



### **Obituary Gisbert Fanselow (1959- 2022)**

Gisbert Fanselow was a founder of modern generative syntax research in Germany. From 1977-1983 he studied in Regensburg and Konstanz with Peter Staudacher, Arnim von Stechow and Urs Egli, among others. His first book publication (1981; "Zur Syntax und Semantik der Nominalkomposition" by Niemeyer) arose from a student seminar paper. After completing his Master's in theoretical linguistics and German and English linguistics in Konstanz, Fanselow moved to the University of Passau from 1983 to 1993, where he also received his doctorate (1985) and his habilitation (1989). During this time, together with his mentor and supervisor Sascha Felix, he wrote one of the most widely read German-language introductions to generative linguistics, "Sprachtheorie", Vol. 1 & 2, UTB, 1987, which had a lasting influence on generations of linguists in the German speaking world.

Since 1993, Fanselow has held the C4 professorship for Grammar Theory with a focus on syntax at the then newly founded Department of Linguistics at the University of Potsdam, which he built up together with Gisa Rauh and shaped in its generative, cognitive science orientation. In collaboration with Reinhold Kliegl from the Department of Psychology at Potsdam, he succeeded in establishing linguistics as a core part of modern cognitive science at the University. Fanselow's spokespersonship in the innovation research initiative "Formal Models of Cognitive Complexity" (1994-1999) and in the DFG research group "Conflicting Rules" (1999-2003) also made significant contributions to the prominent role of linguistics as part of the study of cognition in Potsdam. In addition, Fanselow played a major role in the conception and successful application of the institutional grant SFB632 "Information Structure", a cooperation between Humboldt University in Berlin and the University of Potsdam. He was also significantly involved in the planning and application for the subsequent SFB1287 "The limits of variability in language: Cognitive, computational and grammatical aspects", currently on-going at the University of Potsdam.

Gisbert Fanselow had a broad scientific background and, in his long and successful career, has worked on a large number of empirical phenomena, theoretical problems and methodological questions in a wide variety of languages, including parameterization, configurationality, word order, split NPs, wh-questions, information structure, scope, the methodology of acceptability studies, the limitations of grammatical systems, etc. He was one of the greatest connoisseurs of Germanic syntax and a recognized expert on questions of VO vs. OV parameterization in natural languages. His last research project in the SFB1287, titled "Syntactic Implication of the Position of Head and Argument", once again addresses this problem from a broad typological perspective drawing empirically from all major language families in the world.

Gisbert Fanselow was a role model for generations of syntacticians through his enthusiasm, curiosity, humility, and deep concern for the well-being of students. He was always approachable and always took as much time as the students needed. He was involved in the training of numerous well-known linguists: Artemis Alexiadou, Julia Bacskai-Atkari, Joanna Blaszczak, Ina Bornkessel-Schlesewsky, Damir Cavar, Susann Fischer, André Meinter, Florian Schäfer, Matthias Schlewsky, Luis Vicente, Ralf Vogel, Marta Wierzbica, among many others. In his capacity as an expert reviewer at the DFG, Gisbert also had a strong influence on the development of linguistics in Germany. He has published in all major

journals; his last published essay in *Glossa* (Fanselow et al., 2022) deals with a new experimental method to study inverse quantifier scope in German.

In addition to linguistics, he was also very interested in environmental, climate and species protection. Gisbert was an important voice in the Environment Commission of the University of Potsdam, was active on the advisory board of "Scientists for Future" and founded "climatewednesday.org", an initiative for reducing air travel in science, an aim very close to his heart.

His sudden illness unexpectedly tore Gisbert out of an active life as a researcher. Gisbert still had many plans and was in the process of preparing another research project on wh-questions from a typological perspective.

His death leaves a huge, impossible to fill, gap in German linguistics and in particular in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Potsdam. His colleagues in the Department will miss Gisbert dearly because of his comprehensive linguistic expertise, but above all because of his friendliness, his curiosity, his collegiality and helpfulness, and his willingness to always put personal vanity behind the big picture.

We mourn the loss of Gisbert as a friend and a colleague. Our thoughts are with his family.