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Kersti Börjars , Rachel Nordlinger , Louisa Sadler
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Lexical-Functional Grammar

An Introduction

A clear introduction to Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG), this outstanding textbook sets out a formal approach to the study of language using a step-by-step approach and rich language data.

Data from English and a range of other languages are used to illustrate the main concepts, allowing those students not accustomed to working with cross-linguistic data to familiarise themselves with the theory while also enabling those interested in how the theory can account for more challenging data sets to extend their learning.

Exercises ranging from simple technical questions to analyses of a data set, as well as a further resources section with a literature review, complete each chapter. The book aims to equip readers with the skills to analyse new data sets and to begin to engage with the primary LFG literature.

KERSTI BÖRJARS is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Manchester and Professor (II) of Nordic Languages at Oslo University. Her current research focuses on syntactic description and analysis and on linguistic change. She has taught courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels on English grammar, syntactic theory and diachronic linguistics. She has held grants to study linguistic change in Pennsylvania German (ESRC) and for a study of the English possessive (AHRC). She is editor of the *Journal of Linguistics* and co-author (with Kate Burridge) of *Introducing English Grammar*.

RACHEL NORDLINGER is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Melbourne, Director of the Research Unit for Indigenous Language and a Chief Investigator in the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language. She completed her PhD in Linguistics at Stanford University, USA in 1997. Rachel's research centres around the description and documentation of Australia's Indigenous languages, and their implications for syntactic and morphological theory, working within the framework of LFG.

LOUISA SADLER is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Essex, where she has taught courses at graduate and undergraduate levels on syntactic theory (LFG and HPSG), the description of English, semantics, argument structure, morphology, PROLOG and computational linguistics. She has been involved in a number of research projects using LFG with a number of languages, including Welsh, Archi and Portuguese. Her current research interests centre on LFG, syntax and its interfaces with morphology and semantics and the grammatical description of the Arabic vernaculars, including Maltese. She currently holds a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship for research on Arabic syntax.

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‘This lucid and entertainingly written textbook is an excellent introduction to the theory of Lexical Functional Grammar. It presents the fundamentals of the theory in a way that is both accessible for beginners and engaging for linguists who are familiar with other frameworks.’

Mary Dalrymple,
University of Oxford

‘ … a clear and comprehensive introduction both to syntax and to the LFG framework, covering many core phenomena that have been central to syntactic analysis. Readers are skilfully guided through an impressive range of data reflecting the wide spectrum of languages.’

Peter Sells,
University of York

‘Developed by three notable linguists who are also gifted teachers, the book distinguishes itself by its accessibility, its rich coverage of morphology and f-structure, and its up-to-date references to current research in LFG.’

Joan Bresnan,
Stanford University

‘This is an ideal introduction to formal syntax and can also be used by practising syntacticians to familiarise themselves with the research developed within the framework of LFG.’

Alex Alsina,
University Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona

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KERSTI BÖRJARS

University of Manchester

RACHEL NORDLINGER

University of Melbourne

LOUISA SADLER

University of Essex

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Preface

The aim of this book is to introduce the reader to Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG), a formal system for analysing language.

Our aim is to ensure that this book is understandable to someone with some basic knowledge of linguistics, but with no previous experience of grammatical theories. We will assume that you know how to identify categories such as NOUN, VERB, ADJECTIVE, ADVERB and PREPOSITION. We will expect you to know that there are arguments for assuming that sentences have a hierarchical structure, that you know how to identify the constituents that make up this hierarchical structure, and that you understand how these can be represented as tree structures. We will also assume that you have a basic understanding of grammatical functions such as SUBJECT and OBJECT. Furthermore, we will assume that you know something about the difference between syntax and morphology and that you have some idea of what semantics is. We will have a lot to say in detail about categories, constituents, grammatical functions and morphology, but we will not go back to basics. If you feel you need to remind yourself of this, we suggest you look at Börjars and Burridge (2019) or Payne (2010) if you would like concepts explained through English examples, or Kroeger (2005) if you prefer a broader range of data. Radford et al. (2009) provide an introduction to a broader range of topics in linguistics.

This book will also be suitable for those already familiar with some other theoretical framework. However, even though it is interesting to compare how different frameworks analyse particular linguistic structures, we will have nothing to say in this book about other frameworks.

For most topics, we will use both English and other languages to explain the concepts of LFG. English will be used since this is a language that all readers of this book have in common. However, the languages of the world show a tremendous variety, for instance when it comes to the importance of hierarchical structure or morphology, and any theoretical framework worth its salt should be able to account not just for English, but also equally well for languages that work with radically different principles of organisation from those of English.

It is important to point out that we don't intend to try to provide a detailed LFG analysis of any particular language, but to use the different languages to introduce the tools of LFG and how to use them, so that readers are able to apply them to whatever language data they have. Indeed a reader may find evidence for a different analysis of a language that we have considered in this book. After all,

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we would not claim to have explored each language in full detail, but we hope to have given the reader the tools they require to formulate an alternative analysis.

Of course we will not be able to provide a complete picture of the work that has been done within LFG in a book like this, but we suggest further reading at the end of each chapter, and, at the end of the book, we provide reading on some areas of linguistics where LFG is used that we have not dealt with in the book.

In order to keep the text as simple as possible, we keep references to the literature out of the main text, except to provide the source of examples, but at the end of each chapter we provide references to the issues discussed in the chapter as well as suggestions for reading beyond the material presented.

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Abbreviations

For the abbreviations of glosses of examples, we have used the *Leipzig glossing rules* (www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php) as far as possible, but some of the glosses we need are not included there.

1	first person, or noun class 1 for data from the Bantu language Mbuun
2	second person, or noun class 2 for data from the Bantu language Mbuun
3	third person
I	noun class I
ABS	absolutive case
ACC	accusative case
ADJ	adjunct
AOR	aorist (used for Greek)
AUX	auxiliary
BEN	benefactive marking
C	complementiser
CAUS	causative
COARGD	co-argument domain, a domain for binding, the nucleus that contains the anaphor
COM	common gender
COMP	closed clausal complement
CONJ	conjunction
DAT	dative case
DEF	definite
ERG	ergative case
F	feminine gender
FIN	finite verb form
FOBJ	future object, for languages that mark tense on noun phrases
FUT	future tense
GEN	genitive case
GF	grammatical function
ILL	illative case
IMP	imperative

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IND	indicative
INDF	indefinite
INF	infinitive verb form
LOC	locative case or locative θ-role
M	masculine gender
MINCOMPN	minimal complete nucleus, a domain for binding, the smallest f-structure that contains a reflexive and a SUBJ function
MINFIND	minimal finite domain, a domain for binding, the smallest f-structure that contains a tense feature
N	neuter gender
NEG	negation
NCLASS	noun class
NFOBJ	non-future object, for languages that mark tense on noun phrases
NFUT	non-future tense
NOM	nominative case
NPL	non-plural, for languages where singular is not the only alternative to plural
NPST	non-past tense
NUCLEUS	the smallest f-structure that contains a PRED feature and the arguments required by it
OBJ	object
OBJ_θ	(second) object, usually restricted to Theme
OBL_θ	oblique argument, θ may be instantiated by a θ-role, e.g. $\text{OBL}_{Location}$
OCOMP	object control element, used for Warlpiri
PASS	passive voice
PRF	perfect tense
PL	plural
POSS	possessor
PPTCP	past participle
PRS	present tense
PST	past tense
PTCP	participle
PTV	partitive case
Q	question particle
REFL	reflexive
ROOTD	root domain, a domain for binding, the complete f-structure of the utterance
SELF	gloss used for the Swedish *själv* that forms part of the reflexive *sig själv*
SG	singular

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SM	subject marker
SUBJ	subject
SUP	supine, used here for the verb form that occurs with the perfect tense auxiliary in Swedish
VM	verbal modifier, used here for Hungarian
XADJ	open adjunct, an adjunct without an overt subject
XCOMP	open clausal complement, a complement without an overt subject

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