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978-0-521-58914-7 - Syntax: A Minimalist Introduction
Andrew Radford
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Syntax: a minimalist introduction

This textbook provides a concise, readable introduction to contemporary work in syntactic theory, particularly to key concepts of Chomsky's minimalist program. Andrew Radford gives a general overview of the main theoretical concepts and descriptive devices used in 1990s work. *Syntax: a Minimalist Introduction* presupposes no prior knowledge of syntax or any language other than English: the analysis is based on Standard, Belfast, Jamaican, Shakespearean and Child English. There are exercises (with helpful hints and model answers) and a substantial glossary.

This is an abridged version of Radford's major new textbook *Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English: a Minimalist Approach* (also published by Cambridge University Press), and will be welcomed as a short introduction to current syntactic theory.

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Syntax

A minimalist introduction

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Preface

This book is essentially an abridged version of my *Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English: a Minimalist Approach*. Although much of the text of this shorter book is taken verbatim from various sections of the longer one, the shorter book is intended to be used as a self-contained introduction to syntax, and as such has been designed with a number of specific criteria in mind.

One is that lengthy tomes are simply impractical to use as course-books on short courses where only a limited number of hours/weeks are available: Joe Emonds once remarked to me that a student complained to him about my 625-page *Transformational Grammar* book that 'This is the third syntax course I've been on where we only got half way through the coursebook by the end of the course.' The main text of the present book is around a third the length of the main text of *Transformational Grammar* and is designed explicitly to be used on short syntax courses. So, there's no excuse for not getting through *all* of it!

A second consideration which I have borne in mind is that students taking short introductory syntax courses want a general overview of key theoretical concepts and descriptive devices used in contemporary work in the 1990s; they do not want (nor is it realistic to give them) a historical account of how earlier work in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s led up to (or compares with) current work. This book aims to introduce students to key concepts which are presupposed in works written within the broad framework of the *minimalist program* (in the version outlined in chapter 4 of Chomsky 1995).

A third factor which has influenced me is that many students on syntax courses are primarily interested in English, and may have a relatively limited knowledge of (or interest in) the syntax of other languages. For such students, detailed discussion of (for example) the syntax of Sardinian clitics or Japanese topic markers is likely to induce severe brain-strain and a terminal desire to give up syntax. Accordingly, the discussion in this book is primarily based on different varieties of English (not just Modern Standard English, but also e.g. the English of Shakespeare's plays). The book is therefore ideal for linguaphobic Anglophiles.

A fourth concern which I have taken into account is that many students are terrified by the terminological trauma of taking syntax.

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Most introductions to syntax presuppose a substantial background knowledge of traditional grammatical terms like *subject*, *case*, *agreement*, etc., and then go on to introduce new tongue-twisting terms and conceptually constipated constructs on every page: if you're like me, by the time you reach page 742, you've forgotten what exactly the new term introduced on page 729 means (let alone which of the various definitions of *c-command* it is based on). To overcome the understandable fears which beginners have, I have used simple metaphors and analogies to introduce technical terms (for example, the term *c-command* is defined in terms of networks of train stations). And to help those of you who suffer from terminological amnesia, I've included a substantial *glossary* at the end of the book which provides simple illustrations of how key terms (and abbreviations) are used – not just theory-specific technical terms like *c-command*, but also traditional terms such as *subject*. A good way of reminding yourself of key concepts and constructs after you have completed chapter 10 is to read through the glossary.

My final aim has been to heed plaintive pleas from generations of students that although they can generally follow the text discussion in my 1981 and 1988 coursebooks, they have little or no idea how to go about doing the exercises at the end of each chapter. To help overcome this problem, I've included *model answers* and/or *helpful hints* for each of the exercises in this book.

A word of warning to students taking syntax for the first time: syntax can damage your health, producing (in some cases) an allergic reaction leading to severe scepticemia, and (in rare cases) an addictive response leading to acute arboriphilia. There is no known cure. However, you can take some sensible precautions to minimize the risks.

This book is not a novel: you can't simply pick it up and expect to flick through it in a couple of hours while listening to *Bad English* on your Walkman. The argumentation is dense, and cumulative: new concepts and constructs are introduced on every page, and familiarity with them is presupposed in later chapters. You should therefore treat it like cod liver oil – to be taken in small doses. Tackle it one chapter at a time, and (for example) only go on to chapter 4 when you have digested chapter 3: this may mean that you have to read some chapters several times. It's important to tackle the exercises at the end of each chapter, since it's only by doing so that you find out whether you really do understand the text discussion. (This is particularly important at key points in the text – e.g. in chapter 3, where tree diagrams appear for the first time, and

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where the exercises give you the opportunity of perfecting your arboreal artwork skills.)

The book becomes gradually more abstract as it goes on; the last four chapters are markedly more abstract than the chapters preceding them, and the last two (which introduce recent research of a highly speculative nature) provide an intimidating intellectual challenge: you can be forgiven for wanting to throw in the towel – or throw up – at that point. If you manage to make it through to the end, reward yourself by buying the real thing – no, not a bottle of Coke, but a copy of Chomsky's (1995) book *The Minimalist Program*. As noted at the beginning, this book is an abridged version of my *Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English* (= *STSE*). The two books are thus to a large extent parallel in structure, and can be used in conjunction with each other: hence, those who want to follow up the text discussion in some particular chapter of this book, or to have more extensive exercise material to practise on, can look at the more detailed text discussion and considerably expanded exercise material in the corresponding chapter of *STSE*.

Both books have benefited considerably from helpful suggestions made by colleagues and graduate students. In this connection, I'd like to say a big *thank you* to Laura Rupp, Sam Featherston and Martin Atkinson (Essex), and Jon Erickson (Cologne); 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. I'd also like to express my gratitude to students from all over the world who took the trouble to write to me with comments on my earlier *Transformational Syntax* book; you'll see that I've tried to accommodate many of your suggestions (e.g. for model answers to exercises, for a glossary of terms, etc.).

This book is dedicated to my wife Khadija for the friendship, love, support and encouragement she has always shown me, and for putting up with a houseful of discarded papers and smelly socks for so long.

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