

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Biolinguistics

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE MINIMALIST PROGRAM

The development of the minimalist program (MP), Noam Chomsky's most recent generative model of linguistics, has been highly influential over the last twenty years. It has had significant implications not only for the conduct of linguistic analysis itself, but also for our understanding of the status of linguistics as a science.

The reflections and analyses in this book contain insights into the strengths and the weaknesses of the MP. Among these are: a clarification of the content of the strong minimalist thesis (SMT); a synthesis of Chomsky's linguistic and interdisciplinary discourses; and an analysis of the notion of optimal computation from conceptual, empirical, and philosophical perspectives.

This book will encourage graduate students and researchers in linguistics to reflect on the foundations of their discipline, and the interdisciplinary nature of the topics explored will appeal to those studying biolinguistics, neurolinguistics, the philosophy of language, and other related disciplines.

FAHAD RASHED AL-MUTAIRI is a PhD graduate from the University of Essex (UK). His academic interests are broad and include syntactic theory, the evolution of language, and the philosophy of science and mind.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Bilingualism

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS

General editors: P. AUSTIN, J. BRESNAN, B. COMRIE, S. CRAIN,
W. DRESSLER, C. J. EWEN, R. LASS, D. LIGHTFOOT, K. RICE,
I. ROBERTS, S. ROMAINE, N. V. SMITH

The Minimalist Program

The Nature and Plausibility of Chomsky's Bilingualism

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Biolinguistics

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

In this series

111. SAMUEL D. EPSTEIN AND T. DANIEL SEELY: *Derivations in Minimalism*
112. PAUL DE LACY: *Markedness: Reduction and Preservation in Phonology*
113. YEHUDA N. FALK: *Subjects and their Properties*
114. P. H. MATTHEWS: *Syntactic Relations: a Critical Survey*
115. MARK C. BAKER: *The Syntax of Agreement and Concord*
116. GILLIAN CATRIONA RAMCHAND: *Verb Meaning and the Lexicon: a First Phase Syntax*
117. PIETER MUYSKEN: *Functional Categories*
118. JUAN URIAGEREKA: *Syntactic Anchors: on Semantic Structuring*
119. D. ROBERT LADD: *Intonational Phonology* (Second Edition)
120. LEONARD H. BABBY: *The Syntax of Argument Structure*
121. B. ELAN DRESHER: *The Contrastive Hierarchy in Phonology*
122. DAVID ADGER, DANIEL HARBOUR AND LAUREL J. WATKINS: *Mirrors and Microparameters: Phrase Structure Beyond Free Word Order*
123. NIINA NING ZHANG: *Coordination in Syntax*
124. NEIL SMITH: *Acquiring Phonology*
125. NINA TOPINTZI: *Onsets: Suprasegmental and Prosodic Behaviour*
126. CEDRIC BOECKX, NORBERT HORNSTEIN AND JAIRO NUNES: *Control as Movement*
127. MICHAEL ISRAEL: *The Grammar of Polarity: Pragmatics, Sensitivity, and the Logic of Scales*
128. M. RITA MANZINI AND LEONARDO M. SAVOIA: *Grammatical Categories: Variation in Romance Languages*
129. BARBARA CITKO: *Symmetry in Syntax: Merge, Move and Labels*
130. RACHEL WALKER: *Vowel Patterns in Language*
131. MARY DALRYMPLE AND IRINA NIKOLAEVA: *Objects and Information Structure*
132. JERROLD M. SADOCK: *The Modular Architecture of Grammar*
133. DUNSTAN BROWN AND ANDREW HIPPISEY: *Network Morphology: a Defaults-based Theory of Word Structure*
134. BETTELOU LOS, CORRIEN BLOM, GEERT BOOIJ, MARION ELENBAAS AND ANS VAN KEMENADE: *Morphosyntactic Change: a Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes*
135. STEPHEN CRAIN: *The Emergence of Meaning*
136. HUBERT HAIDER: *Symmetry Breaking in Syntax*
137. JOSÉ A. CAMACHO: *Null Subjects*
138. GREGORY STUMP AND RAPHAEL A. FINKEL: *Morphological Typology: From Word to Paradigm*
139. BRUCE TESAR: *Output-driven Phonology: Theory and Learning*
140. ASIER ALCÁZAR AND MARIO SALTARELLI: *The Syntax of Imperatives*
141. MISHA BECKER: *The Acquisition of Syntactic Structure: Animacy and Thematic Alignment*
142. MARTINA WILTSCHKO: *The Universal Structure of Categories: Towards a Formal Typology*
143. FAHAD RASHED AL-MUTAIRI: *The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of Chomsky's Biolinguistics*

Earlier issues not listed are also available

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Bilingualism

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Bilingualism

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE MINIMALIST PROGRAM

*The Nature and Plausibility of Chomsky's
Bilingualism*

FAHAD RASHED AL-MUTAIRI

The University of Essex (UK)



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Bilingualism

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107041349

© Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi 2014

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2014

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Al-Mutairi, Fahad Rashed, 1973–

The Minimalist program : the nature and plausibility of Chomsky's
bilingualism / Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi.

pages cm – (Cambridge studies in linguistics ; 143)

ISBN 978-1-107-04134-9 (hardback)

1. Minimalist theory (Linguistics) 2. Bilingualism. 3. Generative
grammar. I. Title.

P158.28.A5 2014

415'.0182–dc23

2014016831

ISBN 978-1-107-04134-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication,
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Bilingualism

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*To the memory of my mother, Muneera, who, despite never
having had the opportunity to learn how to read and write, worked very
hard and sacrificed so much of her life to make sure all of her twelve
children received the best education possible.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Bilingualism

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Biolinguistics

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page xi
	<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xii
1	Introduction	1
2	The minimalist program	6
2.1	Introduction	6
2.2	Chomskyan linguistics: refutation of some misconceptions	6
	2.2.1 The combinatoric stage	7
	2.2.2 The cognitive stage	10
	2.2.3 The minimalist stage	18
	2.2.4 Concluding remarks	21
2.3	The shift to minimalism	22
2.4	UG: from an <i>explanans</i> to an <i>explanandum</i>	31
2.5	Minimalism and the design of language	35
	2.5.1 The model of grammar: from GB to minimalism	36
	2.5.2 Merge, Move, and Agree	38
	2.5.3 Economy	41
2.6	Why minimalism?	43
3	The strong minimalist thesis (SMT)	51
3.1	Introduction	51
3.2	Conceptual necessity: a first encounter	52
3.3	SMT as a strict generalization	55
3.4	The imperfection strategy	61
3.5	Conceptual necessity: a second encounter	65
3.6	Some shortcomings	69
3.7	The three factors framework	73
3.8	Two discourses, one thesis?	78

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Biolinguistics

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)x *Contents*

4	The SMT in an evolutionary context	82
4.1	Introduction	82
4.2	The recursion-only hypothesis	83
4.3	The content of FLN: two extreme views	92
4.4	The where and how of recursion	97
4.5	The Merge-only hypothesis	102
5	The SMT as an explanatory thesis	109
5.1	Introduction	109
5.2	Minimalist explanation: interface conditions	109
5.3	Tautology	113
5.4	Teleology	118
5.5	Minimalist explanation: optimal computation	121
5.6	Loose correlations	126
5.7	Minimalism and teleological physics	133
6	Optimal computation and multiple realization	143
6.1	Introduction	143
6.2	Chomskyan naturalism	144
6.3	Optimal computation and non-genomic nativism	147
6.4	Functionalism	152
6.5	The multiple realization argument	158
6.6	Functionalism and naturalism: uneasy bed partners	161
6.7	Chomsky's case against functionalism	164
6.8	Optimal computation versus multiple realization	170
6.9	Implications for the biolinguistic approach	173
7	Conclusion	178
	<i>Notes</i>	185
	<i>References</i>	197
	<i>Index</i>	210

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Biolinguistics

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

My interest in the study of language in general, and in Chomsky's work in particular, began some fifteen years ago when, as an undergraduate student at the University of Salamanca (Spain), I came under the happy influence of two of my professors, Emilio Prieto de los Mozos and José Jesús Gómez Asencio. That interest culminated in the present book, which is a revised and extended version of my 2011 Essex University doctoral thesis, "The Strong Minimalist Thesis: its Nature and Plausibility."

At Essex I was truly honoured and fortunate to have had Martin Atkinson as my supervisor, whose superb lectures on minimalism have been the source of my inspiration for this work. Martin was also a valued friend whose encouragement and support have never wavered, and for which I am very grateful. My thanks also go to Noam Chomsky for taking time out of a very busy schedule to answer my many inquiries about his work, and to my thesis examiners, Neil Smith and Roger Hawkins, for their much valued encouragement and guidance.

I must also thank Cambridge University Press for publishing this book. In particular, I am indebted to Helen Barton for her faith and interest in this project, and for her support and advice throughout the publishing process. Thanks are also due to several anonymous referees for their insightful comments and useful suggestions on the manuscript. Of course, whatever shortcomings remain in this book are all my responsibility.

In addition to my family, I am grateful to my friends Bader Al-Dehani and Pedro Arias for their continuous support and encouragement, and to my colleague, Abbas Al-Haddad, for generously providing a peaceful environment in which to work during the academic year 2012–13. My thanks also go to two colleagues at Essex, Antonis Polentas and Ibrahim Al-Mahboob, for the many discussions I had with them over the years.

Above all, I am most heartily indebted to my wife, Katarina, for tolerating an often-distracted husband, and for her never-ending love and support throughout the process of writing this book. Without her enormous help and many sacrifices I could not have possibly finished this work.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Bilingualism

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Abbreviations

B&H	Boeckx and Hornstein (2010)
C	complementizer
C _{HL}	computational system of human language
CI	conceptual-intentional (system)
cp-	<i>ceteris paribus</i> (clause)
CP	complementizer phrase
D	determiner
D-	deep-(structure)
DP	determiner phrase
FI	full interpretation
FL	faculty of language
FLB	faculty of language in the broad sense
FLN	faculty of language in the narrow sense
GB	government and binding (theory)
LF	logical form
MLC	minimal link condition
MP	minimalist program
MRA	multiple realization argument
N	noun
NP	noun phrase
PF	phonological form
PLD	primary linguistic data
P&P	principles and parameters (framework)
S	sentence
S-	surface-(structure)
SL	statistical learning
SM	sensory-motor (system)
SMT	strong minimalist thesis
Spec	specifier
T	tense

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-04134-9 - The Minimalist Program: The Nature and Plausibility of
Chomsky's Bilingualism

Fahad Rashed Al-Mutairi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

List of abbreviations xiii

TP	tense phrase
UG	universal grammar
V	verb
v	light causative verb
VCN	virtual conceptual necessity
VLSI	very large-scale integrated (microcircuit)
VP	verb phrase