

西方语言学丛书



# 最简方案： 句法理论与英语结构

SYNTACTIC THEORY  
AND THE STRUCTURE OF ENGLISH  
A MINIMALIST APPROACH

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ANDREW RADFORD

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS, UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX



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A MINIMALIST APPROACH

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# 出版说明

乔姆斯基的转换生成语法强调人类语言的普遍性,试图从语法原则与参数的高度揭开人类语言的普遍结构,更进一步揭示人类认知的奥秘。人类历史上似乎从未有哪一门学科如此富于创造性和挑战性,也很少有一种科学能够如此深刻地对相关学科产生如此广泛而深远的影响。这一理论在不断拓展的语料视野面前,在不断回应新思想方法的挑战过程中,不断地调整自己的思路和方法,跋涉了半个世纪,其所取得的成就不仅使语言学家激动和自豪,也令当代哲学、心理学、信息学、计算机科学、人工智能等众多领域的学者所瞩目。

乔姆斯基自称其理论远绍十七世纪法国普遍唯理语法。1898年,马建忠在他的《马氏文通》后序中这样说:“盖所见为不同者,惟此已形已声之字,皆人为之也。而亘古今,塞宇宙,其种之或黄或白,或紫或黑之钩是人也,天皆赋之以此心之所以能意,此意之所以能达之理。则常探讨画革旁行诸国语言之源流,若希腊、若拉丁之文词而属比之,见其字别种,而句司字,所以声其心而形其意者,皆有一定不易之律;而因以律吾经籍子史诸书,其大纲盖无不同。于是因所同以同夫所不同者,是则此编之所以成也。”马氏是留法的,普遍唯理语法对他的影响同样是深刻的。

不过,在中国,普遍主义的思想也就此昙花一现,很快就湮没在强调汉语特点的思路中。半个多世纪之后,转换生成语法逐渐为中国学者所知,可是很多人都认为它不适合汉语语法研究,只有在国外的学者在这方面做了些工作,取得了不少成绩。这种研究尽管还存在许许多多的问题,但至少可以说明,汉语研究同样可以走普遍语法的道路。

马氏的模仿是显然的。然而我们今天的研究就能肯定不是模仿了么?朱德熙先生曾经说:“长期以来印欧语语法观念给汉语研究带来的消极影响……主要表现在用印欧语的眼光来看待汉语,把印欧语所有而汉语所无的东西强加给汉语。”“我们现在在这里批评某些传统观念,很可能我们自己也正在不知不觉之中受这些传统观念的摆布。

这当然只能等将来由别人来纠正了,正所谓后之视今,亦犹今之视昔。”其言盖有深意焉。然而问题其实并不在于是否模仿,而在于模仿来的方法、视角是不是可以得出符合汉语事实的结论。反对模仿蕴涵着一个前提:即汉语与印欧语的结构没有相同之处。但是今天的我们对汉语的结构究竟了解了多少呢?

任何语言都有自己的特点,这一点毋庸置疑。但是不了解语言的普遍性,也就谈不上特点,也就无所谓走自己的道路。而且,在某一水平上成为特点的规律,在更高或更深层的水平上也许就不成其为特点,而仅仅是普遍性的一种特殊表现而已。

当代社会文化领域中多元化是主流,当代语言学理论也趋于多元。在西方,形式语言学不大可能再如以往如此这般地波澜壮阔,而是进入一个相对平静的稳定发展的时期,语言的功能方面的研究已经占据一席之地。在未来的一段时期内,语言学将是一个酝酿期,为下一个重大突破作准备。而在中国,语言学在长期的“借鉴”之后,也在思考如何能够从汉语出发,取得重大突破,反哺世界学林。语言学发展到今天,又重新面临着路怎样走这一根本问题。

不管下一步怎么走,充分了解西方学者的成绩,借鉴他们的思路和方法无疑是必不可少的。特别是对于取得了如此重大成就的当代西方语言学,如果不能有正确的了解,无异于闭门造车,要想出门合辙,不亦难乎?

北大出版社多年来坚持学术为本的出版方针,我们愿意为语言学在新世纪的发展尽一分绵薄之力。为了推动我国语言学事业的发展,在总编张文定先生的主持下,我们将原版引进一批高质量的语言学专著和教材,命之曰“西方语言学丛书”,以飨学林。引进的作品将包括语音学、韵律学、句法学、语义学、语言史、词源学、方言学等各个领域;既包括宏观的理论研究,也包括重要问题的个案研究;既包括形式语言学的方法,也包括认知、功能等视角。但不管是哪一种,都是经过精挑细选,庶几开卷有益。

我们期待着中国语言学的新突破!

北京大学出版社

Andrew Radford's new textbook is written for students with little or no background in syntax, and introduces them to key concepts of Chomsky's minimalist program (e.g. merger and movement, checking, economy and greed, split VPs, agreement projections), as well as providing detailed analysis of the syntax of a range of different construction types (e.g. interrogatives, negatives, passives, unaccusatives, complement clauses). Illustrative material is mainly drawn from varieties of English (Standard English, Belfast English, Shakespearean English, Jamaican Creole and Child English). There is a substantial glossary at the end of the overall book, and an extensive integral *workbook section* at the end of each chapter with helpful hints and model answers, which aim to enable students to analyse phrases and sentences for themselves within a minimalist framework.

## PREFACE

The aim of this book is to provide an intensive introduction to recent work in syntactic theory (more particularly, to key concepts which are presupposed in works written within the broad framework of the minimalist program in the version outlined in Chomsky 1995b). There are six main features which mark this book out as different from other introductions to syntax currently available.

The first is that it does not presuppose any background knowledge of syntactic theory: it is suitable for use with true beginners, and does not presuppose that students have already done a course on generative syntax (though it is also suitable for false beginners who have already taken a course on an earlier model of syntax, and want to learn about more recent work).

The second is that it does not adopt a historical approach, or presuppose any historical knowledge (for example, there is no discussion of earlier work in the 1980s *government and binding* paradigm). Rather (for the most part), it deals directly with 1990s work within the *minimalist program*.

The third is that cross-linguistic variation is illustrated in terms of different varieties of English (e.g. Belfast English, Jamaican Creole, Child English, Shakespearean English, etc.), rather than in terms of different languages. Hence it does not make the unrealistic assumption that the reader knows (for example) Spanish, German, Arabic, Chinese and Chuckchee.

The fourth is that the book contains a substantial *workbook section* at the end of each chapter, containing exercise material designed to be used for class discussion, self-study or coursework assignments, with fully worked out *model answers* provided for key examples, and *helpful hints* for potentially problematic points. Where a particular exercise presupposes understanding of key concepts introduced in particular sections of the text, the relevant text sections are indicated in parentheses, after the exercise number.

The fifth is that there is an extensive *glossary* at the end of the overall book, intended to alleviate the terminological trauma of doing syntax.

The sixth is that the book is published alongside an abridged version called *Syntax: a Minimalist Introduction*. The two books cover roughly the same range of topics: the

## Preface

abridged version is intended for use as a nonintensive introduction on short syntax courses, and includes less theoretical and descriptive detail and less exercise material; the full-length version is intended for use as an intensive introduction on longer syntax courses, and contains twice as much text material and three times as much exercise material (as well as a slightly extended glossary and bibliography). The full-length version can be used as a follow-up to the abridged version (e.g. students who read the abridged version and get interested in the syntax of agreement projections can then turn to read the more detailed account given in chapter 10 of this book).

This book is divided into ten chapters, with each chapter (on average) comprising 25–35 pages of text (divided up into ten numbered sections) and 10–20 pages of exercise material. In general, chapters are written in such a way as to become progressively more difficult: the first half of the text of each chapter introduces key ideas in a relatively accessible way; the second half typically discusses rather more complex descriptive details or theoretical issues, and is often considerably more challenging. In addition, the chapters become cumulatively more complex as the book progresses; the last two chapters are particularly challenging and involve a far higher level of abstraction than the others.

Because each new chapter serves to introduce a new set of ideas, you will find that earlier analyses are often revised in later chapters. Thus, the book introduces students to a range of different analyses of particular constructions (e.g. the analysis of double-object constructions presented in chapter 9 is substantially revised in chapter 10).

The extensive *workbook section* at the end of each chapter is designed as an integral part of the text: the *model answers* provided in some cases extend the analysis presented in the text, and are thus an essential part of the ‘learning experience’ provided by the book. As Sam Featherston remarked to me after teaching an earlier version of the book to a group of students: ‘I wish I’d told the students to read all the *model answers* even if they don’t tackle the relevant exercises – they contain a lot of important additional information.’

The *glossary* at the end of the book provides simple illustrations of how key terms (and abbreviations) are used – not just theory-specific technical terms like *enlightened self-interest*, but also more basic general terms such as *subject*.

I am grateful to Laura Rupp, Sam Featherston and Martin Atkinson (Essex), and Jon Erickson (Cologne) for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript; and above all to the series editor Neil Smith (University College London) for his patient and good-humoured comments on numerous ((re-)re-)revised drafts of the manuscript.

This book is dedicated to my father and my sister (who both died before I had time to thank them for all they did for me) and to my mother for battling so bravely against bereavement and blindness over the past couple of years, before finally passing away on 16 February 1997.



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# 1

## Principles and parameters

### 1.1 Overview

The aim of this chapter is to outline contemporary ideas on *the nature of grammar* and *the acquisition of grammar*. The approach adopted here is that associated with the **principles-and-parameters** model developed by Noam Chomsky during the 1980s and 1990s, in works ranging from his 1981 book *Lectures on Government and Binding* to his 1995c book *The Minimalist Program*.

### 1.2 Grammar

**Grammar** is traditionally subdivided into two different but inter-related areas of study – **morphology** and **syntax**. Morphology is the study of how words are formed out of smaller units (traditionally called *morphemes*), and so addresses questions such as ‘What are the various component parts (= morphemes) of a word like *antidisestablishmentarianism*, and what kinds of principles determine the ways in which the parts are combined together to form the whole?’ Syntax is concerned with the ways in which words can be combined together to form phrases and sentences, and so addresses questions like ‘Why is it OK in English to say *Who did you see Mary with?*, but not OK to say *\*Who did you see Mary and?*’ (A star in front of an expression means that it’s ungrammatical.) ‘What kinds of principles determine the ways in which we can and cannot combine words together to form phrases and sentences?’

However, grammar is traditionally concerned not just with the principles which determine the *formation* of words, phrases and sentences, but also with the principles which govern their *interpretation* – i.e. with the principles which tell us how to *interpret* (= assign meaning to) words, phrases and sentences. For example, any comprehensive grammar of English will specify that compound words like *man-eater* and *man-made* have very different interpretations: in compounds like *man-eater*, the word *man* is traditionally said to have a *patient* interpretation, in the sense that man is the patient/hapless victim on whom the act of eating is going to be performed; by contrast, in compounds like *man-made*, the word *man* is said to have an *agent* interpretation, in the sense that *man* is the agent responsible for the act of making. Thus, structural aspects of meaning are traditionally said to be part of the domain of grammar. We

## *Principles and parameters*

might therefore characterize grammar as the study of *the principles which govern the formation and interpretation of words, phrases and sentences*. In terms of the traditional division of grammar into morphology and syntax, we can say that morphology studies the formation and interpretation of words, whereas syntax is concerned with the formation and interpretation of phrases and sentences.

In a fairly obvious sense, any native speaker of a language can be said to know the grammar of his or her native language. After all, native speakers clearly know how to form and interpret words, phrases and sentences in their native language. For example, any native speaker of English can tell you that the negative counterpart of *I like syntax* is *I don't like syntax*, and not e.g. *\*I no like syntax*: thus, we might say that native speakers know how to negate sentences in their language. However, it is important to emphasize that this grammatical knowledge is *tacit* (i.e. subconscious) rather than *explicit* (i.e. conscious): so, it's no good asking a native speaker of English a question such as 'How do you form negative sentences in English?', since human beings have no conscious awareness of the psychological processes involved in speaking and understanding a language. To introduce a technical term, we might say that native speakers have grammatical **competence** in their native language: by this, we mean that they have tacit knowledge of the grammar of their language – i.e. of how to form and interpret words, phrases and sentences in the language.

In work dating back to the 1960s, Chomsky has drawn a distinction between *competence* (the fluent native speaker's tacit knowledge of his language) and **performance** (what people actually say or understand by what someone else says on a given occasion). Competence is 'the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language', while performance is 'the actual use of language in concrete situations' (Chomsky 1965, p. 4). Very often, performance is an imperfect reflection of competence: we all make occasional slips of the tongue, or occasionally misinterpret what someone else says to us. However, this doesn't mean that we don't know our native language, or don't have competence (i.e. fluency) in it. Misproductions and misinterpretations are *performance errors*, attributable to a variety of performance factors like tiredness, boredom, drunkenness, drugs, external distractions, and so forth. Grammars traditionally set out to tell you what you need to know about a language in order to have native speaker competence in the language (i.e. to be able to speak the language like a native speaker): hence, it is clear that grammar is concerned with *competence* rather than *performance*. This is not to deny the interest of *performance* as a field of study, but merely to assert that performance is more properly studied within the different – though related – discipline of psycholinguistics, which studies the psychological processes underlying speech production and comprehension. It seems reasonable to suppose that competence will play an important part in the study of performance, since you have to understand what native speakers tacitly know about their language before you can study the effects of tiredness, drunkenness, etc. on this knowledge.

If we say that grammar is the study of grammatical competence, then we are implicitly taking a *cognitive* view of the nature of grammar. After all, if the term *grammatical competence* is used to denote what native speakers tacitly know about the grammar of their language, then grammar is part of the more general study of cognition (i.e. human knowledge). In the terminology adopted by Chomsky (1986a, pp. 19–56), we're studying language as a cognitive system *internalized* within the human brain/mind; our ultimate goal is to characterize the nature of the internalized linguistic system (or *I-language*, as Chomsky terms it) which enables humans to speak and understand their native language. Such a cognitive approach has obvious implications for the descriptive linguist who is interested in trying to describe the grammar of a particular language like English. What it means is that in devising a grammar of English, we are attempting to describe the grammatical knowledge possessed by the fluent native speaker of English. However, clearly this competence is not directly accessible to us: as noted above, you can't ask native speakers to introspect about the nature of the processes by which they produce and understand sentences in their native language, since they have no conscious awareness of such processes. Hence, we have to seek to study competence *indirectly*. But how?

Perhaps the richest vein of readily available evidence which we have about the nature of grammatical competence lies in native speakers' intuitions about the *grammaticality* and *interpretation* of words, phrases and sentences in their native language. For example, preschool children often produce past tense forms like *goed*, *comed*, *seed*, *buyed*, etc. and any adult native speaker of (Modern Standard) English will intuitively know that such forms are ungrammatical in English, and will know that their grammatical counterparts are *went*, *came*, *saw* and *bought*. Similarly, any native speaker of English would intuitively recognize that sentences like (1a) below are grammatical in English, but that sentences like (1b) are ungrammatical:

- (1) (a) If you don't know the meaning of a word, look it up in a dictionary  
 (b) \*If you don't know the meaning of a word, look up it in a dictionary

(Recall that a star in front of an expression means that it is ungrammatical; by convention, any expression which does not have a star in front of it is grammatical; note that stars go *before* – not *after* – ungrammatical words, phrases or sentences.) Thus, we might say that *intuitions about grammaticality* form part of the native speaker's grammatical competence. Equivalently, we can say that native speakers have the ability to make *grammaticality judgments* about words, phrases and sentences in their native language – i.e. the ability to judge whether particular expressions are grammatical or ungrammatical within their native language. An interesting implication of this fact is that if grammars model competence, a grammar of a language must tell you not only what you *can* say in the language, but also what you *can't* say, since native speaker competence includes not only the ability to make the judgment that certain types of

### *Principles and parameters*

sentence (e.g. (1a) above) are grammatical, but also the ability to judge that others (e.g. (1b) above) are ungrammatical. Indeed, much of contemporary work in syntax is concerned with trying to explain why certain types of structure are ungrammatical: it would perhaps not be too much of an exaggeration to say that whereas traditional grammars concentrate on *grammaticality* (i.e. on telling you how to form grammatical phrases and sentences), work on grammar within the Chomskyan paradigm tends to focus much more on explaining *ungrammaticality* (i.e. on explaining why certain types of structures are ungrammatical).

A second source of introspective evidence about the nature of grammatical competence relates to native speaker intuitions about the *interpretation* of words, phrases and sentences in their native language. For example, any native speaker of English can tell you that a sentence such as:

(2) Sam loves you more than Jim

is ambiguous, and has two different interpretations which can be paraphrased as in (3a–b) below:

- (3) (a) Sam loves you more than Jim loves you  
(b) Sam loves you more than Sam loves Jim

So, it seems that the native speaker's grammatical competence is reflected not only in intuitions about *grammaticality*, but also in intuitions about *interpretation*.

### **1.3 Criteria of adequacy**

Given that a grammar of a language is a model of the competence of a fluent speaker of the language, and given that competence is reflected in intuitions about grammaticality and interpretation, an important criterion of adequacy for a grammar of any natural language is that of *descriptive adequacy*. We can say that a grammar of a given language is *descriptively adequate* if it correctly describes whether any given string (i.e. sequence) of words in a language is or isn't grammatical, and also correctly describes what interpretation(s) the relevant string has. So, for example, a grammar of English would be descriptively adequate in the relevant respects if it told us that sentences like (1a) above are grammatical in English but those like (1b) are ungrammatical, and if it told us that sentences like (2) are ambiguous as between the two interpretations paraphrased in (3a) and (3b): conversely, our grammar would be descriptively inadequate if it wrongly told us that both the sentences in (1a–b) are grammatical in English, or that (2) can be paraphrased as in (3a), but not as in (3b).

While the concern of the descriptive linguist is to devise grammars of particular languages, the concern of the theoretical linguist is to devise a *theory of grammar*. A theory of grammar is a set of hypotheses about the nature of possible and impossible grammars of *natural* (i.e. human) languages: hence, a theory of grammar answers



questions like: 'What are the inherent properties which natural language grammars do and don't possess?' Just as there are *criteria of adequacy* for grammars, so too there are a number of criteria which any adequate theory of grammar must satisfy. One obvious criterion is *universality*, in the sense that a theory of grammar should provide us with the tools needed to describe the grammar of *any* natural language adequately; after all, a theory of grammar would be of little interest if it enabled us to describe the grammar of English and French, but not that of Swahili or Chinese. So, what we mean by saying that *universality* is a criterion of adequacy for a theory of grammar is that a theory of grammar must enable us to devise a descriptively adequate grammar for every natural language: in other words, our ultimate goal is to develop a *theory of Universal Grammar*. In the linguistic literature, it is a standard convention to abbreviate the term *Universal Grammar* to *UG*, and hence to talk of devising a *theory of UG*.

However, since the ultimate goal of any theory is *explanation*, it is not enough for a theory of Universal Grammar simply to list sets of universal properties of natural language grammars; on the contrary, a theory of UG must seek to *explain* the relevant properties. So, a key question for any adequate theory of UG to answer is: 'Why do natural language grammars have the properties they do?' The requirement that a theory should *explain* why grammars have the properties they do is conventionally referred to as the criterion of *explanatory adequacy*.

Since the theory of Universal Grammar is concerned with characterizing the properties of *natural* (i.e. human) language grammars, an important question which we want our theory of UG to answer is: 'What are the essential defining characteristics of natural languages which differentiate them from, for example, artificial languages like those used in mathematics and computing (e.g. Basic, Prolog, etc.), or from animal communication systems (e.g. the tail-wagging dance performed by bees to communicate the location of a food source to other bees)?' It therefore follows that the descriptive apparatus which our theory of Universal Grammar allows us to make use of in devising natural language grammars must not be so powerful that it can be used to describe not only natural languages, but also computer languages or animal communication systems (since any such excessively powerful theory wouldn't be able to pinpoint the criterial properties of natural languages which differentiate them from other types of communication system). In other words, a third condition which we have to impose on our theory of language is that it be maximally *restrictive*: that is, we want our theory to provide us with technical devices which are so *constrained* in their expressive power that they can only be used to describe natural languages, and are not appropriate for the description of other communication systems. Any such restrictive theory would then enable us to characterize the very essence of natural language.

The neurophysiological mechanisms which underlie linguistic competence make it possible for young children to *acquire* language in a remarkably short period of time: children generally start to form elementary two-word structures at around 18 months of