

Article published in:

*J.M.M. Brown, Andreas Schmidt,
Marta Wierzba (Eds.)*

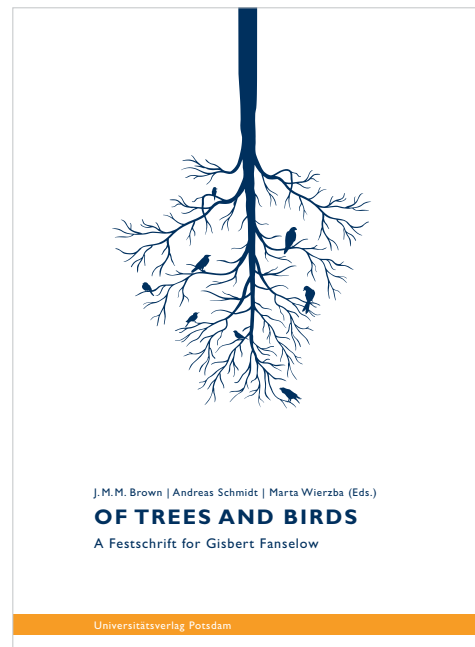
Of trees and birds

A Festschrift for Gisbert Fanselow

2019 – 435 p.

ISBN 978-3-86956-457-9

DOI <https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-42654>



Suggested citation:

Brown, J.M.M. / Schmidt, Andreas / Wierzba, Marta: Preface, In: Brown, J.M.M. / Schmidt, Andreas / Wierzba, Marta (Eds.): *Of trees and birds. A Festschrift for Gisbert Fanselow*, Potsdam, University Press Potsdam, 2019, pp. xiii–xvi.
DOI <https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-43057>

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Preface¹

J. M. M. Brown, Andreas Schmidt, Marta Wierzba

Universität Potsdam

This volume is dedicated to Gisbert Fanselow on the occasion of his 60th birthday.

We provide in this preface a short socio-historical context showing how the contributions in the volume link to Gisbert's ongoing work. The range and prolificness of Gisbert's work has led us to try out several approaches. In our first drafts, we compiled lists of specific themes where Gisbert has written influential papers. In grammatical theory, for instance, some of the topics were superiority effects, partial *wh*-movement, scrambling, and discontinuous noun phrases. However there were too many individual areas in the end, and something of the heart of Gisbert's work was lost in the listing.

We next wrote a draft focussing on the contributions and how they could be linked to Gisbert's work from the point of view of their content. However here too, what came out most prominently, more than any one theme or topic, was Gisbert's openness as a scholar and teacher. Each of the papers in this volume presents original work by colleagues of Gisbert, some of which were inspired by Gisbert's writing, or by questions he asked and suggestions he gave during colloquia, whilst bird-

1. We would like to thank both Caroline Féry and Artemis Alexiadou for their advice and support in planning this volume. Thanks also go to the authors for their interesting and diverse contributions, and for their prompt responses and detailed comments during the typesetting process. Our student assistants Johannes Rothert and Ulrike May provided invaluable support with the bibliographies. We would also like to thank Sarah Pertermann for the difficult task of bringing syntax and ornithology together into such a beautiful cover design, and the Universitätsverlag Potsdam for their support during the editing process.

watching with other linguists, or whilst building the linguistics department at the University of Potsdam, and the contributions range from technical discussions of grammatical theory through to computational papers and corpus studies on ancient Greek.

The reader may know that Gisbert's first degree was in linguistics and politics, and in the deepest, best sense, this connection between scholarly work on language, and community and public life is felt throughout Gisbert's work. In this volume, the contributions are grouped into five areas, and the approach we have settled on is to link these areas to Gisbert's ongoing scholarly work in the context of some of the communities that he is part of.

First in this volume, and as a nod to one of Gisbert's very earliest works, comes a branch on **morphology and lexical semantics**. *Zur Syntax und Semantik der Nominalkomposition*, Gisbert's first monograph, was published in 1981, on different types of nominal composition in German. The work grew out of a term paper, and his interest in the semantics of compounds and derivational morphemes can still be seen in his lectures on morphology.

After studying at the universities of Regensburg and Konstanz, Gisbert wrote his doctoral dissertation and habilitation at the University of Passau with a focus on grammatical theory. When he was subsequently appointed Professor of Syntax and Morphology at the newly founded University of Potsdam in 1993, Gisbert was one of the youngest professors in Germany. The contributions in this second branch on **syntax** are inspired by features of Gisbert's work such as the range of syntactic topics and the large number of languages. Also reflected in these contributions, and in Gisbert's work more generally, is the political and philosophical stance of finding universality amongst such surface variation.

A further syntactic topic that has also been a key issue in Gisbert's work is the relation between syntax and information structure. Gisbert was part of the first *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft Collaborative Research Centre* in the Land (county) of Brandenburg, the *SFB (Sonderforschungsbereich) on Information Structure* (2003–2015), which brought the efforts of the diverse group that had been built up at Potsdam towards a common goal. Within this context, Gisbert explored alterna-

tives to the view that the left periphery of sentences is directly linked to information-structural categories like focus and topic, and studied the intricate interplay of factors that influence word order options at the interfaces. The third **branch on information structure** represents this part of Gisbert's work.

The fourth branch contains contributions with an **empirical** focus. Whilst linguistic research in the latter half of the 20th century was characterised by excited interest in theoretical linguistics in the wake of the Chomskyan research programme, one of the deeper questions that the cognitive revolution gave rise to was whether – and what type of – data was needed to build robust theories of language. Gisbert was aware of the limitations of the types of thought experiments and intuitions used in generative linguistics, but instead of abandoning the generative methodology altogether became a leading figure in combining traditional methods of cross-linguistic comparison with large samples of languages and a range of experimental methods. Gisbert's continued influence in the debate on what experiments can and cannot tell us about language has been visible through his work in the *Innovationskolleg on Formale Modelle kognitiver Komplexität* (1994–1999) and in the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft projects *Morphosyntax und Phonologie von diskontinuierlichen Nominal- und Präpositionalphrasen* (2003–2013) and *Theoretische und methodische Fundierung von gradierten Akzeptabilitätsurteilen als empirische Basis der Syntaxtheorie* (2006–2015). Current work takes place in the still ongoing *SFB on the Limits of Variability in Language* (2017–) together with colleagues from psychology and computer science, and uses systematic, replicable methods to investigate variation in language.

The fifth branch is **language** as a whole. Beyond contributions to specific linguistic fields, Gisbert has also published on the underlying principles of generative linguistics. This foundational perspective on linguistics and on science more broadly also shows in every class that Gisbert teaches, in which phenomena are never discussed in isolation, but always in a way that communicates the significance of broader scientific questions to students. In a similar vein, the (sets of) questions that Gisbert asks during colloquia and conferences often uncover surprising and important connections to related phenomena or theories in

different domains. Outside of his scholarly research, Gisbert has created links between linguistics and other departments within the university through his involvement in rebuilding the University of Potsdam from the nineties onwards, and in bringing together a community of computational, clinical, experimental and theoretical linguists within the department. Beyond language, Gisbert contributes to science in Germany more generally through membership in committees within the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*.

Finally, when reading the papers, throughout all the branches, you may have noticed feathers and birds in the examples, figures or footnotes. Gisbert is a passionate ornithologist, and no account of his engagement in community life would be complete without mentioning Gisbert's environmental activism, and his pivotal role in incorporating sustainability policies into the communities that he is part of, for instance through the university's Senatskommission für Umwelt.

In putting together a Festschrift, there is always a risk that the result could come across to the recipient more trivialising than tributary, as if several lifetimes of work could be summed up in a single volume, or as if the work were finished and not ongoing. We have known Gisbert's support as prospective students, undergraduate linguistics students, student assistants, PhD students, post-docs and colleagues. Whenever we meet new linguists at conferences and are asked who we work with, the reaction to hearing Gisbert's name is often a happy smile and the comment that we should consider ourselves lucky – and we do indeed. What we hope with this volume, Gisbert, is simply to wish you a very happy birthday, from so many people whose lives and work have been touched by the communities that you have built, and to say that we are excited for what is still to come.