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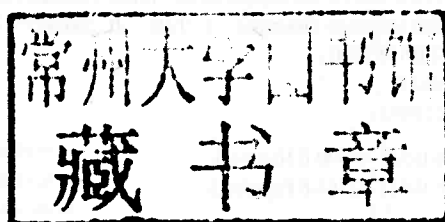
An Introduction to Word Grammar

Richard Hudson

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RICHARD HUDSON



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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	page x
<i>List of tables</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
Introduction	1
Part I How the mind works	
1 Introduction to cognitive science	7
2 Categorization	9
2.1 Concepts, categories and exemplars	9
2.2 Taxonomies and the isA relation	12
2.3 Generalizations and inheritance	16
2.4 Multiple inheritance and choices	22
2.5 Default inheritance and prototype effects	24
2.6 Social categories and stereotypes	30
3 Network structure	34
3.1 Concepts, percepts, feelings and actions	34
3.2 Relational concepts, arguments and values	37
3.3 Choices, features and cross-classification	44
3.4 Examples of relational taxonomies	47
3.5 The network notion, properties and default inheritance	57
3.6 Do networks need modularity?	63
4 Network activity	70
4.1 Activation and long-term memory	70
4.2 Activation and working memory	73
4.3 Building and learning exemplar nodes	80
4.4 Building induced nodes	83
4.5 Building inherited nodes	87
4.6 Binding nodes together	91
Part II How language works	
5 Introduction to linguistics	103
5.1 Description	103
5.2 Detail	104

5.3	Data	105
5.4	Differences	105
5.5	Divisions	106
5.6	Developments	108
6	Words as concepts	109
6.1	Types and tokens	109
6.2	Word properties	114
6.3	Word-classes	117
6.4	Grammaticality	118
6.5	Lexemes and inflections	121
6.6	Definitions and efficiency	127
6.7	Morphology and lexical relations	131
6.8	Social properties of words	136
6.9	Levels of analysis	138
7	Syntax	145
7.1	Dependencies and phrases	145
7.2	Valency	154
7.3	Morpho-syntactic features, agreement and unrealized words	162
7.4	Default word order	168
7.5	Coordination	175
7.6	Special word orders	181
7.7	Syntax without modules	189
8	Using and learning language	193
8.1	Accessibility and frequency	193
8.2	Retrieving words	197
8.3	Tokens and types in listening and speaking	202
8.4	Learning generalizations	205
8.5	Using generalizations	209
8.6	Binding in word-recognition, parsing and pragmatics	212
8.7	Meaning	220
8.8	Social meaning	241
Part III How English works		
9	Introduction to English linguistics	249
10	English words	251
10.1	Word-classes	251
10.2	Inflections	255
10.3	Word-class properties	260
10.4	Morphology and lexical relations	270
10.5	Social properties	276

11 English syntax	279
11.1 Dependencies	279
11.2 Valency	285
11.3 Features, agreement and unrealized lexemes	296
11.4 Default word order	301
11.5 Coordination	304
11.6 Special word orders	307
<i>References</i>	327
<i>Index</i>	322

Figures

2.1	A menu taxonomy in traditional notation	<i>page</i> 15
2.2	A menu taxonomy in Word Grammar notation	15
2.3	The sea-thrush inherits from 'bird' and 'creature'	17
2.4	The searcher climbs step by step but the copier sends copies directly	20
2.5	Only exemplars inherit properties	21
2.6	Multiple inheritance	23
2.7	The Nixon diamond	24
2.8	An exception creates an inheritance conflict	29
2.9	'Me' as goal-keeper	31
3.1	The Necker cube (A) with its two interpretations (B, C)	35
3.2	A concept such as 'cat' may be linked to percepts, emotions and motor skills	37
3.3	Properties shown as links	39
3.4	Properties shown as labelled links	40
3.5	Social relations shown as labelled links	41
3.6	Relations shown as a taxonomy	42
3.7	New relations are defined in terms of existing ones	43
3.8	Sex as a choice between 'male' and 'female'	45
3.9	Man, boy, woman and girl defined	47
3.10	A taxonomy of family relations	49
3.11	How three of the Simpsons are related	49
3.12	Four interactive relations and their default behaviours	51
3.13	Figure or ground?	53
3.14	Landmarks tend to be local	54
3.15	'Before' and 'after' is a 'landmark'	56
3.16	Typical cars are fuelled by petrol and have their motor in front	60
3.17	Grandparents are parents' parents and great-grandparents are grandparents' parents	60
3.18	Petrol is the default car fuel, and diesel is an exception	62
3.19	A car's motor is in front by default, and only exceptionally in the rear	63
3.20	From meaning to sound in the brain	66

4.1	Activation spreads indiscriminately from a node to all its neighbours	75
4.2	How to retrieve Jack's birthday	78
4.3	Three bird exemplars have wings and a beak	85
4.4	A schema for 'bird' has been induced from a number of exemplars	86
4.5	How to inherit a mother	88
4.6	What you know about a bird exemplar	93
4.7	What you know about 'bird'	96
4.8	What you know about bird E	96
4.9	You decide that E is a 'bird'	97
6.1	Types and tokens distinguished	112
6.2	Traditional word-classes as a taxonomy	118
6.3	Inheritance in a taxonomy of word-classes	119
6.4	How the lexeme BOOK is related to the inflection 'plural'	123
6.5	Forms realize words, and word-forms are variants of other forms	133
6.6	Two kinds of morphological exception	134
6.7	Inflections and lexical relations are different	136
6.8	The architecture of language	142
7.1	Two syntactic analyses of <i>Cows eat grass</i> .	148
7.2	Two syntactic analyses of <i>Hungry cows eat grass</i> .	150
7.3	The difference between subjects and adjuncts in a simple example	153
7.4	A general taxonomy of dependencies	155
7.5	Typical words need a parent, but finite verbs don't	157
7.6	A triangle in syntax and in kinship	161
7.7	Plural nouns have exceptional plural number	165
7.8	Three alternative analyses of the imperative <i>Hurry!</i>	166
7.9	Landmarks shadow dependencies	170
7.10	How tangled dependencies show bad word order	171
7.11	The triangular dependencies of <i>He keeps talking</i> .	174
7.12	Syntactic triangles can be multiplied freely	174
7.13	Coordinated words share the same dependency	177
7.14	Any dependency can be shared by multiple parents or dependents	177
7.15	Coordinated items depend on the conjunction	178
7.16	Coordinating conjunctions have dependents but no parent	178
7.17	Word strings accommodate non-constituent coordination	180
7.18	One coordination may contain another	180
7.19	An extracted object	184
7.20	A grammar for simple extraction	185
7.21	Long-distance dependency	186
7.22	Subordinate questions with and without extraction	188
8.1	GOOD is more frequent than BAD	196
8.2	When speaking, thinking of 'cat' evokes /kat/	198
8.3	Stages in the learning of the lexeme CAT	208
8.4	How to recognize {cat} and CAT	214
8.5	The Stroop effect	215

8.6	How to parse a simple sentence	217
8.7	Verbs as well as nouns have a sense and a referent	225
8.8	The semantics of plural and past inflections	227
8.9	How a dependent's referent most typically affects the sense of its parent	229
8.10	Coreference between a determiner and its complement	230
8.11	The syntax and semantics of a cleft sentence	231
8.12	<i>He is a linguist</i> means 'he is a linguist'	233
8.13	The meaning of <i>He can swim</i> .	233
8.14	The idiom KICK THE BUCKET	234
8.15	Four deictic words and their meanings	238
8.16	How the English kinship system is defined in terms of 'mother' and 'father'	242
8.17	Given names are used only for 'intimates' of the speaker	244
10.1	A more efficient taxonomy of word-classes for English	254
10.2	The inflections of the English verb	258
10.3	The morphology and semantics of the lexical relation 'opposite'	274
11.1	Four basic dependency categories for English	282
11.2	The syntactic structure of a sentence	283
11.3	Prepositions can have many different complement patterns	289
11.4	A typically simple dependency analysis of a complex noun phrase	289
11.5	The two 'apostrophe s's as clitics	290
11.6	Mutual dependency in a relative clause	291
11.7	A typical ditransitive verb, with direct and indirect object	293
11.8	Recursive dependencies in a chain of predicatives	294
11.9	Determiners agree in number with their complement noun	297
11.10	Subject-verb agreement in English	298
11.11	Verb-complement ellipsis as an unrealized lexeme	300
11.12	Coordination and subordination compared	305
11.13	The grammar for subject-auxiliary inversion	309
11.14	Extraction in a wh-question	310
11.15	Subordinate questions with and without extraction	311
11.16	A relative pronoun introducing a relative clause	312
11.17	A long subject with and without extraposition	313
11.18	Passivization	315

Tables of Contents

6.1	Some English noun lexemes and their plurals	<i>page</i> 124
6.2	Two Latin nouns by number and case	124
6.3	The present-tense inflections of the French verb PORT, 'carry'	125
6.4	Some regular and irregular verb–noun pairs	135
10.1	Inflections for English verbs	257
10.2	The English auxiliary verbs	264
10.3	The pronouns of English	266
10.4	Tests for the major word-classes of English	269
10.5	Word-classes as percentages of all the word-tokens in this book compared with a million-word corpus of written English	270
10.6	Tests for verb inflections	271
11.1	Pre-dependents and post-dependents of four word-classes	281
11.2	The main dependency types for English	295

Introduction

This book consists of three parts, each of which is an introduction to a separate discipline: cognitive science, linguistics (a branch of cognitive science) and English grammar (a branch of linguistics).

Part I, called 'How the mind works', is a very modest alternative to Steven Pinker's bestseller of the same name (Pinker 1998a), and is a personal selection of rather commonplace psychological ideas about concepts and mental networks and the activation that flows round them, together with a few novelties such as default inheritance and node building. These ideas are selected so as to provide a foundation for the next part.

In Part II, 'How language works', I make a theoretical point that's exactly the opposite of the one made famous by Pinker, following the mainstream Chomskyan tradition (Pinker 1994). Where Pinker finds a 'language instinct', I find ordinary cognition. Like other 'cognitive linguists', I believe that language is very similar to other kinds of thinking. I also believe that the fine details that we linguists find when looking at language tell us a great deal not only about language, but also about how we think in general. Every single phenomenon that I know about, as a linguist, is just as you'd expect given the way in which (according to Part I) the mind works.

Finally, Part III, 'How English works', gives a brief survey of English grammar. The chapter on syntax summarizes my little 1998 textbook *English Grammar* which supported my first-year undergraduate course on English grammar. The students seemed to enjoy learning to draw dependency arrows and appreciated the idea that this was a skill that they could apply to virtually any English sentence.

I should explain that the book's structure is itself a little like the structure of thought: it's a network. Admittedly, it doesn't look like a network at first sight; if you look at the table of contents you'll see the usual hierarchical structure of parts, chapters and sections. But if you look more carefully, you'll find that most of the chapters and sections correspond across the three parts. For example, Section 2.2 discusses general principles of classification which are then applied in 6.3 to the principles of how we classify words, which in turn lead into the exposition of English word-classes in 10.1.

The structure based on parts and the one indicated by the cross-links between parts correspond to the two structures of the intellectual picture that I want to present. The hierarchical structure follows the academic divisions: Part I is the broad discipline of cognitive science, which includes linguistics (Part II), which

includes English grammar (Part III). Each of these disciplines has its own logical structure, so the chapters and sections try to follow this logic. But the cross-links are the book's main point because they show how various general ideas from cognitive science apply to language and explain its characteristics. It's not just that there are some parts of language that are similar to other parts of thinking. What I'm claiming is that the whole of language can be explained in this way, so I have to justify the claim in detail with a link from every section in Part II to some section in Part I.

Fortunately, the corresponding sections in the three parts follow exactly the same order because they follow the same logic, which means that you can read the book either linearly or laterally. A linear reading takes you through a course in cognitive science, then through a course in linguistics and finally through a course in English grammar, each following its own internal logic. A lateral reading takes you from a section in Part I into its corresponding section in Part II and on into a section in Part III – or, if you prefer, in the opposite direction.

How you cope with this choice is, of course, up to you. One obvious solution is to combine the linear and lateral approaches. If you follow this strategy, you'll start at the beginning of Part I, read the first section, then read the corresponding section in Part II, then the one (if there is one) in Part III, then back to the next section in Part I; and so on. This is how I hope more advanced students will read it, and to encourage them I've added a note at the end of most sections in Parts I and II recommending that they should stray into a section of the next part, where (to increase the temptation) they'll also find a summary of this section. This is what I call the '**advanced route**'. But I accept that some readers will prefer to follow a purely linear route which takes them straight through the book, and don't need sign-posts.

If you're a teacher, you may like to know how I would use this book as a textbook for my undergraduate teaching. I would spread it across two years, with Part III for first-year students and Parts I and II for the second year. First-year undergraduates can certainly cope with the grammatical analyses of Part III, especially if they make use of the material on the website; indeed, these analyses aren't much harder than those that are standardly taught in many countries to primary school children. The practical experience of exploring the 'real language' of texts is an excellent foundation for the more theoretical exploration in the first and second parts, and is probably especially important for students who have come through the more or less grammar-free schools of most English-speaking countries (Hudson and Walmsley 2005). I've mapped out a '**novice route**' through the book which basically takes them through Part III, but with little excursions into the corresponding sections of Part II. The 'advanced route' should suit second-year students, who can obviously use their discretion about revisiting Part III.

If you're a student, then I should explain my policy on bibliographical references. I assume that you're a typical modern student with easy access to the internet and more IT skills than time. I also assume that you'd like to be able to follow

up some of the research that I quote, but without having to cope with the dense technicalities of research literature. With these two thoughts in mind, I decided to make as much use as I could of two wonderful resources: Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org) and the second edition of the Elsevier *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (Brown 2006) which your university may well make available to you online.

Wikipedia is especially good for Part I as it gives easy access to the rather elementary research ideas that I discuss, but please remember to take it with a pinch of salt. As far as I can tell, the articles I recommend are, by and large, sensible and scholarly, but some of the claims are inevitably controversial, and occasional silliness is hard to avoid in a work that anyone can edit. If in doubt about something you find in Wikipedia, try searching in Google, and especially in Google Scholar and Google Books. For Part II, of course, the *Encyclopedia* is the main point of reference. The articles in both sources are written by experts with whom I can't compete; my main contribution is simply to have put their ideas together in an unusual combination.

More material is available on the book's **website** (www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/izwg/index.htm) for those who want it, and especially for those who want to hone the skills that Part III tries to develop; it includes an encyclopaedia of English grammar and Word Grammar, but much more besides.

And of course, for those who want to know more about Word Grammar, there are plenty of publications, not least my most recent (2007) monograph, *Language Networks: the New Word Grammar*. There's no better test for ideas than writing a book about them, whether it's a monograph or a textbook, and this textbook is no exception. Consequently I have to report a number of points where I've changed my mind even since writing *Language Networks*: choice sets (3.3), best landmarks (3.4.3), the notation for coordination and dependencies (7.5) and the mechanism for resolving word-order conflicts (7.6). This is as you'd expect. After all, Word Grammar is a network of ideas in my mind, and as I explain in Part I, any cognitive network is forever changing as it tries to adjust to reality.

Where next?

Advanced: Part I, Chapter 1: Introduction to cognitive science

Novice: Part III, Chapter 9: Introduction to English linguistics

PART I

How the mind works

How the mind works