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Book Review

The Grammar of Interactives, by Bernd Heine, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023; 480 pp., US\$135.00 (hbk).

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After nearly a decade since the recognition of the importance of theticals, traditionally referred to as parenthetical constructions (see [Kaltenböck et al. 2011](#); [Heine et al. 2013](#)), there has been a flurry of research on these linguistic elements across various languages, including but not limited to Romance languages ([Schneider, 2007](#)), Chinese ([Long et al., 2019](#)), Persian ([Kazemian & Amouzadeh, 2019](#)), and Arabic ([Haddad, 2020](#)). However, it appears that theticals still remain relatively understudied and warrant more comprehensive and fresh examination. This lack of interest in studying theticals, particularly those inherent in interaction, has prompted Bernd Heine to undertake writing a new book, “The Grammar of Interactives”, dedicated to these items and analyzing them as a distinct level called interactive grammar (IG) which works alongside sentence grammar (SG) to facilitate successful communication. The book is structured in a cohesive and organized manner, consisting of an introduction, six main chapters, and a conclusion, totaling eight chapters in all. This structure properly presents the book's content by establishing the context and scope in the introduction, delving into the subject matter in the core chapters each exploring a specific theme related to the overall subject, and providing a sense of closure and reflection in the conclusion.

Chapter one starts off by Heine's animadversions on the way mainstream linguistic writings treat interactives. Most of these studies have adopted rather negative labels (e.g., step-child, marginal phenomenon, mixed-bag category, etc.), and some of them even have ignored these important elements in social interactions. Aside from speaking out against traditional attitudes, Heine calls for reconsideration about interactive elements in a comprehensive way. Centering around the notion, definition and properties of interactives, the remaining part of chapter one seeks to introduce and elucidate relevant issues through illustrative examples. By “interactive”, Heine refers to “an invariable deictic form that is in some way set off from the surrounding text semantically, syntactically and prosodically and can neither be negated nor questioned” (7). However, this definition is only a prototypical one, and is not given out to make a discrete category of interactives but rather a graded one. That is, if we consider a radial categorization (c.f. [Lakoff 1987](#)), central members are more prototypical; and the main concern of this book is also with the core members of categories. As to definitional properties of interactives, Heine catalogues seven of them in terms of morphology, syntax, meaning, prosody, indexical status, negation and interrogation.

Chapter two moves beyond establishing definitive main characteristics of interactives and focuses on the meaning components, namely descriptive and expressive meaning. Additionally, this chapter revolves around the differentiation of various types of interactives by examining argument structure. Notions such as structure, argument, predicate, constituent, and thematic role are, typically, considered essential features of SG. However, valence is an intrinsic property of interactives, and without taking their arguments into account, their use is incomplete, this is why Heine argues that the notion of argument structure should be necessarily extended to IG. It is important to note that this extension is not exactly parallel to argument structure in SG. This is because the placement and function of IG are

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anchored and shaped by the discourse situation, and are derivatives of their role in the ongoing discourse. Heine classifies interactives with reference to whether they have one argument (Sender/ Speaker or Theme), two arguments (Sender/Speaker, Hearer) or three arguments (Sender/ Speaker, Hearer, Theme).

Chapter three, tightly connected to the concept discussed in the preceding chapter, forms the centerpiece of the book, as evidenced by its substantial length constituting one quarter of the book, in which ten types of interactives (i.e., attention signals, directives, discourse markers, evaluatives, ideophones, interjections, response elicitors, response signals, social formulae, and vocatives) appear on scene. One notable aspect of this section is the author's clear and easily understandable presentation. Each interactive is introduced with a precise definition and accompanied by illustrative examples. Additionally, Heine provides a detailed analysis of these interactives, focusing on four key attributes: their argument structure, the formation of their individual utterances, distinctive phonological features, and reduplication patterns. To aid comprehension, a concise tabulation of all ten interactives regarding the four features is included. He also acknowledges that the list provided is not exhaustive, and encourages further research to compile a more comprehensive catalogue of interactive expressions.

Chapter four builds on the earlier discussions on synchronic aspects of interactives and delves further into diachronic aspects of interactive grammar. It aims to shed light on the emergence of interactives and explores two key developmental issues within discourse grammar, namely, cooptation and grammaticalization theory. To begin with, chapter four provides a concise literature review on these two mechanisms, and subsequently examines each interactive in relation to these concepts. To this end, Heine shows that grammaticalization theory offers valuable insights into the challenging task of categorizing interactives, as they often defy clear boundaries; instead, they exhibit diverse functions, displaying polysemy and multifunctionality within different contexts.

Chapter five deals with the background discussion of interactive grammar and provides an overview of similar approaches and foundational principles that underlie interactives. In this section, Heine presents a comprehensive review of studies employing a dualistic approach. He extensively explores dualism in discourse grammar and expands this perspective to encompass other related domains such as semiotics, social psychology, and neurolinguistics, which have been largely overlooked in previous investigations. Particularly noteworthy is the revelation of the neurolinguistic implications of interactives, highlighting their strong reliance on the right hemisphere, instead of the traditionally attributed left hemisphere responsible for language comprehension and production, shedding light on the neurolinguistic aspects of interactives. He emphasizes that language is the outcome of a joint process involving both cerebral hemispheres, rather than the exclusive domain of one hemisphere.

Chapter six provides an overdue presentation of the ontological status of interactives, as it should have been addressed earlier. Examining the grammar tradition, the chapter seeks to uncover the authentic essence of interactives, raising significant ontological inquiries and trying to address them. The chapter also, though not deeply, delves into the realm of language contact and the acquisition of interactives. A rather similar treatment can be found in Heine et al (2021) (see Kazemian, 2022). Finally, it briefly touches upon the evolutionary aspects of human language in relation to interactives.

Chapter seven, being relatively short, could have been integrated into other chapters in order to create a more cohesive structure and to mediate the purely reviewing nature of the preceding chapters. Nevertheless, this chapter focuses on two essential inquiries: (a) how to differentiate sentence grammar from interactive grammar, (b) and how these grammars contribute to the organization of discourse. These inquiries provide valuable insights into the boundaries of these two grammars for readers and students of discourse grammar.

The final chapter serves as a culmination of the book, providing a comprehensive overview of the main topics covered in the preceding chapters. Its primary aim is to ensure that readers possess a thorough understanding of the subject matter. Moreover, this chapter includes reflective insights that go beyond mere summarization, offering suggestions for future avenues of research. Heine extends an invitation to readers, encouraging them to remain engaged with the topic and make valuable contributions towards enhancing the proposed framework. By fostering a spirit of collaboration, the book actively invites readers to become active participants in the field.

Evaluation

The monograph, as a whole, exhibits commendable compositional qualities. It is written in a lucid and reader-friendly manner, providing illuminous explanation of the framework. Further, each chapter is accompanied by enlightening introductions and conclusions facilitating the process of reading and leading the readers to work their way through the book. In addition to its formal features, the monograph presents a fresh theoretical perspective in this field, potentially paving the way for numerous prospective cross-linguistic studies.

What makes Heine's work stand out from similar studies is his unique approach. Unlike other studies that predominantly use examples from an Anglo-Saxon cultural context, Heine incorporates a significant number of examples from various other languages, particularly African ones. While some may argue that using English content would be easier for an audience with a similar cultural background, this is not necessarily a drawback. In fact, the inclusion of examples from diverse languages can be seen as a positive step towards breaking free from the dominance of a specific language. By doing so, Heine promotes a cross-linguistic understanding of interactive grammar.



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Among the many strengths of the volume are the specific attention devoted to paralinguistic features of interactives such as their multimodal (e.g. discussion on gesture) and prosodic aspects, that traditionally overlooked in linguistic works on discourse grammar and theticals. While Heine's attention to these aspects and their integration should be admired, I believe they have not been discussed thoroughly and these are amongst areas of the book that readers may wish to have had more information about. Recognizing the significance of these interactive features can yield valuable insights in studies investigating the multifaceted aspects of communication. It holds substantial implications for emerging fields such as speech recognition and machine learning. The development of robust models and training data for machines assumes paramount importance in this new era, as they facilitate not only enhanced human-to-human interaction but also interactions involving robots (Marge et al., 2022). Consequently, delving deeper into the understanding and exploration of these interactive attributes stands to benefit both scholarly endeavors and practical applications in various domains.

What I find myself in disagreement with is the structure of the book, particularly the order of the chapters. The current sequence of chapters seems not to do justice to guide the reader effectively through the content in a logical and cohesive manner. For instance, the book commences with an introduction, but then rather abruptly moves to the intricacies of interactives without adequately providing background information for readers who may not be familiar with this subject matter. Additionally, it is puzzling that from chapter five onwards, the book reverts to a literature review-like approach. Therefore, rearranging specific chapters, namely Chapters 5, 6, and 7, could greatly benefit the book by creating a more seamless flow of ideas. Such restructuring would enable readers to better grasp the conceptual progression and connections between disparate topics. While I acknowledge that the arrangement of chapters is a subjective decision on the part of the author, I believe that reassessing the chapter order has the potential to enhance the reading experience, and improve the overall coherence of the book.

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