

Are Grammatical Relations Universal?*

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1. Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years, it has been widely assumed by many linguists that grammatical relations are universal in the sense that the notions of subject and object apply to all languages. Among linguists who make this assumption, there are those who claim that they are discrete categories realized in all languages (cf. Perlmutter 1983) and those who claim that they are prototype categories realized in all languages, although the realization in some languages will deviate from the prototype more than in other languages (Keenan 1976; Comrie 1989; Givón 1995). A number of other linguists have disputed this view that grammatical relations are universal (e.g. Schachter 1976). But even linguists who question the universality of grammatical relations generally assume that grammatical relations are universal in the sense that they are fundamentally crosslinguistic notions, abstract notions that exist independently of particular languages, but which manifest themselves or are realized in particular languages. Thus, in asking whether grammatical relations are universal, these linguists are not asking whether grammatical relations are fundamentally crosslinguistic notions; rather they assume they are and in asking whether grammatical relations are universal, they are asking whether these crosslinguistic notions are manifested in all languages. The goal of this paper is to argue that if one adopts a functionalist view of language, then the view that grammatical relations are crosslinguistic notions becomes unnecessary if not false.

The view that grammatical relations are crosslinguistic notions makes sense if one adopts the view of formal linguistics that explanation of language is largely internal to language, whether one takes the view that theoretical notions are theoretical primitives existing independent of cognition (a view implicit in much work in Relational Grammar; Perlmutter 1983), or as components of

innate linguistic knowledge (as in various approaches associated with Chomsky 1981 *inter alia*). This paper argues that if one adopts instead a functionalist view of language, in which explanations for language are not language-internal but involve general functional and cognitive principles, then grammatical relations as a crosslinguistic notion become unnecessary, at most a convenient fiction.

There are four kinds of things that might exist in the domain of grammatical relations, listed in (1).

- (1) a. Grammatical relations in particular languages
- b. Similarities among these language-particular grammatical relations
- c. Functional, cognitive, and semantic explanations for these similarities
- d. Grammatical relations in a crosslinguistic sense

The goal of this paper is to argue that under a functionalist view of language the first three things in (1) exist but that the fourth one is unnecessary. Before proceeding towards the immediate goal of this paper, it is worth considering two other types of linguistic phenomena which might also be viewed as crosslinguistic but where the idea that they are really language-particular is somewhat more intuitive and one that already has its proponents. It is hoped that the discussion of these other phenomena will lend plausibility to my claims about grammatical relations.

2. The Analogy of Word Classes as Crosslinguistic Categories

The first such phenomenon is word classes. Are word classes fundamentally crosslinguistic or are they fundamentally language-particular? Under the view that they are crosslinguistic, word classes can be defined independently of particular languages but they will manifest themselves in particular languages. Under this view, some word classes (such as nouns or verbs) may be claimed to be universal in the sense that they are realized (perhaps) in all languages, while others (such as adjectives) are likely to be claimed to be nonuniversal, in the sense that they are word classes that are realized in some but not all languages. Under the view that word classes are fundamentally language-particular, word classes in each language are defined on the basis of language-particular distributional properties, and while language-particular word classes in different languages may often resemble each other, word classes are fundamentally specific to each language.

The view of word classes as language-particular is widely reflected within the tradition of American Structuralism. For example, Garvin (1948) classified the words (or more accurately word stems) of Kutenai into three morphologically defined classes that he called W, X, and Y. The defining characteristics of these three classes are the distribution of a variety of grammatical affixes in the language, which divide into three classes, those which occur with stems of class X, those which occur with stems of class Y, and those which occur with stems of either class X or class Y. These classes of affixes thus lead to a classification of stems as X, Y, or W, where W consists of stems which do not occur with any affixes. Garvin's word classes are defined by purely morphological criteria, but the same approach can be extended straightforwardly (and often has been) on the basis of syntactic criteria as well. In the case of Kutenai, such an extension leads to splitting up the set of uninflected words into a number of distinct classes on the basis of their syntactic distribution.

Now if one examines the meaning of the words belonging to classes X, Y and W in Kutenai, one cannot but be struck by the extent to which the membership in these classes resembles traditional word classes in English and other languages. The words in class X, for example, have meanings like 'sing', 'die', 'forget', and 'see' and the words in class Y have meanings like 'dog', 'man', 'father' and 'rock'. In short, one is tempted to say that words in class X are 'really' verbs, that those in class Y are 'really' nouns, and that those in class W are a separate class of nonverbal, nonnominal uninflected words. I wish to argue, however, that under a functionalist view of language, such a conclusion is, strictly speaking, incorrect, that words in the Kutenai class X are really just that, namely 'words in the Kutenai class X', and similarly for classes Y and W. In (2) are listed four things that might exist in the domain of word classes, analogous to the four things listed in (1) for grammatical relations.

- (2) a. Word classes in particular languages
- b. Similarities among these language-particular word classes
- c. Functional, cognitive, and semantic explanations for these similarities
- d. Word classes in a crosslinguistic sense

Again, I want to argue that while the first three things in (2) exist, the fourth one, word classes in a crosslinguistic sense, does not, that it is at most a convenient fiction. What *defines* the word classes in Kutenai and in other languages are grammatical properties specific to each language. The particular set of affixes on which the word classes in Kutenai are based are affixes specific to Kutenai. Many of them do resemble affixes in other languages in their

function, but ultimately the affixes themselves are fundamentally affixes in that language: Their forms are clearly language-particular and so are many of the details of their distribution in the language.

The notion of word classes as language-particular notions is a more familiar one than the notion of grammatical relations as language-particular, partly because they played a much more prominent role in the American Structuralist tradition than did grammatical relations. And while one might recognize word classes in a language-particular sense, some people might want to say that there are also word classes in a crosslinguistic sense. After all, when we examine the language-particular word classes in each language, we find striking similarities across languages, particularly in terms of the semantics associated with members of particular word classes, but also in terms of distributional similarities. And when we do find such similarities, it is at least convenient to employ labels that have been employed for similar word classes in other languages. It is thus at least convenient to call words in Garvin's Kutenai class X 'verb', and words in class Y 'nouns'. Such a choice of label makes it easier to remember the labels and to follow discussions of the language, and it does draw attention to the similarities between these word classes and word classes in other languages. But what is at issue here is whether it is anything more than just a matter of convenient labeling. Some linguists are tempted to think that more than convenient labeling is involved and to think of nouns and verbs as somehow existing independently of particular languages and being realized in each language. As one moves away from nouns and verbs, however, such a temptation weakens. If a language has a closed class of five words with meanings corresponding to basic adjectives in English (cf. Dixon 1977), are we to say that that word class is a realization of the same crosslinguistic adjective class as the open class of adjectives in English? Or if a language expresses meanings similar to those of adjectives in English by words with properties very similar to verbs in the language but still identifiable as a subclass of verbs, are we to say that that subclass of verbs is a realization of the same crosslinguistic adjective class? And if we are not sure what to say in such cases, are we to view the matter as a substantive issue or as merely a terminological one?

If one views word classes as discrete crosslinguistic notions, then these questions are substantive questions, and there is a true answer 'yes' or 'no' in each case. If one views word classes as language-particular notions, these questions are purely terminological; it doesn't really matter what we call them. An intermediate view is that word classes are crosslinguistic notions that involve prototypes. Under this view, the question of whether a word class in a language is an instance of the crosslinguistic word class is a substantive question, though in the kind of borderline cases mentioned, the answer will not be either 'yes' or

'no' but rather something more like 'sort of'. I will return to the prototype view in section 7 below.

3. The Analogy of Phonemes as Crosslinguistic Categories

Similar observations can be made about the notion of specific phonemes. Analogous to the above, there are four things that might be said to exist in the domain of phonemes, listed in (3).

- (3) a. Phonemes in particular languages
- b. Similarities among these language-particular phonemes
- c. Functional, cognitive, and articulatory explanations for these similarities
- d. Phonemes in a crosslinguistic sense

In the case of phonemes, there is less of a tendency to think of them as crosslinguistic entities. Rather, phonemes are generally thought of as fundamentally language-particular, since the precise phonetic domain associated with a phoneme and the rules determining the distribution of its allophones are again, despite some crosslinguistic patterns, ultimately language-particular. Thus it is a little strange to ask whether the phoneme /p/ in English and the phoneme /p/ in French are instances of the same crosslinguistic phoneme. And it is particularly strange to ask what in Thai is an instance of the (crosslinguistic) phoneme /p/, whether it is the aspirated phoneme or the unaspirated phoneme. Even saying that both are nonprototypical instances of the crosslinguistic phoneme /p/ is odd.

A crosslinguistic notion of grammatical relations is much more widely accepted than a crosslinguistic notion of phoneme. In fact, grammatical relations are so often thought of in crosslinguistic terms that it might not be immediately obvious what is meant by language-particular grammatical relations. However (ignoring grammatical relations at other than the clause level), if we consider all of the clauses in a language (in so far as such makes sense) and consider all of the pairs consisting of a clause and a nominal argument of that clause, we find that such pairs of elements fall into a number of classes according to the morphosyntactic properties of the language. I illustrate this in the next section with a rather simplistic description of language-particular grammatical relations in English.¹

4. Language-Particular Grammatical Relations in English

My treatment of grammatical relations in English in this section is similar in spirit to Garvin's approach to word classes in Kutenai discussed above. It will, however, be rather sketchy, and is intended to give an idea of what it means to define grammatical relations in a language on the basis of language-internal properties, rather than anything approaching an adequate description of grammatical relations in English. Consider how individual rules in English divide clausal arguments into classes. In the case of verb agreement, for example, we can distinguish those clausal arguments that can trigger verb agreement and those that cannot. In (4), for example, the argument *He* triggers verb agreement while the argument *them* does not.

- (4) He sees them.

We can thus divide all of the pairs consisting of clauses and clausal arguments into two classes, which we can call Agreement-A and Agreement-B, where the first of these is those arguments which control agreement and the second is those which do not. Thus *He* in the clause *He sees them* is an Agreement-A, while *them* is an Agreement-B. Similarly, *John* in *John sees the dogs* is an Agreement-A but it is an Agreement-B in *The dogs see John*.

Similarly, the case marking system of English (broadly construed to include not only morphological case but prepositions as well) can be viewed as dividing the arguments of clauses into three sets: those which occur without a preposition and occur in nominative form when they are pronominal (Case-A), those which occur without a preposition and occur in accusative form when they are pronominal (Case-B), and finally those which occur with a preposition (and happen to occur in accusative form when pronominal) (Case-C). Thus *Bill* is a Case-A in (5), *him* is a Case-B, and *her* (or *with her*) is a Case-C.

- (5) Bill saw him with her.

And linear order position similarly can, at least as an initial approximation, be seen as dividing arguments into four classes. For example, consider the example in (6).

- (6) John baked Mary a cake before lunch.

We can distinguish four positions in (6), based on the structure of English clauses in general. *John* is a Position-A in (6), *Mary* is a Position-B, *a cake* is a Position-C, and *before lunch* is a Position-D, where Position-A's immediately precede the verb, Position-B's immediately follow the verb, Position-C's immediately follow Position-B's and Position-D's follow Position-B's and C's

if there are any. Unlike Positions A, B and C, more than one element can fill Position D:

- (7) John baked Mary a cake at home before lunch in the wood stove.

And we could extend this to various other grammatical rules that have been shown in the literature to be associated with 'subjects' in English, to distinguish further classes of clausal arguments.²

Now there is a strong pattern of clustering among the three grammatical dimensions in English that I have mentioned here (as well as others based on other syntactic constructions). The set of Agreement-A's, the set of Case-A's and the set of Position-A's are largely identical. This is what is normally called 'subjects' in English. Similarly, the set of Case-B's largely corresponds to the union of the Position-B's and Position-C's. These are what are normally called 'objects' in English. And the set of Position-D's largely corresponds to the set of Case-C's. These are what are often called 'obliques'.

But there are some mismatches. For example, the element *last night* in *I saw her last night* is a Position-D, but does not exhibit the properties of a Case-C, unlike other Position-D's. There are various ways to show that it is a Position-D, not a position-C. These correspond to traditional arguments that *last night* is not a second complement of the verb, but rather an adjunct (these include the fact that other Position-D's can freely be added before it, something not possible with Position-C's). While there are a variety of descriptive approaches to such mismatches, we can say that *last night* is a nonprototypical oblique in that it exhibits all of the properties of obliques except for the absence of a preposition. Note that while I have chosen to employ the labels 'subject', 'object' and 'oblique', this is only for mnemonic purposes. I intend these here solely as labels of grammatical relations in English, defined in terms of specific English morphosyntactic properties.

5. Similarities and Differences among Language-particular Grammatical Relations

We could apply a similar procedure to other languages, and identify the grammatical relations in these other languages, though in each case the defining characteristics of the grammatical relations would be language-particular. And we would find that languages differ in the kinds of morphosyntactic criteria that are relevant. Thus, although agreement, case, and position are all relevant in English, for each of these there are clearly languages for which that criterion is irrelevant. And even when two languages employ similar criteria, the languages

will differ in the details. We will also find that many languages do not exhibit the degree of clustering that we find for English, where the classification of clausal arguments by different criteria tends to crossclassify to a greater extent rather than falling into a clear set of clusters. Many such languages have been the subject of extensive discussion in the literature since it is not immediately clear how to apply a model of grammatical relations that works well for English. One approach to such cases is to appeal to multiple levels, to distinguish 'underlying' or 'initial' grammatical relations from 'surface' or 'final' ones (cf. Perlmutter 1983). Another approach to some cases is to describe them in terms of competing systems of relations, such as descriptions of split ergativity in terms of both a subject-object contrast and an absolutive-ergative contrast, or descriptions in terms of 'semantic' versus 'syntactic' versus 'morphological' dimensions. Yet another approach applicable in some cases is one in terms of prototypes.

Despite some of these deviations for the typical patterns, there clearly are typical patterns, strong similarities among the grammatical relations in different languages. One can easily imagine grammatical relations in languages differing from each other to a much greater extent than they do. In the domain of morpheme position, for example, there is far less crosslinguistic similarity. When one identifies the third position for prefixes preceding the verb stem in a morphologically complex language, one doesn't think of the notion of 'third position for prefixes' as a useful crosslinguistic notion. Rather it is clearly a language-particular notion. And the reason for this should be clear: there is very little similarity in the morpheme classes that can occur in the third position for prefixes across languages. While it may take some creativity to imagine the possibility of languages differing in their grammatical relations to the same extent, such is clearly a logical possibility that we don't happen to find.

Having observed the strong crosslinguistic similarities among language-particular grammatical relations, there are now a number of different moves linguists can make. If they choose to apply the same labels to similar grammatical relations in different languages, either they do so because they are convenient labels, or they do so with the intent of claiming that the similar grammatical relations are to be *explained* in terms of their being instances of the same crosslinguistic grammatical relations. The logic of the argument in the latter case is a familiar one in generative theory. We observe that grammatical relation G_1 in language L_1 has properties $P_1, P_2, \dots, P_N$. We similarly observe grammatical relation G_2 in language L_2 with properties $P_1, P_2, \dots, P_N$. And similarly for languages L_3, L_4 and so on. If we say that G_1, G_2 , etc. are all instances of a crosslinguistic grammatical relation G , and we say that G is associated with properties $P_1, P_2, \dots, P_N$, then this will 'explain' the fact that each of the

particular grammatical relations in the individual languages has these properties. This is the standard approach to explanation in formal linguistics. Some linguists would go a step further and claim that G , with the specific properties in question, is part of the innate linguistic knowledge of humans.

An alternative view is that the similarities among grammatical relations in different languages are themselves reflections of deeper functional and cognitive principles that interact at the level of language change to cause languages to be similar to each other in the ways they are. My goal in this paper is not to argue for such a view; there is an extensive functionalist literature proposing functional and cognitive principles of this sort.³ My goal instead is to argue that *if* one takes such a functionalist view, the need to posit crosslinguistic grammatical relations disappears. Since the only thing that might have led us to posit such crosslinguistic grammatical relations was to *explain* the similarities among language-particular grammatical relations, and since the explanation for those similarities is, by assumption, deeper functionalist and cognitive principles, such crosslinguistic notions become superfluous. The labels remain useful for similar grammatical relations in different languages, but the choice of labels is entirely one of convenience, and ultimately questions of what label to use are terminological.

6. Four Problem Cases of Grammatical Relations

It is worth discussing very briefly four 'problem cases', instances of languages which deviate from the prototype to an extent that has led to competing 'analyses' in the literature of grammatical relations in the language. These four cases are Dyrbal (a syntactically ergative language), Acehnese (a split intransitive language), Cree (illustrating the general problem presented by the inverse construction in Algonquian languages), and Cebuano (illustrating the general problem of Philippine languages). In all four cases, there are competing analyses in the literature, competing answers to the question "What, if anything, are subjects in this language?" Some of this literature is formally-oriented; under the assumptions of formal linguistics, such questions make sense, and if there are unresolved difficulties settling these disputes, I would claim that they are artifacts of a formal approach. But stands on such questions are often taken by linguists whose work otherwise reflects a functionalist orientation, and the discussion by these linguists often seems to reflect an assumption that the matter is more than one of terminology. Much of the literature on these languages

confuses what I claim to be two distinct questions. These two questions are given in (8).

- (8) a. What are the grammatical relations in language X?
 b. What should we call the grammatical relations in language X?

Under the view that grammatical relations are crosslinguistic notions, these two questions are difficult to distinguish, because identifying the grammatical relations in a language under such a view involves choosing how to describe the language in crosslinguistic terms. Under the view that grammatical relations are fundamentally language-particular, the first of these questions is a substantive question identifying to what extent clausal arguments in the language fall into different classes, and in so far as they do, what these classes are and what criteria define these classes. Under this view, the question of what to call the grammatical relations, whether to choose new terms or to use terms that have been used in the description of other languages, is simply a matter of terminology, and has a status little different from deciding whether to write an academic paper in English or French.

6.1. *Grammatical relations in Dyrirbal*

Consider first the example of Dyrirbal. I will not discuss the details of this and the other cases here, since they have been widely discussed elsewhere. The examples in (9) illustrate the ergative case system of Dyrirbal, but, as is discussed in detail by Dixon (1972) (see Comrie 1988 for a summary), the same distinction permeates the syntax of the language as well.

- (9) a. *bayi yaʔa miyanda-nu.*
 that,MASC,ABS man,ABS laugh-NONFUT
 'That/the man is laughing.'
 b. *bayi yaʔa ba-ʔgu-n dʊgumbi-ʔu balga-n.*
 that,MASC,ABS man,ABS that-ERG-FEM woman-ERG hit-NONFUT
 'The woman is hitting the man.'

If one confuses the question of what the grammatical relations in Dyrirbal are with the question of what to call them, then one may confront a dilemma that is represented by competing analyses in the literature. But if one ignores the question of what to call the grammatical relations, then the question of what the grammatical relations in Dyrirbal are is easy. Since the morphological and syntactic rules of the language divide clausal arguments into three fairly well-defined classes, roughly corresponding to absolutive case, ergative case, and

other, then these three classes are the grammatical relations of Dyrirbal, regardless of what we choose to call them. Certainly, the labels 'absolutive', 'ergative', and 'other' are very natural choices but other possibilities exist as well.

A problem arises only if one thinks that identifying the grammatical relations in Dyrirbal involves relating the grammatical relations of the language to crosslinguistic notions of subject and object. Among the possible answers to the question 'What are subjects in Dyrirbal?' are (1) Dyrirbal doesn't have subjects; (2) absolutes are subjects (cf. Keenan 1976); and (3) the notion of subject has only a minor role to play in Dyrirbal (being relevant only to the morphology of first and second person pronouns). If one takes the view that grammatical relations are crosslinguistic notions, then and only then does the choice between these three answers become a substantive one. On the view of this paper, as long as the facts have been accurately described, the question is merely a terminological one.

It is worth contrasting the position I have taken here with respect to Dyrirbal with a superficially similar position taken by Comrie (1988). Comrie provides a nice discussion of some of the problems in applying crosslinguistic terms to Dyrirbal and argues that the difference between competing analyses is terminological; however, the competing analyses he discusses all share the assumption that the P in a basic transitive clause in Dyrirbal is the subject, so the dispute is not about how to employ the term 'subject'. Rather, the three competing analyses he discusses differ in whether the terms 'ergative' and 'passive' are appropriately assigned to basic clauses in Dyrirbal, one view being that they are ergative, a second view being that they are passive, and a third view being that they are neither. Although the dispute surrounds terms other than labels for grammatical relations, the nature of the dispute is clearly similar. Comrie argues that the dispute is unresolvable and that the situation can be best understood in terms of prototypes. He discusses prototypes for passive clauses and prototypes for ergative clauses, and argues that the unresolvability of the dispute arises because the basic construction in Dyrirbal resembles the passive prototype in some respects but is sufficiently different that one might or might not choose to call it a passive, and similarly that it resembles the ergative prototype in some respects but is again sufficiently different that one might or might not choose to call it ergative.

While the issues are discussed by Comrie in terms of the notion 'passive' rather than the notion 'subject', the same sort of issues arise: Just as questions arise as to exactly what it means to employ a term like 'subject' as a cross-linguistic notion, the same applies to terms like 'passive'. Comrie's position differs from the one defended here in that although it treats problematic cases like Dyrirbal as terminological, it still assumes that passive and ergative exist as

crosslinguistic notions, albeit in the form of prototypes. In the view of this paper, terms like, 'passive' and 'ergative' may be convenient labels for similar phenomena in different languages, and one may find instances of phenomena which exhibit some similarity to these phenomena but also some differences, so that a question arises whether these labels *are* convenient labels. But they are no more than convenient labels for similar phenomena so the issue is terminological, not because the cases in question deviate from some prototype, but because these terms are simply convenient labels for language-particular phenomena and not labels for crosslinguistic concepts. I return to further discussion of prototypes in section 7 below.

6.2. *Grammatical Relations in Acehnese*

The second case is that of Acehnese, discussed by Durie (1987). Acehnese operates on a split-intransitive system, reflected in the examples in (10) and (11).

- (10) a. *gopnyan geu-mat lôn.*
3SG 3SG-hold 1SG
'She holds me.' (Durie 1987: 396)
- b. *gopnyan geu-jak.*
3SG 3SG-go
'She goes.' (p. 370)
- (11) a. *gopnyan ka lôn-ngieng-(geuh).*
3SG IN 1SG-see-(3SG)
'I saw her'
- b. *gopnyan rhët-(geuh).*
3SG fall-(3SG)
'She fell.'

The crucial point of these examples involves the pronominal critics on the verb. The proclitic *geu-* in (10) marks what Durie calls *actors*, while the enclitic *-geuh* in (11) marks undergoers. In other words, the single arguments of nonagentive intransitive clauses exhibit the same grammatical properties as the objects of transitive clauses. And while this type of system for pronominal marking is attested in many other languages (cf. Mithun 1991), Acehnese is unusual in the extent to which the distinction between actor and undergoer permeates the syntax of the language.

Again, on the view of this paper, there is little question what the grammatical relations in Acehnese are. Whatever one calls them, they are what Durie

calls actor and undergoer. If one examines the literature, however, one finds a variety of apparently competing analyses of the language. While Durie himself refers to actor and undergoer as grammatical relations, Van Valin (1993: 50–56) uses Acehnese as an example of a language which he claims *lacks* grammatical relations. He assumes a crosslinguistic notion of grammatical relations that excludes relations like actor and undergoer because of their relatively direct link to semantic roles. Schachter (1984) similarly denies that 'syntactic roles' are relevant to a number of morphosyntactic phenomena in Toba Batak, claiming that the phenomena in question can be characterized in terms of 'semantic roles'.

There are a variety of reasons why I consider the existence of a relatively direct mapping onto semantics as irrelevant to the question of whether grammatical relations are involved. For one thing, Van Valin himself has shown that it is somewhat misleading to characterize actor and undergoer as semantic, since the mapping from semantics onto the actor-undergoer distinction is not a trivial one: e.g. actors are sometimes agents, sometimes experiencers, and sometimes bear some other semantic role. Hence he refers to actor and undergoer as *macroroles*. Another reason to consider actor and undergoer in Acehnese as grammatical relations is that even in languages in which all intransitive arguments are treated like the actor in transitive clauses, the mapping from semantic roles to grammatical relations is in fact quite trivial. It is far from clear that there is any noncircular sense in which the grammatical relations in such a language are any less linked to semantic roles than actor and undergoer in Acehnese are.

However, the primary reason for considering actor and undergoer in Acehnese as grammatical relations is that the distinction is a grammatical one in Acehnese in the sense that it is a distinction that is made in the grammar of the language. In other words, Acehnese makes a distinction in its morphosyntax between two types of clausal arguments. This is a *grammatical* distinction because it has morphosyntactic manifestations in the language. The fact that the assignment to this grammatical distinction may be semantically predictable does not alter its status as a grammatical distinction. If a language were to distinguish three tenses which map trivially onto past, present, and future, we would describe this as a grammatical tense distinction that maps transparently onto the semantics. In languages which make a grammatical distinction between second person masculine and second person feminine we call it a grammatical distinction even though the choice of form is semantically predictable. Thus whether the actor-undergoer distinction in Acehnese involves grammatical relations is a question of whether the language distinguishes the two in its grammar, regardless of whether the distinction is semantically predictable or not. Of course, how

we choose to employ the expression 'grammatical relations' is itself a matter of terminology, but once one recognizes the language-particular nature of grammatical relations in general, there seems to be little reason to not apply the notion to actor and undergoer in Acehnese.⁴

But regardless of whether we call actor and undergoer grammatical relations, the assumption that grammatical relations like subject and object are crosslinguistic notions leads to the separate question of whether Acehnese has subjects and objects. Again, I view this as a terminological issue. While the most natural answer might be that Acehnese has actor and undergoer instead of subject and object, an alternative terminological choice, one in keeping with one of the earliest characterizations of split intransitivity by Sapir (1917), would be to simply call actors and undergoers 'subjects' and 'objects' and thus to say that what is unusual about Acehnese is that it allows intransitive clauses with just an object and no subject. Such a choice of terminology does go against the assumptions that many people make about how to use the terms 'subject' and 'object'. However, I think that it is fair to say that many people believe that this is more than just a convention about how to employ the terms 'subject' and 'object'. In particular, many people assume that subject and object exist as crosslinguistic concepts, and that the terms 'subject' and 'object' are labels for these concepts. But if one rejects the idea that such crosslinguistic concepts exist, it becomes clear that it is merely a matter of convention how people extend the terms 'subject' and 'object' to new languages. Under such a view, there is little reason not to simply apply the terms 'subject', and 'object' to actor and undergoer in Acehnese, as long as one realizes that there is nothing substantive at stake.

6.3. *Grammatical relations in Cree*

The third case I will discuss is that of the inverse construction in Cree. The examples in (12) illustrate two ways of expressing transitive clauses in Cree, a direct construction, illustrated in (12a), and an inverse construction, illustrated in (12b).

- (12) a. *wa-pam-e-w na-pew atim-wa.*
 see-DIRECT man dog-OBV
 'The man [proximate] sees the dog [obviative].'
 (Foley and Van Valin 1984: 333)

- (12) b. *wa-pam-ik na-pe-w-a atim.*
 see-INVERSE man-OBV dog
 'The man [obviative] sees the dog [proximate].' (p. 335)

In addition to the contrast of direct and inverse, third person animate elements in Cree vary for the largely Algonquian-specific morphosyntactic status of proximate versus obviative (where the proximate element is in some sense the more 'topical' one). If we use the traditional terminology of 'actor' and 'goal' we can say that in the direct clause in (12a), the actor is proximate and the goal is obviative, but that in (12b), the actor is obviative and the goal proximate. The form of the verb identifies which participant is which. The direct form in (12a) indicates that the proximate element is the actor and the obviative element the goal, while the inverse form in (12b) indicates the reverse situation.

Although different proposals have been applied to different Algonquian languages, there is a clear sense in the Algonquianist literature that the matter of how to analyse the inverse construction is a pan-Algonquian question, even if the answer might be different for different Algonquian languages. One approach, proposed by Dahlstrom (1991) for Cree, is that the actor is the subject in both direct and inverse clauses. An alternative approach, variants of which are proposed for Cree by Jolley (1982) and by Rhodes (1976) for the analogous alternation in Ojibwa, is that direct and inverse clauses differ in what is the subject: in direct clauses it is the actor while in inverse clauses it is the goal. But both approaches assume that the question of which element in an inverse clause is subject makes sense, that there is a crosslinguistic notion of subject and that we can therefore ask the question of which argument in inverse clauses in Algonquian languages is an instance of this crosslinguistic notion. In other words, both Dahlstrom and Rhodes claim that their respective analyses of what is subject in inverse clauses is the right analysis and that the other analysis (if applied to the languages that they work on) is the wrong analysis. Both assume that one of the two analyses is wrong because they assume that the question of identifying the grammatical relations in Cree and Ojibwa includes deciding what in these languages should be associated with the term 'subject'. Both treat this as a substantive question, apparently because both assume a crosslinguistic notion of subject.

Under the view of this paper, the question of what the grammatical relations are in Cree and Ojibwa can be answered without deciding what if anything to call subjects. It is at least necessary to distinguish proximates from obviative and to distinguish actor versus goal versus other, regardless of what one chooses to call them. But interestingly, this isn't enough. For one thing, Dahlstrom shows that there is a need in Cree to characterize a class of elements

that includes the actor in direct and inverse clauses, but the goal in passive clauses like (13).

- (13) *ki-kosis nipah-a-w.*
 your-son kill-3PASS
 'Your son has been killed.'

(Dahlstrom 1991: 66, from Bloomfield 1934: 88)

While Dahlstrom recognizes the need to characterize this class of elements, she concludes, without argument, that the class of elements in question should be considered 'subjects', and treats this conclusion as a substantive one, rather than simply a choice of terminology. In addition, the characterization of the relation between the proximate-obviative distinction and the contrast of direct and inverse clauses is more complex than what is said above in the discussion of the contrast in (12). In addition to examples like these there are also cases in which both the actor and the goal in both direct and inverse clauses are obviative, illustrated by the examples in (14).

- (14) a. *wa-pam-e-iyi-w-a.*
 see-DIRECT-OBV-3-OBV
 'He [obv] sees him [obv].' (Dahlstrom 1991: 47)
- b. *wa-pam-iko-iyi-w-a.*
 see-INVERSE-OBV-3-OBV
 'He [obv] sees him [obv] [inverse].'

It is clear that in order to describe the difference between (14a) and (14b), we need some notions in addition to the proximate-obviative distinction and the actor-goal distinction. Rhodes' analysis of the corresponding contrast in Ojibwa is that they differ along a third dimension, which is that of subject versus object: He claims that in inverse clauses the goal is subject and the actor is object. But note that as long as we have some label for this distinction, we will have identified the grammatical relations of Ojibwa, and labels other than subject and object would serve this purpose. Dahlstrom implicitly seems to assume an analysis of the clauses in (14) that involves expanding the dimension of proximate versus obviative into a dimension of proximate versus obviative versus *further-obviative* (a distinction which is independently motivated morphologically for many Algonquian languages), and that the clauses in (14) differ as to which of the actor and goal is obviative and which is further obviative. At this point, the two analyses are sufficiently different that there may be a substantive difference between them. It is possible that both will account for the linguistic data equally well but that one of them is closer to the cognitive

representation in the minds of speakers. But the contrast between the two analyses is actually independent of what if anything to call subjects. Although both Rhodes and Dahlstrom assign this term to particular elements in their analysis, in both cases, there are terminologically different analyses which replace the term 'subject' with something else, and in fact there are also terminologically different analyses which employ the term 'subject', but employ it in a different way. The crucial point is that identifying the grammatical relations in these languages is a separate enterprise from deciding what if anything to associate with the term 'subject'.

6.4. Grammatical relations in Cebuano

The last case I will discuss is that of Cebuano, a Philippine language whose situation has been discussed in the literature (cf. Bell 1976, 1983), and whose relevant properties are largely similar to those of a number of other Philippine languages like Tagalog (cf. Schachter 1976, 1977), although some Philippine languages exhibit slightly different facts which may argue for different analyses.⁵

Cebuano has a set of different 'focus'-constructions, including the 'actor' focus and 'goal'-focus constructions illustrated in (15).

- (15) a. *Mi-palit ang babayi sa saging.*
 ACTOR.FOCUS-buy TOPIC woman NONTOPIC banana
 'The woman bought the bananas.'
- b. *Gi-palit sa babayi ang saging.*
 GOAL.FOCUS-buy NONTOPIC woman TOPIC banana
 'The woman bought the bananas.'

Cebuano draws a grammatical distinction between what are traditionally called 'topics' versus 'nontopics'. This distinction shows up in the choice between the noun markers *ang* and *sa* in (15), but also is a fundamental distinction for many syntactic rules. At the same time, Cebuano also distinguishes 'actors', 'goals' and some other relations that are linked semi-directly to semantic roles. This shows up in the focus-prefix on the verb, which shows the status of the topic on the actor-goal-other dimension. It also shows up (as discussed by Bell 1976; Schachter 1976; Shibatani 1988) in a number of other places in the morphology and syntax.

As with the preceding cases, the literature contains competing analyses of the Cebuano contrasts, competing at least in the sense of employing differing terminology and arguing against analyses which employ alternative terminology.

The widespread view of the 'problem' of Philippine languages is well-characterized by the title of Schachter (1976): "The subject in Philippine languages: topic, actor, actor-topic, or none of the above?" This title clearly reflects a view of subject as a crosslinguistic notion and assumes that the problem is that of deciding what in Philippine languages is an instance of this crosslinguistic notion. But note that there is no problem *internal* to Philippine languages in identifying the grammatical relations. I have already identified them; there is a dimension of topic-versus nontopic and a dimension of actor versus goal versus others. The problem is not therefore a problem in identifying the grammatical relations but a problem in deciding how to apply terminology that is widely used for other languages. And because, as Schachter shows, the properties that are associated with subjects in other languages are divided between actors and topics in Philippine languages, there is a real dilemma as to what if anything to call subjects. But on the view of this paper, this dilemma is an artifact of the assumption that grammatical relations are crosslinguistic notions. The Philippine languages have important implications for crosslinguistic generalizations about grammatical relations, since they show the possibility of a type of clustering that is not clearly attested elsewhere in the world. But whether we choose to label something in these languages 'subjects' is a terminological issue.

7. Grammatical Relations as Prototypes

Much of the discussion above is directed at a view of grammatical relations as crosslinguistic notions that assumes that they are relatively discrete, and hence that questions about whether something in a particular language is or is not an instance of that crosslinguistic grammatical relation make sense. An alternative view, proposed by Keenan (1976) and further defended by Comrie (1988) and Givón (1995), is that grammatical relations involve prototypes. On such an approach, notions like subject are viewed as crosslinguistic notions whose prototype is associated with those patterns which are particularly common crosslinguistically, and grammatical relations in particular languages that deviate from this prototype can simply be considered nonprototypical instances of the grammatical relations. This approach does avoid the artificial dilemmas presented by the languages discussed above. In Philippine languages like Cebuano, for example, we can say that there are two highly nonprototypical subject grammatical relations. On this view, what are traditionally called 'actors' in Cebuano are sort of subjects and what are traditionally called 'topic' are also sort of subjects.⁶

But while such an approach might at first seem to 'solve' the problem presented by the sorts of atypical languages discussed above, it actually makes

matters worse. For one thing, it seems to portray grammatical relations in Cebuano as nondiscrete entities. But there is nothing nondiscrete about grammatical relations in Cebuano, at least not as far as the basic facts are concerned. The basic facts can be accounted for in terms of two separate dimensions of grammatical relations, the topic-nontopic dimension, and the actor-goal-other dimension. In other words, if one examines grammatical relations in these languages from a purely language-internal point of view, there is no problem identifying the grammatical relations and no need to describe the system in nondiscrete terms. It is only when we examine grammatical relations in these languages from the perspective of what we generally find in *other* languages that a problem arises and that the temptation to describe these languages in nondiscrete terms arises. This example brings out particularly clearly the difference between language-particular grammatical relations (which are relatively discrete and straightforward in Cebuano) from grammatical relations as a crosslinguistic notion (according to which Cebuano involves nondiscrete grammatical relations because of the extent to which they differ from the crosslinguistic prototype).

What is at issue here can be described in terms of the following two positions. The view espoused in this paper is that although there is a sufficiently strong isomorphism between grammatical relations in many different languages to make it convenient to employ the same label for these grammatical relations in different languages, the degree of isomorphism between Philippine languages and more typical languages is sufficiently weaker that there is not a clear way to assign the familiar labels to the Philippine languages. The alternative view, which I am arguing against, is that there exists, in addition to the similarities and differences noted, a crosslinguistic Platonic concept of 'subject', of which subjects in English are more prototypical and 'subjects' in Philippine languages less prototypical. Note that the essential Platonic nature of grammatical relations as crosslinguistic concepts is not diminished by claiming that they are prototype categories rather than categories with well-defined discrete boundaries. The question of whether they are essentially Platonic is *not* the question of whether they are discrete categories or not, but whether they exist at all outside the minds of linguists.

It is useful to contrast the nature of grammatical relations as a crosslinguistic concept defined by some prototype with the sorts of prototype categories proposed by Eleanor Rosch and others that are claimed to exist as cognitive representations corresponding to the folk-linguistic notion of the 'meaning' of words. According to the latter type of proposal, speakers of a language have prototypes of the sorts of things that words denote (e.g. cats) stored in their heads, and these prototypes play a role in language use. It is also quite possible that in many cases language-particular grammatical relations

involve prototypes and that these prototypes exist in people's heads as cognitive representations underlying their use of particular syntactic structures in their language. But grammatical relations as crosslinguistic prototypes have a very different status. Where are they supposed to exist? Are they also supposed to be cognitive representations that exist in the minds of speakers? What reason is there to believe that such representations exist? And apart from the relatively minor detail that under this view grammatical relations are prototypes rather than discrete categories, how is such a view different from the Chomskyan view that language universals are represented in our heads?

If it is claimed that people have cognitive representations of the crosslinguistic prototype for subject stored in their heads, it is presumably claimed that speakers of Philippine languages in particular have such representations in their heads. But under such a view, how do speakers of Philippine languages come to have such representations in their heads? It is surely very unlikely that they are learned. The alternative is apparently that they are part of innate knowledge. Such a view is not incoherent, but it is essentially the Chomskyan view, and fundamentally different from what I take to be the functionalist view. Let me describe what I take to be the functionalist view. According to this view, languages are shaped by the complex interaction of functional and cognitive principles or 'forces' that play a role in language change, in language acquisition, and in language use. In so far as many languages resemble each other strongly in their grammatical relations, the similarities are assumed to be the result of these functional and cognitive principles. In so far as these properties are functionally and cognitively natural, the process of learning them will be made easier, and hence these functional and cognitive principles will play a role in language acquisition. In so far as not all languages share identical properties, the specific properties of the language already exist in the language prior to language acquisition and are thus to at least some extent learned by children. In addition, these functional and cognitive principles will play a role at the level of language use to lead to particular tokens of usage that eventually become part of the language, thus influencing language change. Because of the cumulative effect of these changes, the set of languages spoken in the world at any given point in time will exhibit grammatical similarities that reflect the effect of these functional and cognitive principles over time.

Note that under the view just described, there are two things that people will have in their heads: specific information about their particular language, including some representation of the grammatical relations of their language, and cognitive properties that correspond to the functional and cognitive principles underlying language in general. And, assuming that the details work out correctly, that is all that needs to be claimed to exist. There will also be

similarities between the cognitive representations of language-particular grammatical relations in the heads of speakers of different languages, these similarities ultimately being due to the fact that they share the same general cognitive properties that correspond to the functional and cognitive principles underlying language in general. But individuals do not store these similarities in their heads; these similarities are similarities among individuals. And there is no place in this view, nor any need whatsoever, for crosslinguistic grammatical relations. They certainly can't exist in the heads of individuals, any more than the similarities among languages can. But where else can they exist, apart from in the minds of linguists? If one adopts a functionalist view of language, such concepts not only become superfluous, but if we assume that such concepts exist and if we try to spell out just where they are, we are led back to an essentially Chomskyan view of language.

8. Is this all much ado about nothing?

Now one question that some might ask is: Whatever the truth of the view I am defending in this paper, is the question any more than a metaphysical question without particular significance to what functionalists, or linguists as a whole, do? Is the question whether grammatical relations exist as crosslinguistic concepts itself ultimately a terminological question? I want to claim that the assumption that grammatical relations exist as crosslinguistic notions leads people to discuss very different sorts of things when they talk about grammatical relations than they might otherwise discuss. First, it leads people to present and defend particular theories of grammatical relations that may be insightful in drawing attention to particular similarities and differences among languages but which are ultimately, on the view of this paper, not really theories at all, but just different metalanguages for talking about the similarities and differences. And second, and perhaps more significantly, it leads to people ignoring grammatical relations in a language-particular sense.

Let me discuss two concrete examples. In a recent book, Palmer (1994) provides a nice summary of much of the literature on grammatical relations, in a way that is quite neutral with respect to many of the issues that distinguish competing viewpoints. But from the very first page of his book, it is clear that Palmer assumes the topic of discussion is grammatical relations in a crosslinguistic sense. Despite the fact that his entire book is about grammatical relations, no mention is apparently ever made of the notion of grammatical relations in a language-particular sense, and one could apparently read and understand the entire book without ever grasping such a notion.

The second example is a chapter on grammatical relations in Givón (1995). The title to this chapter is significant: "Taking Structure Seriously II: Grammatical Relations." As with Palmer's book, Givón's discussion deals entirely with grammatical relations in a crosslinguistic sense, and once again the reader might have little idea what grammatical relations are in a language-particular sense. What is particularly significant in the context of Givón's discussion is that a central theme of this chapter, and of the book in which it occurs, is to argue that linguistic structure should be taken seriously, and that much functionalist work has failed to take structure seriously, and has failed to recognize that linguistic structure does exist in addition to the functional and cognitive principles that are claimed to underlie language. However, I claim that the linguistic structure that exists independently of functional and cognitive principles is not crosslinguistic linguistic structure, as Givón assumes, but *language-particular* structure. Furthermore, I suspect that many other functionalists who question or reject the existence of linguistic structure are really rejecting linguistic structure in a *crosslinguistic sense*. Conversely, Givón's intuition that linguistic structure exists is, on my view, correct, but because he has confused linguistic structure in a crosslinguistic sense with linguistic structure in a language-particular sense, he has drawn the mistaken inference that linguistic structure exists in a crosslinguistic sense.

When we examine the specific arguments that Givón offers in support of his thesis that linguistic structure exists independent of function, we can see that either these arguments argue for linguistic structure in some sense, either crosslinguistic or language-particular, or they actually specifically argue for structure in a language-particular sense. Consider, for example, the following argument by Givón:

If iconicity stands for the functionally-motivated isomorphism between grammatical structures and their paired semantic or pragmatic functions, then what are these functions isomorphic to if grammatical structure is deemed unreal? (Givón 1995: 175)

This argument could equally well be given as an argument for grammatical structure in a crosslinguistic sense or grammatical structure in a language-particular sense. Either way, the argument is that if there is iconicity, there must be something that function is isomorphic to. While Givón assumes that this is structure in a crosslinguistic sense, iconicity can equally well be viewed as an isomorphism between function and language-particular structure. Since the isomorphism that exists between function and structure is not a perfect one, what one finds is slightly different structures in different languages, all of which bear a high degree of isomorphism to the given function. But since these structures

in different languages are bearing a high degree in isomorphism to the same function, they bear a high degree of isomorphism to each other. But because the isomorphisms they bear to the function are not perfect isomorphisms, the language-particular structures are often very similar but not identical to each other. What this illustrates is that Givón's argument that there must be something that function is isomorphic to is satisfied by language-particular structure without positing, in addition, structure in a crosslinguistic sense. The temptation that has led linguists in the past to posit structure in a crosslinguistic sense is driven precisely by the high degree of similarity among structures in different languages, a degree of similarity that leads to using the same labels *for* similar structures in different languages and eventually to the reification of these labels as labels *for* some unified crosslinguistic phenomenon. But, once we recognize that the similarities that lead to these labels are themselves simply the reflection of high degrees of isomorphism between different structures and a given function, then the need for positing crosslinguistic structures should evaporate. Furthermore, it explains what Givón finds so baffling: why people who apparently deny linguistic structure can still at the same time claim that there is iconicity in language: the structure that they are denying is *crosslinguistic* structure, and such a denial is fully compatible with the existence of iconicity between function and language-particular structure.

Furthermore, although many of the examples of iconicity that Givón discusses in his work are phrased in terms of iconicity between function and crosslinguistic grammatical notions, many of the examples of iconicity cited by Haiman (1983, 1985) are very specific manifestations of iconicity in particular languages that are often ones that one does not find repeated in most or even many languages. Such cases very clearly illustrate iconicity as a phenomenon holding between function and language-particular structure rather than between function and crosslinguistic structure.

Consider, similarly, Givón's second argument.

Likewise, if by grammaticalization one means the emergence over time of new morpho-syntactic structures, from paratactic, syntactic or lexical precursors, then what is it that emerges over time, and how real is it once it has successfully emerged, if grammatical structure is deemed unreal? (Givón 1995: 175).

But here it should be even clearer that what emerges from grammaticalization is not crosslinguistic structures but language-particular structures. Although there are many similarities among different instances of grammaticalization, each instance has its own language-particular properties. The structures that emerge by grammaticalization exist in particular languages. Again, because of the fact that the functional factors influencing separate instances of grammaticalization

9. Conclusion

I have argued in this paper against the notion of grammatical relations as crosslinguistic notions, claiming that the explanatory role that grammatical relations play in formal theories is unnecessary in a functionalist approach, that the similarities among languages can be explained directly in terms of functional and cognitive principles that underlie language and which cause languages to be the way they are. A question that might arise is: If functional and cognitive principles explain the similarities among grammatical relations in different languages, then why are there any differences at all? This issue is most directly addressed in the literature on competing motivations (Du Bois 1985, 1987; Haiman 1983, 1985). The general idea is that the underlying functional and cognitive principles, i.e. the motivations, are often in conflict with one another. It is in general impossible to satisfy all of the motivating principles, and differences among languages are due to differences in how the competition among motivations is resolved in particular cases. The differences among grammatical relations in different languages seem to reflect different ways in which functionally similar instances are treated similarly in the grammars of languages. The problem is that there are a large number of dimensions in which particular tokens may be similar to or different from each other, and it is iconic motivations associated with these different dimensions which are in competition with each other. And although there are differences of opinion in the literature regarding this point, there appear to be at least two competing dimensions, one associated with semantic roles, and one associated with pragmatic functions. The discussion by Schachter (1977) in terms of role-related properties and reference-related properties in Philippine languages suggests that these two dimensions resolved their differences in these languages in a way that makes the competing effects of these two dimensions unusually clear. The fact that grammatical relations in other languages tend not to show such a clear distinction of the effects of these two dimensions could be interpreted in a number of ways. One possibility is that one dimension tends to win out over the other in most languages, the semantic dimension winning out most clearly in split intransitive languages, and the pragmatic dimension winning out most clearly in languages like English in which the relationship between grammatical relations and semantic roles is especially complex. Another possibility is that these two dimensions are actually themselves multi-dimensional, at least the pragmatic one, and different pragmatic dimensions are winning out over each other in different languages. There would also appear to be an independent cognitive motivation that leads to the kind of categorization we tend to find in language. For one thing, the degree of discreteness in linguistic categories is much greater

are the same, one finds clear similarities among different instances of grammaticalization, similarities that may lead one to employ the same label for phenomena in different languages. But the answer to the dilemma Givón offers in the above quotation is that what emerges by grammaticalization is language-particular structure and that what is deemed unreal by many people is grammatical structure in a crosslinguistic sense.

Consider the following third quotation from Givón:

The coding instrument called grammar has well-documented, unimpeachable cognitive reality in discourse processing, a reality that can be manipulated and measured experimentally. (Givón 1995: 177).

First of all, the 'coding instrument called grammar' is not grammar in some crosslinguistic sense, but grammar in a language-particular sense, since that coding instrument is different from one language to another. Furthermore, what has "well-documented unimpeachable cognitive reality" is not grammar in some crosslinguistic sense, but the grammar of specific languages. It is the cognitive reality of the grammar of individuals' *own* languages that "can be manipulated and measured experimentally". Grammar in a crosslinguistic sense can never be measured experimentally. Consider finally the following argument of Givón's.

The observable reality of grammar ... boils down to four signal components that can be extracted ... from the stream of speech:

- (3) Observable components of grammatical structure
 - a. Linear order
 - b. Nested hierarchic structure
 - c. Grammatical morphology
 - d. Rhythmics: intonations and pauses (Givón 1995: 177)

I want to comment on just the first of these, since linear order is something that is very much part of the grammar of many languages, but an area of grammar where there is a particularly high degree of crosslinguistic variation. Languages differ immensely in the extent to which linear order is fixed. And among languages in which linear order is fixed, there is immense variation. In fact, it is precisely because of the degree of variation that it is clear that we must recognize the existence of the grammar of individual languages. And while there are well-known instances of crosslinguistic patterns, linear order seems much clearer as a language-particular notion than as a crosslinguistic notion.

than the degree of discreteness in the functional domains related to linguistic categories. For another, languages tend to exhibit a much smaller number of distinctions in linguistic categories than exist in functional domains. Whatever underlies this relative simplicity in linguistic categories increases the amount of competition among different motivations. My general methodological claim is that the search for an understanding of the similarities and differences among grammatical relations in different languages will be impeded if we make the mistake of thinking of grammatical relations as crosslinguistic categories, and will be more successful if we bear in mind that grammatical relations are unique to every language.

Notes

* This paper has its origin in discussion I have had with Tom Givón over a number years, partly in private discussion, partly in public discussion, partly in email discussion on Funknet. A version of this paper was presented at a workshop on grammatical relations organized by Tom Givón and Matt Shibatani in Albuquerque in 1995. A later version was presented to the Department of Linguistics at the University of Oregon in 1996. I acknowledge useful comments from the audience for these two talks. I also must acknowledge particularly insightful comments by Russ Tomlin on an earlier written draft of this paper, though, for reasons of space, I was unable to incorporate all of his good suggestions.

1. See Dryer (1996) for a more detailed illustration of a description of language-particular grammatical relations in Kutenai.
2. Note that everything that is said in this paper about grammatical relations applies equally well to notions like verb agreement and case. Thus, when I talk of defining grammatical English on the basis of phenomena like agreement and case, I realize that these notions too must ultimately be defined in language-particular terms. I assume this process 'bottoms out' with notions of same versus distinct morphological forms.
3. Examples of functionalist literature of this sort include Bybee (1985), Croft (1990, 1995), Du Bois (1985, 1987), Givón (1979, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1995), Greenberg (1966), Haiman (1983, 1985), Hawkins (1990, 1994), Hopper and Thompson (1980, 1984), Silverstein (1976), Thompson (1988), Tomlin (1986). Among these references, those with discussion bearing more directly on explaining grammatical relations include Hopper and Thompson (1980) and the references cited by Croft, Du Bois, and Givón.
4. Actually, Van Valin (1993: 50), while rejecting actor and undergoer as grammatical relations, argues that the grammatical role of pivot that exists in most languages is not universal in the sense that it does not have the same properties in different languages. This position is similar to the theme of this paper in that it recognizes grammatical roles (or relations) as fundamentally language-particular.
5. See also Mulder and Schwartz (1981) and Shibatani (1988) for further discussion of grammatical relations in Philippine languages.
6. Shibatani (1988) specifically defends a prototype analysis of grammatical relations in Cebuano and other Philippine languages.

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