

Syntax

P.H. MATTHEWS

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SYNTAX

P. H. MATTHEWS

PROFESSOR OF LINGUISTICS,
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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To my friends in Reading

PREFACE

This is the last thing that I will send to the press from the University of Reading, where I have worked for fifteen years. I would like to believe that it is a fitting tribute to the ideal conditions which the University has provided, and to the inspiration which the Head of the Linguistics Department, Frank Palmer, has given me all the time that I have been with him.

I am grateful to David Allerton, Ron Brasington, David Crystal, Giulio Lepschy, John Lyons, Jeremy Mynott and Irene Warburton, for reading a penultimate draft and making clear where it had to be improved. I doubt if I could ever have put my material in order if I had not spent a year in 1977–8 as a fellow of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in Wassenaar, and I owe a great debt to the Board of the Institute, and the Dutch Ministry of Education, for making this possible.

June 1980

P.H.M.

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The following abbreviations cover all books and articles which I have referred to for two or more separate points. Other references are given in full at the point of citation.

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NOTICE TO THE READER

When I wrote *Morphology*, which was published in 1974 as the first volume of this series, it was clear enough what such a book should contain but none too easy to convince people that it was needed. I therefore began with a chapter explaining why I thought the subject was important. This time I have quite the opposite problem. My colleagues will agree that syntax must be studied. But many of them may be puzzled by the form which this introduction takes. I must therefore begin by making clear how it is to be read, and what it is and is not trying to do.

Firstly, it is not an introduction to a particular syntactic theory, such as transformational grammar, systemic grammar, and so on. In the past twenty years I have learned most from the transformational grammarians and would urge any student of linguistics to familiarise himself with their work, from the originals as well as from the excellent textbooks that are now available. But there are many topics that they have covered poorly or not at all, and some that cannot be dealt with properly, or cannot be dealt with in a way that I find illuminating, unless their basic assumptions are rejected. A further problem concerns the sort of transformational grammar that one might expound. Five years ago it was possible to see the latest work of Chomsky and his associates as no more than a series of extensions, in different directions, of a basic method that had been firmly established in the 60s. But this is no longer so. On issues central to grammatical theory, such as the distinction between syntax and semantics or transformations and the lexicon, the views reflected in leading generativist work are now much closer to those urged by their critics ten or fifteen years ago than to the practices those critics objected to. Nor is it clear exactly what their present principles are.

An alternative is to discuss the history of successive theories, from the 50s or from the 30s and earlier. This is a book that would be well worth writing, and would make a fascinating essay in the development of ideas. It might also appeal to students, who often ask to be

taught in that way and who read much of the relevant literature in tutorials. But a course on what linguists have said is no substitute for one on language itself, and many of the facts that have been taken as crucial for one theory or another (including those discussed in very recent articles) are either well known or in other respects not very revealing. They also cover a rather small range. That is neither surprising nor discreditable. But since many of the theories are now dead, and many of the arguments are seen to be invalid, the examples which have been prominent in the literature are often only of historical interest.

A further problem is that although we have learned a great deal from the theorists of specific schools, a scholar does not have to call himself a thingummybob grammarian, or publish work on such and such a component of the whasit model, to say important things either about syntax in general or about specific constructions. A student can also gain much from the descriptive traditions of individual languages. But for those studying English this is at present rather difficult, since the books recommended for the structure of the language often differ strikingly, in terminology, in references and in a large part of their substance, from those recommended for transformational and other syntactic theories, even though the latter have English illustrations. This is a bad state of affairs and any responsible introduction ought to try and improve it. It will be made worse unless theoretical and more traditional work are both taken into account.

For these reasons I have organised my text thematically, in a way that reflects the dominant models only as they are relevant to given issues. The central chapters deal with the nature of syntactic relations and the fundamental types of construction (predication, attribution, coordination and so on) as I understand them. This account begins with Chapter 4 ('Constituency and dependency') and ends or culminates in Chapter 10, with the discussion of apposition and correlative constructions. Those who know the subject will see at once that I have not limited myself to the problems that happen to have attracted the most attention in recent decades. I have also been forced at times to adopt original positions. The first three chapters address preliminary questions, with which a student is already likely to have some familiarity. But the general textbooks do not always cope with them satisfactorily, and some of the primary treatments are now quite old. I have also given prominence to topics that are crucial to later

stages of my argument, such as the roots of indeterminacy (at the end of Chapter 1) and the notion of ellipsis (in the middle part of Chapter 2), though it may not be till later that the reader will fully appreciate why they are important.

After the survey of constructions, the last two chapters deal with the means by which syntactic relations are realised and the forms of statement in which they can be described. It is here, I believe, that transformational grammar has made, or can make, its best contribution. I have therefore ended with a critical sketch of its history, which may be taken as a plea, both to the generativists and to their out and out opponents, to look at its possibilities in a fresh light. By this point it will be clear why a common or garden course in established formalisms cannot, in my view, be an adequate introduction.

A thematic exposition inevitably leaves much that can only be covered, or alluded to, in the small print. The sections of 'Notes and references' are mainly designed to give an account of my sources and to direct the reader to further studies, both secondary and primary. In many cases there is no recent survey, and I have had to include a thumbnail history of what has been said on the topic. But I have also felt that other forms of note might be of value. Some deal with problems of terminology: a book of this kind must choose among alternative uses, and although one may make the choice as rationally as one can, a student will and must read work in varying traditions. I have tried to sort out some of the discrepancies which seem to me to be most confusing. Other notes summarise the contribution of a school, or the main points of a model that has been referred to. I have also explained why I think that certain proposals are mistaken. Some of these have in the past been influential (thus the note on endocentricity at the end of Chapter 7). Others are recent, but too much at variance with my own view for convenient inclusion in the text. So far as possible, I have tried to shape the notes for each chapter into a continuous bibliographical survey.

These notes are indexed as carefully as the text, so that an inquiring reader will not overlook them.

Finally, I must apologise (if apologies are needed) for two deliberate restrictions of my subject matter. Firstly, I have given relatively few examples from languages other than English. The languages of Europe are basically similar, and to illustrate from German or Italian instead of English would in most cases be decorative rather than truly

helpful. I have therefore stuck to English throughout the body of the work, except where good examples are lacking. On other languages the information available to Western scholars is less complete, and I do not sufficiently trust my own grasp of it. Some may wish that I had been more confident, and had included more discussion of typological theories. But the most careful studies in this field tend to have limited conclusions, and those which are more spectacular are often known to contain bad errors. So far as an introduction is concerned, I think this subject is better left for the moment.

Secondly, I have said very little, and that only in passing, about the analysis of discourse or the structure of a sentence in relation to its setting. This is partly because I agree with the old-fashioned definition of syntax, as a subject distinct from stylistics and in terms of which expressions such as 'syntax beyond the sentence' are meaningless. But it is also because I am convinced that these fields are too important, and their methods too much of their own, for them to be handled as an appendage to a book which is basically on relations within phrases and clauses. They need separate introductions, and I look forward to seeing them in this series.

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I

Constructions

Traditional concept of syntax. Constructions; characterised as wholes and by internal elements. Constructions and meaning; which differences are relevant?

Identification of constructions: Semantic connections; lexical co-variance; collocational restrictions. Rules: for realisation; of valency. Tests for units: transference of function; replacement by single words; as confirming semantic distinctions. Transformational relations: as oppositions of construction; as separating constructions. Can transformations be the only evidence? Regularity of transformations: exceptions vs. semantic unpredictability. Collocational evidence not sufficient.

Indeterminacy: Distinctions sometimes uncertain. Reasons for indeterminacy: rules and tendencies; marginal codification.

The term '**syntax**' is from the Ancient Greek *śyntaxis*, a verbal noun which literally means 'arrangement' or 'setting out together'. Traditionally, it refers to the branch of grammar dealing with the ways in which words, with or without appropriate inflections, are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence. For example, in *It tastes nice* there are connections of meaning among *it*, *tastes* and *nice* which are shown by the order of words (*it + tastes + nice*, not *nice + tastes + it*, or other permutations) and also, in part, by inflectional agreement between the verb and pronoun (*it tastes*, not *it taste*). Similar connections are found in other combinations: for example, in *They smell fresh* and *It felt softer* or, as parts of larger sentences, among *he*, *looked* and *thinner* in *I thought he looked thinner*, or among *which*, *tastes* and *peppery* in *He likes food which tastes peppery*. The individual connections can also form part of a different whole, distinguished by another pattern of arrangement: for example, in the exclamation *How nice it tastes!* or, as part of a larger sentence, in *However nice it tastes, you are not to eat any more*. The field of syntax covers both what is shown (that *How nice it tastes!* is an exclamation, that *tastes* stands in a certain meaning relationship to *nice*) and the means by which it is done (agreement, order of words, and other devices).

For the syntactic characterisation of a sentence, or of any smaller unit that we can distinguish within it, grammarians use the equi-