English Syntax
An introduction

This textbook provides a concise, clear and accessible introduction to current syntactic theory, drawing on the key concepts of Chomsky’s Minimalist Program. Assuming little or no prior grammatical knowledge, Andrew Radford takes students through a wide range of topics in English syntax, beginning at an elementary level and progressing in stages towards more advanced material. There is an extensive glossary of technical terms, and each chapter contains a workbook section with ‘helpful hints’, exercises and model answers, suitable for both class discussion and self-study.

This is an abridged version of Radford’s major new textbook Minimalist Syntax: Exploring the Structure of English (also published by Cambridge University Press), and will be welcomed as a concise introduction to current syntactic theory.

Andrew Radford is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Essex. He has published six books on syntax with Cambridge University Press: Italian Syntax (1977); Transformational Syntax (1981); Transformational Grammar (1988); Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English (1997); Syntax: a Minimalist Introduction (1997) and Linguistics: an Introduction (co-authored with a group of his Essex colleagues, 1999). He has also published a book on Syntactic Theory and the Acquisition of English Syntax (Blackwell, 1990) and numerous articles on Romance syntax and the acquisition of syntax.
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Preface

Aims

This book has two main aims, corresponding to the two conjuncts in its title. This first is to provide an introduction to recent work in syntactic theory (more particularly to how the computational component operates within the model of Universal Grammar assumed in recent work within the framework of Chomsky’s Minimalist Program). The second is to provide a description of a range of phenomena in English syntax, making use of key minimalist concepts and assumptions as far as possible – while avoiding excessive technical complexity. This new book can be seen as a successor to (or updated version of) my (1997b) book Syntax: A Minimalist Introduction. There is quite a lot of duplication of material between the earlier book and this one (particularly in the first few chapters), though the present book also contains substantial new material (e.g. on agreement, case, split projections and phases), and the analysis of many phenomena presented in this book differs from that in its predecessor (with agreement being presented in terms of a feature-matching rather than a feature-checking framework, for example).

Key features

The book is intended to be suitable both for people with only minimal grammatical knowledge, and for people who have already done quite a bit of syntax but want to know something (more) about Minimalism. It is not historicist or comparative in orientation, and hence does not presuppose knowledge of earlier or alternative models of grammar. It is written in an approachable style, avoiding unnecessary complexity. I’ve taught earlier versions of the book to more than 200 students over the past three years, and greatly benefited from their mutterings and mystification, as well as their assignments (which told me a lot about what they didn’t understand, and about what I needed to explain more carefully). I’ve worked through (and refined) the exercise material with the students, and the helpful hints which the exercises contain have been developed in order to try and eliminate some of the commonest errors students make. The book is intensive and progressive in nature, which means that it starts at an elementary level but
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gets progressively harder as you get further into it. A group of students I taught an earlier (longer) version of the book to gave the following mean degree-of-difficulty score to each chapter on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = very easy to 5 = very hard: chapter 1 = 1.6; chapter 2 = 1.8; chapter 3 = 2.2; chapter 4 = 2.7; chapter 5 = 2.9; chapter 6 = 3.2; chapter 7 = 3.4; chapter 8 = 3.7; chapter 9 = 4.2; chapter 10 = 4.4. Successive chapters become cumulatively more complex, in that each chapter presupposes material covered in previous chapters as well as introducing new material: hence it is helpful to go back and read material from earlier chapters every so often. In some cases, analyses presented in earlier chapters are subsequently refined or revised in the light of new assumptions made in later chapters.

Organisation

Each of the ten chapters in the book contains a detailed text discussion of a particular topic (divided into sections to facilitate reading), together with an integral workbook section at the end of the chapter, containing exercise material (to be done as classwork or homework) with model answers and helpful hints provided. Although the book contains numerous references to (often highly technical) primary research works, the exercises are designed in such a way that they can be tackled on the basis of the coursebook material alone. The book also includes an extensive glossary which provides simple illustrations of how key technical terms are used (both theory-specific terms like EPP and traditional terms like subject): technical terms are written in bold print in the main text (italics being used for highlighting particular expressions – e.g. a key word appearing in an example sentence). The glossary contains entries for key technical terms in syntax which are used in a number of different places in the text (though not for terms which appear in only one part of the main text, and which are glossed in the text where they appear). The glossary also includes an integrated list of abbreviations.

Companion volume

This book is an abridged version of my parallel book on Minimalist Syntax: Exploring the Structure of English which is being published at the same time. In this shorter version of the book, the main text has been abridged (particularly in the later chapters) and hence is around two-thirds of the length of the main text in the parallel book. This shorter version is aimed in part at students taking syntax as a minor rather than a major course, and in part at non-native speakers of English whose reading speed may be considerably slower than that of native speakers. The two books have an essentially parallel organisation into chapters and sections (though a few sections and some technical details have been omitted.
in the abridged version), and contain much the same exercise material (with some omissions and changes in this shorter version). In keeping the two books parallel in structure and organisation as far as possible, I am mindful of the comment made in a review of two earlier books which I produced in parallel longer and shorter versions (Radford 1997a,b) that some readers may wish to read the short version of a given chapter first, and then look at the longer version afterwards, and that this ‘is not facilitated by an annoyingly large number of non-correspondences’ (Ten Hacken 2001, p. 2). Accordingly, I have tried to maximise correspondence between the ‘long’ and ‘short’ versions of these two new books.

Acknowledgments

Particular thanks are due to three brave Musketeers (Hajime Hattori, Cris Lozano and Peter Evans) for shooting down some of the more inane parts of an earlier draft of the book when they had it inflicted on them as students. I’d also like to thank CUP’s series editor (Neil Smith) for patiently wading through and commenting on two drafts of the longer version and one of the shorter one, and managing to make his comments challenging and good-humoured at the same time. Thanks also go to Bob Borsley and Martin Atkinson for helpful thoughts on particular issues.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my wife Khadija, for all the love, support, understanding, encouragement and patience she has shown me over the past half dozen books (books being major temporal milestones in our lives, coinciding with extended holiday-free periods of authorial autism). I’ve got bad news for her. No time for a holiday – tomorrow I’m starting on my next book. Not sure whether it’ll be another syntax book (Fantasy Syntax) or an acquisition book (Allgone Cookies). Or should I heed the advice of a former Cambridge University Press editor who suggested that my literary talents would be better employed in writing soft porn? Perhaps I could combine the two in a book on Fantasy Syntax and Sexual Fantasy . . .