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978-1-108-84043-9 — Universal Grammar and Iconicity
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Universal Grammar and Iconicity

Within linguistics, the formal and functional approaches each offer insight into what language might be and how it operates, but so far, there have been hardly any systematic attempts to integrate them into a single theory. This book explores the relationship between Universal Grammar – the theory that we have an innate mechanism for generating sentences – and iconicity – the resemblance between form and meaning in language. It offers a new theory of their interactions, the "UG–iconicity interface" (UG-I), which shows that not only do Universal Grammar and iconicity coexist, but in fact they collaborate in intricate and predictable ways. The theory explains various recalcitrant cross-linguistic facts surrounding serial verb constructions, coordination, semantically and categorically obscure "linkers," the multiple grammatical aspects of the external argument, and noncanonical arguments. This groundbreaking work is essential reading for researchers and postgraduate students in linguistics, as well as scholars in psychology and cognitive science.

Yafei Li is Professor of Language Sciences at University of Wisconsin-Madison and affiliated part-time with Nanjing University, China. Notable publications include *X°: A Theory of Morphology–Syntax Interface* (2005) and *The Syntax of Chinese* (co-authored, 2009).

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University of Wisconsin-Madison

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To those in my life
who have made me be who I am and inspired me to do
what I have done

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Preface

Four things happened during the writing of this book, all unexpected in one way or another.

First, whereas this is the longest work I have ever written in my academic career, it also turned out to be among the easiest if I put aside the inevitable commitment of time needed to convert the thoughts into words. Part of the reason is that some contents were already written out in the form of papers, a few published and the rest not. What somewhat surprised me was that the ideas in these papers, taking shape separately over a span of thirty years on totally different subject matters, could all fall into place under a single central theme so snugly, reminding me of a long-ago experience of putting together a 3-D jigsaw puzzle of the Eiffel Tower – I did have to figure out where to put which piece, but once that was worked out, all the pieces simply fit. As with the puzzle, I surely had the initial general belief that these apparently unconnected ideas could be assembled together – otherwise the book project would not have been attempted. Still, it would give me a happy surprise each time one more smooth and technically detailed integration not only proved available between thoughts/analyses years and topics apart, but also lent itself readily to more facts and new analyses not imagined while initially planning the book.

Out of professional habit, I sought to explain why this happened and came up with two possible answers. (A) Our current understanding of the human language faculty and our control of the linguistic data are still rudimentary enough to evoke uncertainty, which in turn creates room for more than one seemingly plausible "theory" regarding the design of language and its components. (B) The core analyses in these separately written papers, as well as the particular formulation of the UG–iconicity interface, are overall on the right track. The rational side of me says that both (A) and (B) are partly at work; emotionally, I would like to think of (B) as playing a significant role. Regardless, it has been a totally enjoyable experience that a wide range of linguistic facts, from Chinese verbal compounds to cross-linguistic coordination to applicatives to word order typology, to list but a few, can be unified in a theory consisting merely of two highly general principles (the FICH and the USM), a couple of functional voids (Void_F1, 2) plus the basic operations of UG.

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The surprises described above were rewards any researcher would be glad to encounter.

Second, of the nine months spent on the first complete draft of this book, over half of the period coincided with Covid-19 where I live. I take it that not many authors could claim this "privilege," which has been, let's put it mildly, inconveniencing for everyone. But there is a classic Chinese saying which keeps people optimistic when things look gloomy: *huo xi fu suo yi* 'disaster PARTICLE blessing SUO lean.on'. Ignore *xi* and understand *suo* as a marker when the object DP undergoes A′-movement, and the sentence translates into this: Oh disasters, good fortunes accompany them! Pre-coronavirus, the summer months would always have me travel abroad, visiting relatives, giving lectures and attending linguistic conferences. I was mentally prepared not to be able to finish the book on time because a summer itinerary so packed that every half-day slot would be filled for a prolonged stretch of time was not rare. With this hideous virus, however, I have been literally staying in the house for weeks in a row during the past months, even resisting the urge to visit my two-year-old granddaughter in California. So I had no excuse but to concentrate on the book and ended up wrapping things up a few weeks earlier. This pandemic is bad, sad things have been happening because of it, and I personally felt and feel the worries about my family and my relatives first in China and later in the USA. But as the American author Wayne Dyer once said, "You can't discover light, by analyzing the dark." Writing a book that integrates many ideas throughout my whole academic career and being able to finish it on time is the light I have had the good fortune to discover.

The other two happenings carry a heavy emotional weight. Two people passed away during my book-writing time who had life-shaping influences on me: my father LI Ming, and my mentor and friend Wayne O'Neil. On the way to the first day of my elementary boarding school, my father said to me some words to this effect: Your teachers and classmates may have an opinion about a student, and it could be popular, but you should always form your own based on your observations and best judgment. He said it and I forgot it. Only in my mid-50s – exactly half a century later – did I suddenly realize that I had been practicing these words throughout my life and my career. The only deviation I made was the target. My father was talking about people while I applied it to ideas, as reflected everywhere in this book. I met Wayne in China, wrote a term paper on Chinese locative-inversion for his course, and he brought me to MIT without me requesting or doing anything. Looking back, working with the type of linguistics that MIT started and pursuing a career in American higher education is the best choice of life and work for someone with my strengths and weaknesses, a choice which Wayne enabled and which I thank him for, eternally. In brief, Wayne presented me with the opportunity, and my father planted in me the principle through which to pursue that opportunity. I could not be grateful enough.

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Abbreviations

3^{rd}F	third-factor principle
a(P)	"light adjective"
A(P)	adjective (phrase)
Adv(P)	adverb (phrase)
Appl(P)	applicative (phrase)
$Appl_H$	high applicative
$Appl_L$	low applicative
APT	Auxiliary Plane Theorem
Arg_E	external argument
&(P)	conjunction (phrase), or as a feature in "[&]"
C(P)	complementizer (phrase)
CApp	complement approach
CCS	categorial complement space
c_n	n^{th} conjunct from left
CSC	Coordinate Structure Constraint
cu	computational unit
CUDH	Computational Unit Disparity Hypothesis
D(P)	determiner (phrase)
Del_C	total count of deletions required to yield superficial conjunct C
$Depth_X$	number of different phrases traversed with respect to X (see specific contexts)
DM	Distributed Morphology
e	event
ECM	exceptional case marking
EM	External Merge
Ep	epistemic (adverb class)
Ev	evaluative (adverb class)
φ-feature	any of [person, number, gender]
F(P)	functional head (phase)
FCA	first-conjunct agreement
FEO	fact-event object
F_{HL}	human language faculty

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FICH	Functional Iconicity Complementation Hypothesis
Focus(P)	focus head (phrase)
Fr	frequency (adverb class)
G/B	Goal or Benefactive
GE	genetic endowment
IM	Internal Merge
L(P)	lexical head (phrase)
LCA	Linear Correspondence Axiom, or last-conjunct agreement (in Serbo-Croatian)
LF	Logical Form (conceptual–intentional)
Ln	linker (in den Dikken's sense)
LPM	Lexical Phonology and Morphology
Ma	manner (adverb class)
MC	Mandarin Chinese
$\mathbb{N}$	smallest node dominating all conjuncts
N(P)	noun (phrase), or category feature with "±" values
NCA	noncanonical argument
NCC	non-constituent conjunct
Neg	negative (as a category label)
NPI	negative polarity item
O(bj)	object
O_i	operator indexed with *i*
P(P)	pre/postposition (phrase)
P_{AUX}	auxiliary plane
PCC	predicate cleft construction
P_D	default plane
PF	Phonological Form (sensorimotor)
PIC	Phase Impenetrability Condition
Poss	possessor
PR	possessor raising
pro	phonologically empty pronoun
PRO	phonologically empty pronoun as the subject of infinitive clauses
QP	quantifier phrase
QR	quantifier raising
$\sqrt{}$ or *r*	root (of a lexical item)
R	relator
$R_{\&}$	'and/or' relation
R_C	lexico-semantic relation
RC	relative clause
R_L	linear relation
R_M	semantic relation of generalized modification

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RNR	right-node-raising
R_S	structural relation
R_T	relation of temporal precedence
S	entropy (in Boltzmann's equation only), or clause (only as node label)
S(ubj)	subject
Sa	speech act (adverb class)
SC	Serbo-Croatian, or small clause (only as node label)
sh	shell
SMH	Structural Mapping Hypothesis
So	subject-oriented (adverb class)
Spec	specifier (in X′-theory)
SVC	serial verb construction
SVP	Serial Verb Parameter
t	trace
T(P)	tense (phrase)
θ-	thematic
TopP	topic phrase
T_S	thermodynamic system
TSC	Temporal Sequence Condition
UG	Universal Grammar
UG-I	Universal Grammar-iconicity interface
USM	Uniform Structure Mapping Principle
v(P)	"light" verb (phrase) responsible for introducing the agent argument
V(P)	verb (phrase), or categorial feature with "±" values
VM	verb modifier (in Hungarian)
$Void_F$	functional void (of Universal Grammar)
W	number of microstates in a thermodynamic system with the same macrostate
wh	generic reference to the type of words like *what, which, where, why, how*
X, Y, Z . . .	generic categorial labels (when used in structure)
XSM	exo-skeletal model

In language examples

1, 2, 3	person
ACC	accusative case
AFF	affix
AGR	agreement

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APPL	applicative morpheme
ASP	aspect
AUX	auxiliary
BEI	*bei* (glossing the morpheme without analysis)
C	complementizer
CAUS	causative morpheme
CL	classifier
COM	comitative
DAT	dative case
DE	*de* (glossing the morpheme without analysis)
DECL	declarative
DET	determiner
ERG	ergative case
F(EM)	feminine gender
FOC	focus
FUT	future tense
FV	final vowel (in Bantu)
GEI	*gei* (glossing the morpheme without analysis)
GEN	genitive case
HAB	habitual
IMPERF	imperfect aspect
INDEF	indefinite
IO	indirect object agreement
L	linker
LE	*le* (glossing the morpheme without analysis)
LOC	locative
M(ASC)	masculine gender
N(EUT)	neuter gender
NEG	negation
NML	nominalizer
NOM	nominative case
O(BJ)	object agreement/case
OBV	obviative
P	generic/semantically unspecified preposition
PASS	passive
PAST	past tense
PERF	perfect/perfective aspect (difference being irrelevant to this book)
PL	plural number
POSS	possessive
PRES	present tense
PRT	particle

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REAL	realis
REM	remote (with PAST)
S	singular number
SUBJ	subject agreement
SUBORD	subordinate marker
SUF	suffix
T	tense

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