paper about grammar. With satisfactory theoretical embedding and descriptive completeness, the authors examine the use of the Danish and German

equivalents of the ironic *oh-so* Adjective construction and the common-place lexicogrammatical pattern *I am no racist but...* (and variants thereof). Despite a couple of slips in grammatical analysis (especially concerning the notion of modification and the scope of (alleged) modifiers), the chapter presents an irreprehensible methodology and illustrates its potential for the automatic detection of hate speech. In fact, the main focus is arguably the methodology itself, rather than the analysis of the two constructions; given the authors' concern with the abovementioned practical applications, however, this seems justified.

In Chapter 13, 'Homophobic space–times: Lexicogrammatical and discourse-semantic aspects of the softscapes of hate', David Peterson investigates the discursive construction of homophobic communities by combining insights and methodologies from Critical Geography, Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics. The line of argument is mainly fuelled by the discourse-analytical perspective and culminates in a convincing demonstration of the frustration and utter panic with which heteronormative bigots in the rural communities of the Western United States react to the idea that homosexuality may even exist in 'their' environment. The discussion is supplemented with a careful analysis of the linguistic structure of the examples considered; whether this indeed provides support for Peterson's conclusion depends on whether one accepts Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) notion that a speaker's choice to assign predicate, non-subject argument or modifier status to a given constituent is essentially an attempt to subtract that bit of information from a potential argument.

In all, the volume contains several excellent papers. Virtually all the chapters develop convincing arguments and present interesting findings supported by a solid methodology. Unfortunately, not all focus primarily or even substantially on issues of grammatical structure (to the extent that the very inclusion of some of these papers in a book titled *The Grammar of Hate* might be questionable). Those that do, however, represent important contributions to our understanding of the grammar–pragmatics interface in hateful discourse and are likely to establish themselves as crucial references in this growing field of studies.

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