

## Syntactic Constructions in English

Construction Grammar (CxG) is a framework for syntactic analysis that takes constructions – pairings of form and meaning that range from the highly idiomatic to the very general – to be the building blocks of sentence meaning. Offering the first comprehensive introduction to CxG to focus on both English words and the constructions that combine them, this textbook shows students not only what the analyses of particular structures are, but also how and why those analyses are constructed, with each chapter taking the student step by step through the reasoning processes that yield the best description of a data set. It offers a wealth of illustrative examples and exercises, largely based on real language data, making it ideal for both self-study and classroom use. Written in an accessible and engaging way, this textbook will open up this increasingly popular linguistic framework to anyone interested in the grammatical patterns of English.

JONG-BOK KIM is Professor of English Linguistics at Kyung Hee University, Seoul.

LAURA A. MICHAELIS is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Colorado Boulder.

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Jong-Bok Kim , Laura A. Michaelis  
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JONG-BOK KIM

*Kyung Hee University, Seoul*

LAURA A. MICHAELIS

*University of Colorado Boulder*



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## Preface

Charles J. Fillmore, an exalted scholar of syntax at the University of California, Berkeley, used to say that studying the syntax of any language is like trying to examine a web made of chain that has sunk to the bottom of a swamp. There is no way to see the full structure at once. Instead, he said, you have to pick up one small piece at a time, clean off that piece, and then examine it. But each time you lift up a new piece for study, the piece you are already holding will slide back into the swamp. The point, we think, is that it is hard to develop a complete picture of the grammar of a language, and each new fact we uncover might make us doubt an analysis we have previously given. But there is only one way to proceed in grammar analysis, and that is from linguistic fact to linguistic fact, as we slowly develop a picture of how the facts fit together. We offer this book as a small contribution to that enterprise; it is intended to inspire careful syntactic scholarship.

This book grew out of Kim and Sells's (2008) *English Syntax: An Introduction*. The key property that distinguishes this book from its predecessor is that it uses a synthesis of Construction Grammar and HPSG (Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar) to analyze English syntactic structures. Construction Grammar returns to the traditional idea that a grammar is composed of conventional associations of form and meaning. It aims to provide full coverage of the facts of the language under study. An allied theory, HPSG is a lexicalized, constraint-based grammar that relies on de Saussure's concept of the sign (an association of signifier (form) and signified (meaning)), and in particular the idea that language is an infinite set of signs, including complex phrasal signs. A synthesis of these two grammars, Sign-Based Construction Grammar (SBCG), was brought forth in the first decade of the new millennium. SBCG aims to expand the range of phenomena covered by HPSG grammars while also improving the formal rigor of construction-based grammar description, for example, by reducing the repertoire of grammatical features used. The descriptive tools used in this book are directly inspired by SBCG.

Successful teaching of English syntax (whether one's students are native or nonnative speakers) requires the ability to strike a balance in the exposition between facts and theory. Students who study English syntax want to learn basic facts of English grammar in use, and transparent ways to represent those facts, so that they can extend what they know to newly encountered structures. In this book, as in Kim and Sells (2008), we try to offer an explicit account of the form,

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meaning, and use of English sentences, both simple and complex, including their correct syntactic structures.

The book focuses primarily on the descriptive facts of English syntax, presented through a ‘lexical lens’ that encourages students to recognize the important contribution that words and word classes make to syntactic structure. It then proceeds with the basic theoretical concepts of declarative grammar (in the framework of SBCG), providing sample sentences. We have tried to make each chapter maximally accessible to those with no background knowledge of English syntax. We provide clear, simple tree diagrams that will help students understand recursive structures in syntax. The theoretical notions are simply described but framed as precisely as possible so that students can apply them in analyzing English sentences. Each chapter also contains exercises ranging from straightforward to challenging, aiming to promote a deeper understanding of the factual and theoretical contents of each chapter.

We relied heavily on the prior works on English syntax. In particular, much of the content, as well as our exercises, were inspired by or adapted from renowned textbooks including Aarts (1997, 2001), C. L. Baker (1995), Borsley (1991, 1996), Radford (1988, 1997, 2004), Miller (2000), Sag et al. (2003), Carnie (2002, 2011), and Hilpert (2014). These works have set the standard for syntactic description and argumentation for decades.

Many people have supported and/or improved this textbook. This work owes a great intellectual debt to the late Ivan A. Sag, who demonstrated that an elegant and intuitive grammar formalism can also have extraordinary sweep and scope. Our thanks also go to Peter Sells for contributing foundations for this book in Kim and Sells (2008). We thank anonymous reviewers of prior drafts of this book for detailed comments and suggestions which helped us reshape it. We are grateful for the advice and insights of linguistic colleagues including Anne Abeillé, Doug Arnold, Jóhanna Barðdal, Emily Bender, Bob Borsley, Rui Chaves, Suk-Jin Chang, Hee-Rahk Chae, Sae-Youn Cho, Incheol Choi, Jae-Woong Choi, Chan Chung, Mark Davies, Elaine Francis, Jonathan Ginzburg, Adele Goldberg, Goldberg, Martin Hilpert, Paul Kay, Jungsoo Kim, Valia Kordoni, Chungmin Lee, Juwon Lee, Kiyong Lee, Bob Levine, Philip Miller, Stefan Müller, Joanna Nykiel, Byung-Soo Park, Chongwon Park, Javier Pérez-Guerra, Jeffrey Runner, Manfred Sailer, Rok Sim, Sanghoun Song, Eun-jung Yoo, James Yoon, Frank Van Eynde, Gert Webelhuth, and Stephen Wechsler. We also thank students and colleagues at Kyung Hee University, Seoul and the University of Colorado Boulder for their encouragement over the years. In particular, we thank students who used drafts of this textbook and raised questions that helped us solidify its structure and content. We are also grateful to Helen Barton at Cambridge University Press for her outstanding advice and support, and to Catherine Dunn and Stanly Emelson for expert editorial and production assistance. The first author also acknowledges support from the Alexander Von Humboldt Foundation, from which he received a Humboldt Research Award in 2019. Lastly, we thank our close friends and family members, whose love and understanding sustained us through the writing process.