

SYNTAX

A FUNCTIONAL-TYPOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

Volume II

T. GIVÓN

*Linguistics Department
University of Oregon, Eugene*

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY
AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA

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江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

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DEDICATION

To Nathaniel,
who didn't always understand what all the fuss was about,
but came along anyway.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data (Revised for vol. 2)

Givón, Talmy, 1936-
Syntax: a functional-typological introduction.

1. Grammar, Comparative and general -- Syntax. 2. Typology (Linguistics) 3.
Functionalism (Linguistics) I. Title.

P291.G5 1984 415 84-6195

ISBN 1-55619-096-4 (U.S. hb., v. 2)

ISBN 1-55619-097-2 (U.S. pb., v. 2)

ISBN 90-272-2069-7 (European hb., v. 2)

ISBN 90-272-2070-0 (European pb., v. 2)

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PREFACE

This second volume, somewhat late in coming, completes our survey of syntax from a functional-typological perspective. We deal here with clauses whose complexity arises from a variety of sources. It may arise from the presence of various modifiers within the noun phrase (chapter 12). It may arise from various types of embeddings, whereby one clause is subordinated within another (chapters 13, 15). It may arise from de-transitive voice (chapter 14), or from non-declarative speech-act values (chapter 18). It may also arise from discourse-pragmatic operations, such as focusing (chapter 16), or topicalization (chapter 17). Complex syntax shades, finally, into complex discourse, where clauses are concatenated, more tightly or more loosely, to form coherent discourse (chapter 19).

I have attempted to sketch out in the two volumes how grammar is used to produce (and interpret) coherent communication. The considerable surface diversity of cross-language typological facts masks behind it a great measure of commonality of human languages. Part of that commonality is due to semantic and pragmatic universals — the cognitive and socio-cultural foundations that underlie human communication. But a large part of the commonality is also due to the universals of syntactic coding. In the last three chapters of the book, I have attempted to sketch out the theoretical context within which syntactic universals may be understood: The communicative use of language to form coherent discourse (chapter 19), the cognitive basis of discourse coherence (chapter 20), and the cognitive and biological basis of markedness and iconicity (chapter 21).

At relevant points throughout the text, I acknowledge the many generous contributions that others have made toward the writing of this book. Science is a communal enterprise, and I have been fortunate to practice it within a communal network that is both nurturing and challenging. Institutional support for this work came in part from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the

Office of Naval Research, and the Deutsche Forschung Gemeinschaft. The National Science Foundation has once again been conspicuous mostly for its absence.

Last but not most, I must acknowledge the help of to my family, Linda and Nathaniel, who have put up cheerfully — though seldom quietly — with the considerable amount of dislocation imposed by the demands of writing this book.

Eugene, Oregon
December 1990

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12.1. INTRODUCTION: NOUNS AND MODIFIERS*

Throughout the various chapters of the first volume of this book, we have seen how noun phrases of varying types occupy the characteristic syntactic positions — and case-roles — of nouns. Most typically, such positions are those of the subject, direct object, various indirect objects and nominal predicate. In those positions, it is typically the case, wherever a noun, name or pronoun can occur, a more complex **noun phrase** can also occur.

With the exception of pronouns and names, a noun phrase is made out of a **head noun** plus some **modifiers**. In the grammar of noun phrases, these modifiers perform a great variety of communicative functions, and are accorded different syntactic treatments. The functions performed by the various types of modifiers may be ranked along a continuum, beginning from those that are most clearly **lexical-semantic**, shading into those that are more **phrasal-semantic**, shading further into those that are more **propositional-semantic**, and further into those that are more clearly **discourse-pragmatic**. Last on this scale are large, word-size — or clause-size — modifiers. Some, such as quantifiers, have distinct discourse-pragmatic functions (e.g. contrast). In other cases, large-size modifiers (e.g. adjectives), in addition to their pragmatic function in referential identification, also serve to restrict — or **further specify** — the meaning of the head noun, in effect thus *changing lexical meaning*. In this way, somewhat paradoxically, such modifiers loop the functional continuum back to its lexical-semantic origin, albeit at another level, that of **lexical derivation**.¹

* I am indebted to Doris Payne for many helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this chapter.

1) Both adjective and nouns, as modifiers in this category, can produce lexical compounds and eventually derivational morphology. Thus, *black bird* may become *blackbird* and *mail man* *mailman*. In the latter, the 'man' has become the productive derivational suffix *-mn*. For further discussion see Givón (1971).

The scale of modifiers and their functions may be given roughly as follows:

- (1) **Scale of noun modifiers:**
 - (a) **Noun-semantic** features: gender/class markers
 - (b) **Noun-phrasal semantic** features: number markers
 - (c) **Clausal-semantic** features: semantic case markers
 - (d) **Clausal-pragmatic** roles: grammatical case markers
 - (e) **Discourse-pragmatic** (referent-tracking) devices:
determiners of definiteness, reference, deixis
 - (f) **Meaning-restricting** elements: adjectives, quantifiers,
relative-clauses, relational
nouns

Given scale (1), one may observe that modifiers nearer the top of the scale — points (a) through (d) — tend to be more often **grammaticalized**. That is, they tend to appear as **grammatical/inflectional morphology**. On the other hand, elements nearer the bottom of the scale, most clearly those in (f), tend to appear more often as **words** or, in the case of possessive and relative modifiers, as **clauses**. Further, in terms of the **morphotactic position** of those elements that become grammaticalized, one can also predict that those nearer the top of scale (1) have a higher probability of becoming **noun affixes**, while those lower on the scale are more likely to become **noun phrase clitics** ('NP operators'). In spite of such predictable differences in morphemic status, a general unifying principle seems to characterize noun phrases, regardless of whether they are solitary nouns, names, pronouns or multi-element noun phrases:²

- (2) **The noun-phrase feature-climbing principle:**
"Whatever features belong to the head noun, also belong to the entire noun phrase".

The utility of principle (2) becomes apparent when one examines the various ways by which languages endeavor to structurally unify the noun phrase, to make it 'behave like a nominal entity'.

Many common elements of the noun phrase, particularly those involving either lexical-semantic or grammatical features, have already been dis-

2) For a more formal argument suggesting this principle, see Givón (1972a, ch. 2).

cussed in earlier chapters of volume I.³ Those will be re-examined in this chapter from a different perspective, namely the way they partake in the structure — or 'grammar' — of noun phrases.

12.2. RELATIVE ORDERING OF ELEMENTS WITHIN THE NOUN PHRASE

12.2.1. Rigid ordering within the noun phrase

We have already noted (vol. I, Ch. 6, section 6.7) one major aspect of ordering within the noun-phrase, namely whether modifiers *in general* precede or follow the head noun. But in addition, ordering constraints may also govern the placement of modifiers *vis-a-vis* each other. English may serve to illustrate this. The general rule, glossing over a number of specific co-occurrence restrictions and other potential complications, and excluding morphological case (in English, prepositions), is as follows:

- (3) **Order of modifiers in English**

$$NP = (QUANT) (DET) (AP^*) (N^*) N (PL) \left(\begin{array}{l} REL \\ POSS-NP \\ N-COMP \end{array} \right)$$

We will deal first with pre-nominal modifiers.

(a) **Quantifiers**

Quantifiers (QUANT) appear in two constructions. The first is the **partitive** construction, where the quantifier is followed by the possessive 'of' and by a *definite* determiner, as in:

- (4)
 - a. *some of the people*
 - b. *all of that nonsense*
 - c. *none of my friends*
 - d. *any of those people*
 - e. *most of this work*
 - f. *lots of their effort*
 - g. *two of the men*

An *indefinite* article — whether with a referring or non-referring head noun — is incompatible with most of these partitive quantifiers. Thus:

3) See vol. I, ch. 3, section 3.5; ch. 5, sections 5.4. and 5.5; ch. 6, section 6.7; and ch. 11 in its entirety.