

AN INTRODUCTION TO SYNTACTIC THEORY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Symbols and abbreviations

Chapter 1. Parameters of syntactic theories

1. Preliminaries
2. How can syntactic theories differ from each other?
 - 2.1. Necessary similarities
 - 2.1.1. Shared goals
 - 2.1.2. Shared tools
 - 2.2. Actual differences
 - 2.2.1. Apparent differences
 - 2.2.2. Substantive differences
3. Why are there different syntactic theories?
 - 3.1. Imperatives in English: the problem
 - 3.2. Coping with contradictions
 - 3.3. Imperatives in English: solutions
 - 3.4. Wh-questions in English: problems and solutions
 - 3.5. A typology of conflicts
4. Conclusions

NOTES

QUESTIONS

Chapter 2. Alternative analyses of syntactic structures

1. Preliminaries
2. Discontinuous order
 - 2.1. What is discontinuous order?
 - 2.2. Conflict between orderings
 - 2.3. Conflict between selection and ordering
 - 2.4. Summary
3. Long-distance agreement
 - 3.1. Hungarian
 - 3.2. Tsez
 - 3.3. The larger picture
4. Conclusions

Notes

Questions

Chapter 3. Alternative analyses of symbolic correspondence relations: co-ordination

1. Preliminaries
2. Compositionality in co-ordinate constructions
3. Non-compositionality in co-ordinate

- constructions and its alternative analyses
- 3.1. Conjuncts that are not constituents
 - 3.1.1. The problem
 - 3.1.2. Constituents on one level, not on another
 - 3.1.3. Constituents in one structure, not in another
 - 3.1.4. Summary
- 3.2. Co-conjuncts that are not of the same syntactic type
 - 3.2.1. The problem
 - 3.2.2. Co-constituents that differ in linear position
 - 3.2.3. Co-constituents that differ in grammatical function
 - 3.2.4. Summary
- 4. Conclusions
- Notes
- Questions

Chapter 4. Alternative analyses of symbolic
correspondence relations: grammatical functions

- 1. Preliminaries
- 2. Semantic participant roles and grammatical functions
 - 2.1. Active and passive sentences
 - 2.2. Double-object and object-dative sentences
- 3. Analyzing Patient-Recipient sentences by unifying the two forms
 - 3.1. Syntactic characteristics of Patients and Recipients
 - 3.1.1. Dative Recipients and Object Recipients
 - 3.1.2. Object-1 Patients and Object-2 Patients
 - 3.2. A Relational Grammar account
 - 3.3. Transformational Generative Grammar accounts
 - 3.3.1. Dative Movement
 - 3.3.2. NP Movement
 - 3.4. A Lexicase account
- 4. Analyzing Patient-Recipient sentences by splitting their meaning
 - 4.1. Semantic characteristics of Patients and Recipients
 - 4.2. A Functional Grammar account
 - 4.3. A Construction Grammar account
 - 4.4. A Cognitive Grammar account
- 5. A crosslinguistic outlook
 - 5.1. Direct-object and primary-object languages

- 5.2. Accusative and ergative languages
- 6. Conclusions
- NOTES
- QUESTIONS

Chapter 5. Alternative analyses of syntactic variation and change

- 1. Preliminaries
 - 2. Alternative analyses of word order variation across languages
 - 2.1. The problem
 - 2.2. Heads and dependents
 - 2.3. Branching and non-branching constituents
 - 2.4. Mother-node-constructing and non-mother-node-constructing constituents
 - 2.5. Summary
 - 3. Alternative analyses of relative clause acquisition in second languages
 - 3.1. The problem
 - 3.2. External transfer
 - 3.3. Internal transfer
 - 3.4. Simplification
 - 3.5. Summary
 - 4. Conclusions
- Notes
Questions

Chapter 6. Four current approaches to syntax

- 1. Preliminaries
- 2. Transformational grammars
 - 2.1. Basic assumptions
 - 2.2. The passive construction in English
 - 2.2.1. The Passive Transformation
 - 2.2.2. NP Movement
 - 2.2.3. Move Alpha
 - 2.2.4. Why move?
 - 2.3. Summary
- 3. Dependency grammars
 - 3.1. Basic assumptions
 - 3.2. Categorical identity across phrases
 - 3.3. Categorical identity within phrases
 - 3.4. X-bar theory
 - 3.5. Summary
- 4. Construction grammars
 - 4.1. Basic assumptions
 - 4.2. All constructions have meanings

- 4.3. All constructions have unique meanings
- 4.4. Summary
- 5. Optimality theory
 - 5.1. Basic assumptions
 - 5.2. The case marking of direct objects
 - 5.3. Summary
- 6. Conclusions
- Notes
- Questions

Chapter 7. Where do conflicts come from?

- 1. Two sources for conflicts
- 2. Conflicts in language
- 3. Conflicts in metalanguage
- 4. Conclusions

Appendix: Parallel data from six languages

- English
- Latin
- Russian
- Hungarian
- Japanese
- Chantyal

Glossary

References

PREFACE

1. Main points

Why are there so many different approaches to syntactic description? What is it about sentence structure that keeps on inviting new attempts to analyze it? The answer proposed in this book hinges on the existence of conflicts in the data.

In recent years, there has been increasing attention paid to the nature and resolution of conflicts in grammatical descriptions, also referred to as mismatches or discrepancies. Conflicts arise between syntax and meaning; between syntax and phonetic form; and among various aspects of syntax itself. Such mismatches and the problems that they pose have been central to Autolexical Grammar, Cognitive Grammar, Construction Grammar, Functional Grammar and Lexical-Functional Grammar, and have been seminal in Optimality Theory.

That the attempt to resolve conflicts is an overarching theme across syntactic theories has been suggested by Ray Jackendoff. As he considers various accounts of tense in English, which is morphologically marked on the verb even though it has the entire proposition in its semantic scope, Jackendoff notes that there is a mismatch here between phonology and meaning and he remarks:

Much dispute in modern syntax has been over these sorts of mismatch and how to deal with them. (I don't think most linguists have viewed it this way, though.)'
(Jackendoff 2002: 15)

A step in the direction of surveying various syntactic theories from the point of view of how they accommodate conflicts has been taken in Elaine J. Francis and Laura A. Michaelis' introduction to their volume on mismatches (Francis & Michaelis (ed.) 2003) and in some of the papers in the volume. The present book may be viewed as a further exploration of this idea. Drawing upon the theoretical literature of the past few decades, it presents selected analyses from different syntactic frameworks and makes two main points.

(1) Many of the various conceptual tools employed by syntacticians are designed to resolve conflicts in the data.

(2) Given that there is a limited range of the logically available ways of resolving conflicts, the variety of syntactic theories is limited as well and their diversity can be systematically characterized in terms of the conflict-resolving constructs they resort to.

The book is meant for undergraduate and graduate courses. An introductory linguistics course and basic familiarity with syntactic analysis are presupposed. Illustrative data are taken from English and several other languages.

2. Overview

Chapter 1. Parameters of syntactic theories surveys various ways in which syntactic theories may differ and states the goals that all syntactic theories must share, including consistency of descriptions. On two examples - English imperatives and wh-questions - it is illustrated how accounts that strive to be both empirically correct and general can run afoul of the consistency requirement. An overview is provided of the major types of conflict and the logically possible ways in which they can be dealt with. Alternative analyses of English imperatives and wh-questions are identified as alternative types of conflict-resolution.

Chapter 2. Alternative analyses of syntactic structures discusses conflicts that arise in the analysis of syntactic form. Examples of discontinuous linear order and 'long-distance' verb agreement are taken up along with their alternative resolutions found in the literature.

The next two chapters take up conflicts between syntactic form and meaning. In **Chapter 3. Alternative analyses of symbolic correspondence relations: co-ordination**, the problem is illustrated for co-ordinate structures; various suggestions are gleaned from the literature on how to solve them. **Chapter 4. Alternative analyses of symbolic correspondence relations: grammatical functions** discusses mismatches between semantic participant roles and grammatical functions, with focus on 'double-object' constructions and their various analyses.

In **Chapter 5. Alternative analyses of variation and change**, crosslinguistic variation of constituent order is discussed; it is shown how conflicts in this domain have been variously proposed to be resolved by typologists. Syntactic change is discussed as it takes place in individual development: the acquisition of relative clause

structures by children. Conflicts in the data are made explicit and alternative resolutions presented.

While the preceding chapters used analyses of limited sets of data taken from different approaches, **Chapter 6. Four current approaches to syntax** provides overall characterizations of four families of contemporary syntactic approaches: transformational grammars, dependency grammars, construction grammars, and optimality theory.

Each chapter is followed by a set of study questions. Some of the questions are based on the language data in the appendix which contains eighteen sentences translated into six languages.

3. Acknowledgments

Many people have provided indispensable help for my writing this book. First and foremost, it is with very special gratitude that I think of two linguists whose writings and personal guidance have fundamentally shaped my views of language and linguistics: Joseph H. Greenberg and Gerald A. Sanders.

Joseph Greenberg's pioneering oeuvre encompassing many fields of linguistics and anthropology is well-known. In this book, I have mostly relied on his work in language typology, major highlights of which are the recognition and fruitful use of implicational statements as the principal means of capturing constraints on language variation, and the elaboration of the claims of markedness theory.

Gerald Sanders' 1972 book Equational Grammar presented a comprehensive theory of grammar. In it, several ideas that have since been independently proposed and now prominently figure in various current syntactic approaches were first put forth and synthesized within a coherent and principled framework. These include the insights that syntactic and phonological rules, just as lexical entries, express symbolic correspondence relations between meaning and form; that rules of syntactic selection and linear order must be separately formulated; that linear order be recognized as a feature of phonetic form; that linear order statements be surface-true and thus invariant in the course of grammatical derivations; that the application of rules should be motivated by the requirement of full phonetic and semantic interpretability; and that the discourse, rather than the sentence, is the proper domain of linguistics.

I also want to thank my other professors and mentors in linguistics as well as my teachers of Hungarian grammar in elementary and high school in Budapest for all that I learnt from them.

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