



Festschrift for Jack Hoeksema

Preface

John Nerbonneⁱ & Frans Zwartsⁱⁱ

j.nerbonne.work@gmail.com

Groningen, Freiburg and Tübingen

1. Introduction

Some colleagues seem to have come into the world while a lone star stood in the sky, with shepherds abiding in their fields, and where an angel spoke unto them, ... But forget it! That sort of preface couldn't be less fitting for Jack Hoeksema, one of the most modest scientist-scholars in a profession not known to give vanity a wide berth. So, we'll go easy on the hagiography and relate just a bit about the man and a bit about the book being offered to him by colleagues as a sign of their esteem.

2. Semantics and Categorical Grammar

Jack was part of a large informal group exploring formal semantics in the 1980s in Groningen, which also included Johan van Benthem, Alice ter Meulen, Sjaak de Mey, Arie Molendijk, Co Vet, Frans Zwarts, and undoubtedly more (but no formal records were kept of their meetings). During this time, he worked on plurality, conjunction, comparatives, partitives, focus adverbs, and negative polarity --- all classical topics in formal semantics. His dissertation, supervised by van Benthem and Albert Sassen, *Categorical Morphology*, (Hoeksema 1984¹, 2014) focused on derivational morphology and compounding, including the thorny case of synthetic compounding (e.g., *short-legged*, *blue-eyed*), and heralded a long-term curiosity in the breadth of phenomena examined and an unflagging commitment to careful empirical work. This took him beyond the bounds of categorial grammar, but Jack was even then sober about the limits of theoretical perspectives, nicely referring to data collection and preliminary analysis with Pullum's phrase, the "slow agony of empirical endeavor". (Hoeksema & Zwarts 1991:51).

2.1 An American foray

After his dissertation Hoeksema left Groningen for a sequence of shorter-term posts in the US. He served as a sabbatical replacement for David Dowty at the Ohio State University and held a visiting position at the University of Washington, both excellent research universities with top linguistics departments. He was then hired into a tenure-track position at the University of Pennsylvania, then and always listed in the top five departments of linguistics in the US. He left this prestigious position at Penn to help with family matters, and it is typical of Jack that neither of the co-authors of this preface has ever heard him complain of opportunities missed for reasons beyond his control. During the five years in the US, Hoeksema continued to work on semantics.

3. Negative polarity items

In 1995 the Dutch Research Council (NWO) awarded Hoeksema a *Pionier* grant (now referred to as *Vici* grants, following Caesar's *Veni, vidi, vici*), which was in fact the first grant in this category awarded to a Groningen researcher. *Reflections of Logical Patterns in Language Structure and Language Use* was the title of the project, which took the analysis of negative polarity items (such as *not give a fig*, where the negation must be present if the idiomatic meaning is to be preserved) as an impetus. But the project examined a range of theories about how such items depend on negation, examining *inter alia* accounts appealing to negation, or to downward entailing, or non-veridical contexts as well as to accounts relying on both syntax and semantics (Ginnakidou's).

Hoeksema gathered a strong team to conduct the research, including Anastasia Giannakidou, Henny Klein, Charlotte Koster, Hotze Rullman, the late Victor Sánchez-Valencia, Sjoukje van der Wal, Ton van der Wouden. Frans Zwarts participated energetically as well and served as promotor ('professor of record') for the team members earning their PhDs in the project. The group collaborated closely, but engaged the rest of linguistics community as well, setting the tone on the fourth floor of the Harmonie building during the mid-nineties!

4. Corpus Linguistics and Historical Linguistics

Spurred by the enormous growth in computing power and the concomitant drop in the cost of long-term storage, linguists began to exploit large text collections (corpora) in the 1990s, and Jack was an early convert. In fact, all his early corpus-based studies concern negative polarity (Rullmann & Hoeksema 1997; Hoeksema 1998a, 1998b).

Corpus linguistics has become one of his focal research lines in the current century, where his research has exploited the peculiar advantage corpora provide for the investigation of collocations (*blaken van zelfvertrouwen*) and other lexical affinities, exceptionality, and idioms. These have often been extended into historical research, as synchronic accounts left details unexplained. Jack has also proceeded beyond linguistic questions to the level of methods for corpus analysis, where he also added a course to the linguistics curriculum in Groningen.

5. Colleague Hoeksema

Jack is a conscientious professional, a helpful colleague if a new curriculum is needed, or if a search committee needs expertise. He supervised twelve dissertations, served on the most important grant selection committees in the Netherlands, has been a member of the editorial boards of several important scholarly journals, and organized or co-organized numerous conferences. He was a visiting faculty member at the Arizona Summer Institute of the Linguistic Society of America and also at the European Summer School in Language, Logic and Information in Leuven. He held an endowed visiting chair at Swarthmore, one of the top liberal arts colleges in the US, where he continued a collaboration with Donna Jo Napoli. And Hoeksema remained faithful to Groningen in keeping the Groningen *Taalkundige Bulletin* (TaBu) running as editor-in-chief for more than twenty years.

The esteem that his international colleagues hold him in is surely witnessed by the table of contents to this volume, the breadth of expertise it shows, and geographic spread of its authors. But the Festschrift is largely a local matter, and we know Jack's local collegiality best, so we'll concentrate on his role here.

Jack's also been a very personable and supportive colleague on the work floor, always willing to share in his expertise, which was often in demand, and we want to say more about this. During the 1990s the discipline of linguistics grew a great deal in the breadth of its subdisciplines. Psycholinguistics, Neurolinguistics, Language Disorders and Therapies, Language Acquisition and Computational Linguistics all grew in popularity all over the scientific world, and Groningen, where Jack continued to work, was no exception. This led to an excellent community of language researchers, but one where many excellent colleagues had neither the training nor inclination to follow specialized discussions in syntax and phonology. They had devoted their training and further development to techniques of psychological research, neuro-anatomy, pedagogy, theories of learning and computer programming.

When these colleagues needed further expertise in a relevant fine point of grammar, Jack was the very helpful resident oracle. Can directional adverbs be regarded as complements? Is the intervocalic [d] lenition in Dutch (*goeje, kwaaje, ...*) an automatic process or part of lexical phonology? ... The questions could be endless, non-trivial and often not even initially well formulated. After a while, one got used to a classic Hoeksema reaction:

Visitor to the Hoeksema office: “So we’ve noticed that directionals can sometimes be repeated, like adjuncts. *They walked over the bridge along the canal into the intersection.*”

To which Jack might reply, “Do you want the arguments for or against the adjunct hypothesis?”

Jack was *de facto* the local expert for all the “hyphenated” linguists, and has been appreciated both for his wide-ranging knowledge but also for his willingness to distance himself from his own well-reflected views to discuss as well the numerous alternatives that one or another researcher had proposed. If you ran into him months later, he might even return to the subject spontaneously. “What did you decide then about the status of [d]-lenition?”

Given his immense curiosity, the wide range of his interests and his quiet, but tenacious energy, we’re confident that we’ll continue to benefit from his research, and we wish him all the best in whatever new challenges he turns to.

References

- Hoeksema, J. (1984¹, 2014). *Categorical Morphology*. (Routledge Library Editions, Linguistics B: Grammar). London & New York: Routledge.
- Hoeksema, J. (1998a). Corpus study of negative polarity items. *IV-V Jornades de corpus linguistics, 1996-97*. 67-86.
- Hoeksema, J. (1998b). Corpusonderzoek naar negatief-polaire uitdrukkingen. *TABU, 1*, 1-52.
- Rullmann, H. & Hoeksema, J. (1997). De distributie van 'ook maar' en 'zelfs maar': een corpusstudie. *Nederlandse taalkunde, 4*, 281-317.
- Hoeksema, J. & Zwarts, F. (1991). Some remarks on focus adverbs. *Journal of Semantics, 8*(1-2), 51-70.

ⁱ I reminisce about my long acquaintance with Jack in the title footnote to my contribution to this volume, “When less is more”.

ⁱⁱ Jack Hoeksema and I have known each other for fifty years, when he came to work in the Dutch department where I was also teaching. We shared a great interest in formal semantics and the larger role it might play in grammar.