

UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE SERIES

Maggie Tallerman

# Understanding Syntax

fourth edition

ROUTLEDGE



Understanding

# Syntax

Fourth edition

Maggie Tallerman

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# Understanding Syntax

Assuming no prior grammatical knowledge, *Understanding Syntax* explains and illustrates the major concepts, categories and terminology involved in the study of cross-linguistic syntax.

Taking a descriptive viewpoint throughout, the book introduces syntactic typology, syntactic description and the major typological categories found in the languages of the world. Grammatical constructions and relationships between words in a clause are explained and thoroughly illustrated, including word classes and their syntactic properties; case and agreement; grammatical functions such as subject and object, and the passive. Each chapter features in-text and chapter-end exercises to extend the reader's knowledge of syntactic concepts and argumentation, and the final chapter explains and illustrates the principles involved in writing a brief syntactic sketch of a language. Featuring data from approximately 100 languages, this fourth edition has been fully revised and updated in line with current syntactic theory and description, and checklists have been added to each chapter to further aid comprehension.

*Understanding Syntax* is indispensable for students studying cross-linguistic syntax, language typology, and linguistic fieldwork.

**Maggie Tallerman** is Professor of Linguistics at Newcastle University, UK.

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*For my dear family*

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## Note to the instructor

### Changes to the fourth edition

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If you have used this textbook before, you will find that this new edition contains essentially the same material as the third edition, but that every chapter has been revised. I hope to have improved the clarity of discussion and level of explanation for all the most complex concepts that are introduced, and I have attempted to anticipate more precisely the needs of the beginning student with no background whatever in language studies. One new development is strategically placed checklists of material covered, typically at the end of a major section or at the end of a chapter. A number of new exercises have also been added, and some of the old ones removed, in cases where I felt that they didn't work too well. Please let me know if you find the changes helpful.

As always, I'd be glad to hear from any instructors about the success or otherwise of any of the changes I've made, and I'm also happy to receive data corrections and suggestions for further improvements.

*Maggie Tallerman*  
*Newcastle*  
*February 2014*



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## Note to the student

This book is an introduction to the major concepts and categories associated with the branch of linguistics known as syntax. No prior knowledge is assumed, although it is assumed that you will learn from each chapter, and assimilate much of the information in a chapter, before reading further. However, I generally don't expect you to learn what something means from a single discussion – instead, you will meet the same terms and concepts on several different occasions throughout the book. The first mention of some concept might be quite informal, with examples just from English, and then later I will give the discussion a broader perspective with illustrations from other languages. I use SMALL CAPITALS to introduce technical terms and concepts: these can be found in the subject index at the back. I also use small capitals to indicate any particularly important discussion or illustration of a term or concept that you've already met earlier. It will probably help to look up in the index all the previous mentions of this item, especially if you're finding it hard to grasp.

Many of the example sentences used in the text are given as a phonetic transcription, for instance when the language under discussion does not have a written form. Although you don't need to know how to pronounce the examples in order to understand the point being made, you may well be interested in their pronunciation. If you'd like further information about the various symbols used, I recommend that you consult the *Phonetic symbol guide* (Pullum and Ladusaw 1996), for comprehensive details of phonetic symbols and their pronunciation, or Davenport and Hannahs (2010) for general information on phonetics and phonology.

You are invited to tackle exercises within the body of the text in each chapter, and these are separated from the running text by rows of arrows that mark out the start:



and finish:



of the exercise. The answers to these problems are discussed in the text itself. If you attempt these exercises as you go along, they will certainly help you to check that you've understood the section you've just finished reading. If you don't get the right answer, I recommend re-reading that section before reading further. There are also checklists in each chapter that remind you of the main material covered. If you don't

feel that you've taken the topics on board, you are recommended to revise them before moving on.

Additionally, there are exercises at the end of each chapter, for which I don't provide answers. If you are having real problems with the text, or want to discuss the exercises, please email me and I will try to help by suggesting a strategy, but I won't tell you the answers unless I can be sure that I'm not giving away the answers to a set assignment! For that reason, students should ask their instructors to email. My email address is: [maggie.tallerman@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:maggie.tallerman@ncl.ac.uk).

I will also be happy to receive corrections to data or to claims I make about any language, or further illustrations, or suggestions for new exercises.

Maggie Tallerman  
Newcastle  
February 2014

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## Acknowledgements

Over the sixteen years or so since the first edition of this book was published, I have been overwhelmed by the interest shown in the material it presents, and by the kindness of very many people from around the world. I have received dozens of emails, often from complete strangers, volunteering corrections to data, offering new data, suggesting ways in which the book could be improved, discussing fine linguistic points at great length, offering to read drafts of new material, and generally providing constructive criticism. Doubtless, I have overlooked some of you in the list that follows; for this, I heartily apologize, and I stress my genuine gratitude to all who helped make this fourth edition a better text. Many thanks, then, to the following colleagues, friends and students whose real and virtual presence has helped so much in the writing of all the editions of this textbook: Muteb Alqarni, Abdelrahman Altakhaineh, Clayton Ashton, Seiki Ayano, Ute Bohnacker, Bob Borsley, Siobhan Casson, Zedric Dimalanta, Joe Emonds, Tom Ernst, Abdelkader Fassi Fehri, Stuart Forbes, Don Frantz, Anders Holmberg, Chris Johns, Andreas Kathol, Jagdish Kaur, Daniela Kolbe, Lan Yin Kong, Nedzad Leko, Joan Maling, Anna Margetts, Jenny Marjoribanks, Roger Maylor, Sadat Peyambar, Tenzin Rigzin, Caroline Gray Robinson, Stuart Payton Robinson, the late Anna Siewierska, the late Carlota S. Smith, Rex Sprouse, Siti Hamin Stapa, Maite Taboada, Höski Thráinsson, Graham Thurgood, Antoine Trux, Ian Turner, Robert D. Van Valin, Nigel Vincent, Emiel Visser, Stephen M. Wechsler, Ian Woo, Wim van der Wurff and Monaliza Sarbini Zin. None of the above should be held responsible for any remaining errors.

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## Abbreviations used in examples

1	first person	INTRANS	intransitive
2	second person	M, MASC	masculine
3	third person	NEG	negative
ABS	absolutive	NOM	nominative
ACC	accusative	NONPAST	nonpast tense
APPLIC	applicative	OBJ	object (or object marker)
AUX	auxiliary	OBL	oblique (case)
CAUS	causative	PAST	past tense
COMP	complementizer	PERF	perfect (tense/aspect)
CONJ	conjunction	PERFCTV	perfective (tense/aspect)
CONT	continuous	PL	plural
DEF	definite	PN	proper noun marker
DEF ART	definite article	POSS	possessive marker
DEM	demonstrative	PRED	predicate marker
ERG	ergative	PRES	present tense
EXC	exclusive	PROG	progressive
F, FEM	feminine	PRT	particle
FUT	future tense	QU	question marker
GEN	genitive	RM	relative marker
IMPER	imperative	SEQ	sequential
IMPF	imperfect (tense/aspect)	SG	singular
INC	inclusive	SJTV	subjunctive (mood)
INDEF	indefinite	SM	subject marker
INDIC	indicative mood	SU	subject (or subject marker)
INFIN	infinitive	TRANS	transitive marker

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