Simpler Syntax

Peter W. Culicover & Ray Jackendoff

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SIMPLER SYNTAX

Peter W. Culicover
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Preface

The overall questions addressed by this book are: What is the role of syntax in the grammar vis-à-vis semantics, and what are the consequences for syntactic structure? In the late 1960s, when we were graduate students at MIT together, these questions were being hotly debated in the "Linguistic Wars" between Generative Semantics and Interpretive Semantics. Both of us wrote our dissertations on aspects of these questions, naturally taking the Interpretive side, as befit our position as Chomsky's students. At the time, it looked to us as though the Interpretive position was leading generative grammar toward a leaner syntax with less complex derivations, and that a great deal of the work of predicting grammatical distribution would be pushed into the lexicon, into semantics, and into what were then called "projection rules" and are now called "correspondence rules" or "interface rules", i.e. the rules that mediate between syntax and meaning. Somehow this didn't come to pass: instead mainstream generative syntax became steadily more abstract, derivations more complex.

One of the reasons the Interpretive Semantics position could not be implemented adequately at the time was that the field lacked a theory of semantics sufficiently robust to help explain syntactic phenomena. Thirty-five years later, although the issues are still the same, the field has explored a lot more syntactic, semantic, and psychological phenomena, and the range of theoretical options is broader. So we think it's worth trying again.

An important part of our work here involves picking through the history and philosophy of generative syntax to identify the reasons for the way it developed as it did. Part I (Chapters 1–4) is devoted to these issues. Beginning at the end of Chapter 4 and continuing through Part II (Chapters 5–9), we engage in developing many details of what might be thought of as a contemporary version of Interpretive Semantics: the theory of Simpler Syntax. Parts III and IV (Chapters 10–14) discuss further phenomena that provide evidence for Simpler Syntax: a far leaner syntax coupled with a somewhat richer syntax–semantics interface. More broadly, Simpler Syntax leads to a vision of the language faculty that better facilitates the integration of linguistic theory with concerns of processing, acquisition, and biological evolution.

Our discussion is mainly focused on English. This happens to be the style of investigation with which we feel most comfortable, and besides, we think there are still lots of interesting things about English that the lore has not recognized.

This does not mean that we think linguistics can be studied in the context of English alone, only that we think others can do other languages better.

This book grows out of a friendship that goes back to our graduate student days, when we lived three doors apart on Inman Street in Cambridge. All these years we've gotten a big kick out of thinking together about linguistics—for us it's "playing syntax"—and we've gone out of our way to find opportunities to do so. Around 1990 we began working seriously on some joint projects, and, despite millions of other things going on in our lives, we managed to scrape together a number of published papers, working together catch-as-catch-can when we happened to meet at conferences or when we passed through each other's towns on the way to someplace else.

When it became clear by the late 1990s that this habit of ours was not a fluke, we began to envision collecting the papers together into a volume, with a short introduction that tied them together. However, the plot began to thicken as we independently found ourselves developing critiques of and alternatives to larger developments in the field, culminating in Culicover's *Syntactic Nuts* and *Dynamical Grammar* (the latter jointly with Andrzej Nowak) and in Jackendoff's *Architecture of the Language Faculty* and *Foundations of Language*. As we started to plan our joint book, we realized that we needed to offer a more concrete overview of what we think syntax is like, and that our joint papers in fact provided an important source of corroborating evidence. The result is the present volume, in which Parts I and II and Chapter 15 offer new material and Parts III and IV offer reworked versions of previous papers.

We consider ourselves fortunate indeed to be able to take on this assignment, thanks to our friendship, our collaboration, and the influence of many friends and colleagues over the years. We have been lucky to have experienced so much of the history and to have participated in many of the theoretical developments. Given our long involvement in cognitive science, we have been able to view the situation from a broader perspective than syntax alone. In particular, Culicover's work on learnability and Jackendoff's work on psychological foundations of semantics provide important boundary conditions—and opportunities—for exploring the interfaces between syntax and the rest of the mind.

One of our closest friends back in graduate school was Adrian Akmajian, who lived a few blocks away on Dana Street in Cambridge. Adrian went on to write two of the most influential textbooks in linguistics and was a founding editor of the journal *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*. Both of us published in collaboration with him at one time or another, and much of his work—both in its substance and its spirit—has had a lasting influence on us. Had he not died in 1983, much too early, after a decade of intermittent illness, he might well have collaborated on this book with us. We would like to dedicate this book to his memory.

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Acknowledgements

Peter Culicover did a substantial portion of his part of this work while he was a visitor during 2002 at the University of Groningen, Department of Alfa-Informatica, with the assistance of a Bezoekerbeurs from the NWO. He gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided by the NWO, the hospitality of the University of Groningen, the Department of Alfa-Informatica, and John Nerbonne, and the contributions of the participants in the Groningen Syntax Seminar, especially Jan Koster, Jan-Wouter Zwart, and Mark de Vries. In the earlier years of the research that ultimately led to this book, Culicover received critical support, both financial and moral, from Edward F. Hayes, Vice President for Research at the Ohio State University. Regrettably, Ed passed away in 1998, much too soon.

Ray Jackendoff did much of his part of the work while he was a visitor in the Psychology Department at Harvard University in 2002–3. He is especially grateful to Marc Hauser for providing facilities and such a congenial group of colleagues during the year. Some earlier conceptualization of the work took place while he was a Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in 1999–2000, for which he is also supremely thankful.

We had the opportunity to present parts of this work in our courses at the 2003 LSA summer Linguistic Institute at Michigan State University, and we wish to thank our students in those courses. Many colleagues offered comments and discussion on earlier versions, including Fritz Newmeyer, Tom Wasow, Ida Toivonen, Jason Merchant, Andrew Spencer, Paul Postal, Barbara Citko, Jim Blevins, Vera Gribanov, Bob Borsley, Idan Landau, Shalom Lappin, Klaus-Uwe Panther, Jan-Wouter Zwart, Jan Koster, Mark deVries, Carl Pollard, Robert Levine, Joan Maling, Ivan Sag, Kara Hawthrone, Shanna Hollich, and students in Stan Dubinsky's seminar at University of South Carolina. Our editor, John Davey, gently pushed us and pulled us through the project, with good humor and good taste. Any deficiencies are of course our responsibility. In particular, we apologize in advance to anyone whose work we have failed to cite or to cite sufficiently despite its relevance. We hope readers will be relatively indulgent in light of the scope of this work: it is a full-time occupation to keep up with the literature in any single one of the many areas we have tried to cover here.

Chapters 10–14 are reworked versions of the following previously published papers of ours, and are reprinted with the kind permission of the publishers:

Chapter 10: 'Mme. Tussaud Meets the Binding Theory', *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 10 (1992), 1–31 (Kluwer Academic Publishers).

Chapter 11: '*Something else* for the Binding Theory', *Linguistic Inquiry* 26 (1995), 249–75 (MIT Press).

Chapter 12: 'The Semantic Basis of Control in English', *Language* 79 (2003), 517–56 (Linguistic Society of America) and 'Control is Not Movement', *Linguistic Inquiry* 32 (2001), 493–512.

Chapter 13: 'Semantic Subordination Despite Syntactic Coordination', *Linguistic Inquiry* 28 (1997), 195–217.

Chapter 14: 'The View from the Periphery: The English Comparative Correlative', *Linguistic Inquiry* 30 (1999), 543–71.

Each of these chapters contains the acknowledgements from the original version.

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PART I

Cutting Syntax Down to Size

CHAPTER 1

Why Simpler Syntax?

1.1 Different notions of simplicity

Within the tradition of generative grammar, the most prominent focus of linguistic research has been the syntactic component, the part of language concerned with the grammatical organization of words and phrases. The present study will develop and defend a view of the syntactic component that is on one hand thoroughly within the generative tradition but on the other markedly at odds with views of syntax that have developed in mainstream generative grammar (MGG).[1] Our approach concurs in many respects with many alternative theories of generative syntax, most notably Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (Pollard and Sag 1987; 1994), Lexical-Functional Grammar (Bresnan 1982a; 2001), and Construction Grammar (Fillmore 1988; Fillmore and Kay 1993; Zwicky 1994; Goldberg 1995; to appear); it also shares commonalities with others such as Autolexical Syntax (Sadock 1991; 2003) and Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997). We will refer to this collection on occasion as "the alternative generative theories."

The differences between our approach and the mainstream can be divided roughly into two major aspects, which it is important to distinguish. The first aspect is technological: what formal devices does the theory adopt for its description of language? The second, deeper and more difficult to characterize

[1] Throughout this study we will use the term "mainstream generative grammar" (or MGG) to refer to the line of research most closely associated with Noam Chomsky, including *Syntactic Structures* (1957), the Standard Theory (*Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, 1965), the Extended Standard Theory (*Studies on Semantics in Generative Grammar*, 1972b), the Revised Extended Standard Theory (*Reflections on Language*, 1975c), Principles and Parameters Theory (*Lectures on Government and Binding*, 1981), and the Minimalist Program (1993; 1995). Readers who feel it is a mistake to call this line the "mainstream" should feel free to substitute their own favorite term.

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