

Paul R. Kroeger

Analyzing Grammar

An Introduction

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Analyzing Grammar

Analyzing Grammar is a clear introductory textbook on grammatical analysis, designed for students beginning to study the discipline. Covering both syntax (the structure of phrases and sentences) and morphology (the structure of words), it equips them with the tools and methods needed to analyze grammatical patterns in any language. Students are shown how to use standard notational devices such as Phrase Structure trees and word-formation rules, as well as prose descriptions, and are encouraged to practice using these tools through a diverse range of problem sets and exercises. Emphasis is placed on comparing the different grammatical systems of the world's languages. Topics covered include word order, constituency, case, agreement, tense, gender, pronoun systems, inflection, derivation, argument structure, and Grammatical Relations, and a useful glossary provides a clear explanation of each term.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521816229

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First published in print format 2005

ISBN-13 978-0-521-11328-4 eBook (NetLibrary)

ISBN-10 0-521-11328-5 eBook (NetLibrary)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-81622-9 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-81622-X hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-01653-7 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-01653-3 paperback

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For Sarah, Ruth, and Katie

Contents

<i>Preface and acknowledgments</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	<i>xiv</i>
1 Grammatical form	1
1.1 Form, meaning, and use	1
1.2 Aspects of linguistic form	2
1.3 Grammar as a system of rules	4
1.4 Conclusion	5
2 Analyzing word structure	7
2.1 Identifying meaningful elements	7
2.2 Morphemes	12
2.3 Representing word structure	14
2.4 Analyzing position classes	18
2.5 A typology of word structure	22
Exercises	24
3 Constituent structure	26
3.1 Ambiguity	26
3.2 Constituency	28
3.3 Hierarchy	32
3.4 Syntactic categories	33
3.5 Tree diagrams: representing the constituents of a clause	38
3.6 Pronouns and proper names as phrasal categories	44
3.7 Conclusion	46
Practice exercises	47
Exercises	47
4 Semantic roles and Grammatical Relations	51
4.1 Simple sentences and propositions	52
4.2 Arguments and semantic roles	53
4.3 Grammatical Relations	55
4.4 Adjuncts vs. arguments	58

4.5	“Indirect objects” and secondary objects	61
4.6	Conclusion	62
	Exercises	63
5	Lexical entries and well-formed clauses	66
5.1	Lexical entries	66
5.2	Argument structure and subcategorization	67
5.3	Properties of a well-formed clause	72
5.4	Uniqueness of oblique arguments	79
5.5	Zero-anaphora (“pro-drop”)	79
5.6	Further notes on English Phrase Structure	81
5.7	Conclusion	83
	Exercises	83
6	Noun Phrases	87
6.1	Complements and adjuncts of N	87
6.2	Determiners	89
6.3	Adjectives and Adjective Phrases (AP)	90
6.4	Possession and recursion	92
6.5	English NP structure (continued)	97
6.6	Conclusion	98
	Practice exercise	98
	Exercises	98
7	Case and agreement	102
7.1	Case	102
7.2	Agreement	111
7.3	Conclusion	118
	Exercises	119
8	Noun classes and pronouns	128
8.1	Noun classes and gender	128
8.2	Pronouns	135
	Exercises	143
9	Tense, Aspect, and Modality	147
9.1	Tense	147
9.2	Aspect	152
9.3	Perfect vs. perfective	158
9.4	Combinations of tense and aspect	161
9.5	Mood	163
9.6	Modality	165
9.7	Conclusion	168
	Exercises	169

10	Non-verbal predicates	173
10.1	Basic clause patterns with and without the copula	174
10.2	Existential and possessive clauses	180
10.3	Cross-linguistic patterns	181
10.4	A note on “impersonal constructions”	185
10.5	Further notes on the predicate complement (XCOMP) relation	187
10.6	Conclusion	189
	Exercises	190
11	Special sentence types	196
11.1	Direct vs. indirect speech acts	196
11.2	Basic word order	197
11.3	Commands (imperative sentences)	199
11.4	Questions (interrogative sentences)	203
11.5	Negation	211
11.6	Conclusion	214
	Practice exercise	214
	Exercises	215
12	Subordinate clauses	218
12.1	Coordinate vs. subordinate clauses	218
12.2	Complement clauses	220
12.3	Direct vs. indirect speech	224
12.4	Adjunct (or Adverbial) clauses	227
12.5	Relative clauses	230
12.6	Conclusion	240
	Practice exercise	241
	Exercises	241
13	Derivational morphology	247
13.1	Stems, roots, and compounds	248
13.2	Criteria for distinguishing inflection vs. derivation	250
13.3	Examples of derivational processes	253
13.4	Word structure revisited	259
13.5	Conclusion	265
	Practice exercise	265
	Exercises	266
14	Valence-changing morphology	270
14.1	Meaning-preserving alternations	271
14.2	Meaning-changing alternations	277
14.3	Incorporation	280
14.4	Conclusion	282

	Practice exercises	283
	Exercises	284
15	Allomorphy	288
	15.1 Suppletion	290
	15.2 Morphophonemic changes	292
	15.3 Rules for suppletive allomorphy	296
	15.4 Inflectional classes	297
	15.5 Conclusion	299
	Practice exercises	301
	Exercises	302
16	Non-linear morphology	304
	16.1 Non-linear sequencing of affixes	305
	16.2 Modifications of phonological features	307
	16.3 Copying, deleting, re-ordering, etc.	309
	16.4 Inflectional rules	312
	16.5 Conclusion	313
	Exercises	314
17	Clitics	316
	17.1 What is a “word?”	317
	17.2 Types of clitics	319
	17.3 Clitic pronouns or agreement?	325
	17.4 Conclusion	329
	Practice exercise	329
	Exercises	330
	Appendix: Swahili data for grammar sketch	334
	<i>Glossary</i>	341
	<i>References</i>	352
	<i>Language index</i>	360
	<i>Subject index</i>	362

Preface and acknowledgments

This book provides a general introduction to morphology (the structure of words) and syntax (the structure of phrases and sentences). By “general” I mean that it is not specifically a book about the grammar of English, or of any other particular language. Rather, it provides a foundation for analyzing and describing the grammatical structure of any human language. Of course, because the book is written in English it uses English examples to illustrate a number of points, especially in the area of syntax; but examples from many other languages are discussed as well.

The book is written for beginners, assuming only some prior knowledge of the most basic vocabulary for talking about language. It is intended to be usable as a first step in preparing students to carry out fieldwork on under-described languages. For this reason some topics are included which are not normally addressed in an introductory course, including the typology of case and agreement systems, gender systems, pronoun systems, and a brief introduction to the semantics of tense, aspect, and modality. This is not a book about linguistic field methods, but issues of methodology are addressed in various places. The overall goal is to help students write good descriptive grammars. Some basic formal notations are introduced, but equal emphasis is given to prose description of linguistic structures.

In this book I am chiefly concerned with structural issues, but I do not attempt to teach a specific theory of grammatical structure. My basic assumptions about how human grammars work are those of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG; see Bresnan 2001 and references cited there), but I have adopted a fairly generic approach which will hopefully be usable by teachers from a wide variety of theoretical backgrounds. For the sake of simplicity, I have adopted some analyses which are different from the standard LFG approach, e.g. the treatment of “pro-drop” in chapter 5. The main features of the book which are distinctive to LFG are the well-formedness conditions outlined in chapter 5 and the inventory of Grammatical Relations (including OBL_{θ} and XCOMP).

It is somewhat unusual for a single textbook to deal with both morphology and syntax. In adopting this broad approach, the present work follows and builds on a tradition of grammar teaching at various training schools of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Earlier work in this tradition includes Pike and Pike (1982); Elson and Pickett (1988); Thomas et al. (1988);

Healey (1990a); Bickford (1998); and Payne (2002, MS). Bickford's book, in particular, has had a major influence on this one in terms of scope and organization, and in a number of specific details cited in the text.

Teaching morphology is much easier if the students have some basic background in phonology. For this reason, most of the chapters dealing with morphology are clustered at the end of the book (chapters 13–17), for the benefit of students who are concurrently taking a first course in phonology. In situations where this is not a factor, those chapters could be taught earlier, though some of the exercises assume material taught in previous chapters. Chapters 3–5 are a tightly knit unit and should be taught in that order; with the other chapters, the ordering is probably less crucial. Chapters 9 (Tense, Aspect, and Modality systems) and 17 (clitics) are relatively independent of the rest of the book, and could probably be taught wherever the instructor wants to fit them in.

The contents of this book can be presented in a standard semester-length course. However, this material is intended to be reinforced by having students work through large numbers of data analysis exercises. Many teachers have found the exercises to be the most important part of the course. In addition, it is very helpful to assign a longer exercise as a final project, to give students some practice at writing up and integrating their analyses of various aspects of the grammar of a single language. (A sample of such an exercise, using Swahili data, is included as an appendix at the end of the book.) For most beginning students, extra tutorial hours or “lab sessions” will be needed to complete all of these components in one semester.

Some data exercises are included at the end of each chapter, except chapter 1. Those labelled “Practice exercises” are suitable for classroom discussion; the others can be used for either homework or tutorial sessions. Model answers for some of these exercises are available from the author. For most chapters, additional exercises are suggested from two source books: Merrifield et al. (1987) and Healey (1990b). Of course, similar exercises are available from many other sources as well, and instructors should feel free to mix and match as desired. The discussion in the text does not generally depend on the students having worked any specific exercise, except for exercise 3A(ii) at the end of chapter 3, which is referred to several times.

(A new edition of the Merrifield volume was published in 2003; it contains the same exercises as the 1987 edition with some orthographic changes. A few of the data sets have been re-numbered, but there is a table at the beginning of the 2003 edition listing the changes in numbering. Numbers cited in the present book refer to the 1987 edition.)

So many people have helped me with this project that I cannot list all of their names. Special thanks must go to Joan Bresnan, René van den Berg, Dick Watson, Bill Merrifield, John Roberts, and Marlin Leaders for their contributions. To all of the others, I offer my thanks with apologies for not naming them individually. Thanks also to my students in Singapore,

Darwin, and Dallas who have pushed me to clarify many issues with their insightful questions and suggestions, and to my long-suffering family for their encouragement and support.

The copyright for data exercises that I have cited from Merrifield et al. (1987); Roberts (1999); Healey (1990b); and Bendor-Samuel and Levinsohn (1986) is held by SIL International; these exercises are used here by permission, with thanks.

Abbreviations

–	affix boundary
=	clitic boundary
[]	constituent boundaries
*	ungrammatical
#	semantically ill-formed or inappropriate in context
?	marginal or questionable
%	acceptable to some speakers
(X)	optional constituent
*(X)	obligatory constituent
∅	null (silent) morpheme
1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person
A	transitive agent; Actor
A(DJ)	adjective
ABIL	abilitative mood
ABL	ablative case
ABS	absolutive
ACC	accusative
ACT	active voice
ADV	adverb
ADVBL	adverbializer
ADVRS	adversative
AGR	agreement
agt	agent
AP	Adjective Phrase
APPL(IC)	applicative
ASP	aspect
ASSOC	associative
AUX	auxiliary
BEN	benefactive
C	consonant
CAT	syntactic category
CAUS	causative
CLASS	classifier

COMIT	comitative (accompaniment)
COMP	complementizer
CONCESS	concessive
CONJ	conjunction
CONT	continuous
COP	copula
DAT	dative
DEB	debitive (must/ought)
DESID	desiderative
DET	determiner
DIR	directional
DIRECT	direct knowledge (eye-witness)
DU(AL)	dual
DUB	dubitative
DV	dative voice (Tagalog)
ERG	ergative
EVID	evidential
EX(CL)	exclusive
EXIST	existential
F(EM)	feminine
FOC	focus
FUT	future tense
GEN	genitive
GR	Grammatical Relation
HIST.PAST	historic past
HORT	hortative
IMPER	imperative
IMPERF	imperfective
IN(CL)	inclusive
INAN	inanimate
INDIRECT	indirect knowledge (hearsay)
INF	infinitive
INSTR	instrumental
INTERROG	interrogative
IO	indirect object
IRR	irrealis
IV	instrumental voice (Tagalog)
LNK	linker
LOC	locative
M(ASC)	masculine
N	Noun
N' / \bar{N}	N-bar (see Glossary)
NEG	negative
N(EUT)	neuter

NMLZ	nominalizer
NOM	nominative
NONPAST	nonpast tense
NP	Noun Phrase
OBJ	primary object
O(BJ).AGR	object agreement
OBJ ₂	secondary object
OBL	oblique argument
OPT	optative
OV	objective voice (Tagalog)
P	(1) preposition; (2) transitive patient
PASS	passive
PAST	past tense
pat	patient
PERF	perfect
PERM	permissive
PERS	personal name
PFV	perfective
pl / PL / p	plural
POSS	possessor
PP	Prepositional Phrase
PRE	prefix
PRED	predicate
PRES	present tense
pro/PRO	pronoun (possibly null)
PROG	progressive
PRT	particle
PS	Phrase Structure
Q(UES)	question
QUOT	quote marker
REC(IP)	recipient
REC.PAST	recent past tense
RECIP	reciprocal
REDUP	reduplication
REL	relativizer
REPORT	reportative
S	(1) sentence or clause; (2) intransitive subject
S' / \bar{S}	S-bar (see Glossary)
SBJNCT	subjunctive
sg / SG / s	singular
STAT	stative
S(UBJ)	subject
S(UBJ).AGR	subject agreement
SUBORD	subordinate

SUFF	suffix
TAM	Tense-Aspect-Modality
th	theme
TNS	tense
TODAY	today past
V	(1) verb; (2) vowel
VP	Verb Phrase
WFR	Word Formation Rule
WH	Wh- question marker
X*	a sequence of zero or more Xs (X is any unit)
XCOMP	predicate complement
XP	phrase of any category
YNQ	Yes–No question

1 Grammatical form

1.1 Form, meaning, and use

Why do people talk? What is language for? One common answer to this question is that language is a complex form of communication, and that people talk in order to share or request information. That is certainly a very important use of language, but clearly it is not the only use.

For example, what is the meaning of the word *hello*? What information does it convey? It is a very difficult word to define, but every speaker of English knows how to use it: for greeting an acquaintance, answering the telephone, etc. We might say that *hello* conveys the information that the speaker wishes to acknowledge the presence of, or initiate a conversation with, the hearer. But it would be very strange to answer the phone or greet your best friend by saying “I wish to acknowledge your presence” or “I wish to initiate a conversation with you.” What is important about the word *hello* is not its information content (if any) but its use in social interaction.

In the Teochew language (a “dialect” of Chinese), there is no word for ‘hello’. The normal way for one friend to greet another is to ask: “Have you already eaten or not?” The expected reply is: “I have eaten,” even if this is not in fact true.

Now no one would want to say that *hello* means “Have you eaten yet?” But, in certain contexts, the English word and the Teochew question may be used for the same purpose or function, i.e. as a greeting. This example illustrates why it is helpful to distinguish between the meaning (or SEMANTIC content) of an utterance and its function (or PRAGMATIC content).

Of course, in many contexts there is a close relationship between meaning and function. For example, if a doctor wants to administer a certain medicine which cannot be taken on an empty stomach, he will probably ask the patient: “Have you eaten?” In this situation both the meaning and the function of the question will be essentially the same whether the doctor is speaking English or Teochew. The FORM, however, would be quite different. Compare the Teochew form in (1a) with its English translation in (1b):

- (1) a Li chya? pa boy?
you eat full not.yet
b *Have you already eaten?*

Obviously the words themselves are different, but there are grammatical differences as well. Both sentences have the form of a question. In Teochew this is indicated by the presence of a negative element ('not yet') at the end of the sentence, while in English it is indicated by the special position of the auxiliary verb *have* at the beginning of the sentence.

This book is primarily concerned with describing linguistic FORM, and in particular with describing grammatical structure. (What we mean by "grammatical structure" will be discussed below.) But in our study of these structural features, we will often want to talk about the meaning of a particular form and/or how it is used. The Teochew example illustrates how a particular form may be used for different functions, depending on the context. This means that the form of an utterance by itself (ignoring context) does not determine its function. But it is equally true that function by itself does not fully determine the form. In other words, we cannot fully explain the form of an utterance while ignoring meaning and function; at the same time, we cannot account for the form of an utterance by looking *only* at its meaning and function.

1.2 Aspects of linguistic form

In describing the grammar of a language, we are essentially trying to explain why speakers recognize certain forms as being "correct" but reject others as being "incorrect." Notice that we are speaking of the acceptability of the form itself, rather than the meaning or function which it expresses. We can often understand a sentence perfectly well even if it is not grammatically correct, as illustrated in (2).

- (2) a Me Tarzan, you Jane.
 b Those guys was trying to kill me.
 c When he came here?

Conversely, the form of a sentence may be accepted as correct even when the meaning is obscure or absurd. An extreme example of this is found in Lewis Carroll's famous poem *Jabberwocky*, from the book *Through the Looking Glass*. The poem begins as follows:

Jabberwocky

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.
 "Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
 The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
 Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
 The frumious Bandersnatch!"

(Another five verses follow in a similar style.) After reading this poem, a native speaker of English will very likely feel as Alice did (pp. 134–136):

“It seems very pretty,” she said when she had finished it, “but it’s *rather* hard to understand!” (You see she didn’t like to confess even to herself, that she couldn’t make it out at all.) “Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don’t exactly know what they are!”

In the second verse, we can at least guess that the Jabberwock is some kind of beast, the Jubjub is a kind of bird, and the Bandersnatch is something dangerous and probably animate. But the first verse is almost total nonsense; the “function” words (i.e. conjunctions, articles, prepositions, etc.) are real English words, but almost all the content words (nouns, verbs, etc.) are meaningless.

As noted in section 1.1, language is normally used to communicate some MEANING from the speaker to the hearer. In these verses very little meaning is communicated, yet any speaker of English will recognize the poem as being English. How is this possible? Because the FORM of the poem is perfectly correct, and in fact (as Alice points out) quite pretty. Thus in one sense the poem is successful, even though it fails to communicate.

Let us look at some of the formal properties of the poem which make it recognizable, although not comprehensible, as English. First, of course, the whole poem “sounds” like English. All of the nonsense words are pronounced using sounds which are phonemes in English. These sounds are represented in written form using English spelling conventions. And these phonemes are arranged in permissible sequences, so that each nonsense word has the phonological shape of a possible word in English. For example, *brillig* and *gimble* could be English words; in a sense it is just an accident that they do not actually mean anything. In contrast, *bgillir* and *gmible* are not possible English words, because they violate the rules for combining sounds in English.

In addition, Carroll has skillfully made many of the nonsense words resemble real words which could occur in the same position: *brillig* reminds us of *brilliant* and *bright*; *slithy* reminds us of *slippery*, *slimy*, *slithering*, etc.

Second, the sentence patterns are recognizably those of English, specifically of a poetic and slightly old-fashioned style of English. We have noted that most of the function words (*the*, *and*, *in*, *were*, etc.) are real English words, and they occur in their proper place in the sentence. Similarly real content words like *son*, *shun*, *jaws*, *claws*, etc. are used in appropriate positions. We can generally identify the PART OF SPEECH (or CATEGORY) of each of the nonsense words by the position in which we find it. For example, *slithy*, *frumious*, and (probably) *mome* must be adjectives, while *gyre* and *gimble* (and probably *outgrabe*) are verbs. (In chapter 3,

section 3.4 we will discuss some of the specific clues which allow us to reach these conclusions.)

Besides the word order, there are other clues about word categories. For example, we can see that *toves*, *borogoves*, and *raths* are nouns, not only because they all follow the definite article *the* (and perhaps an adjective) but also because they all contain a final *-s* which is used in English to indicate PLURALITY (more than one). This marker can only be attached to nouns. Similarly, the final *-ous* in *frumious* is typically found only in adjectives, which reinforces our earlier conclusion that *frumious* must be an adjective. And in the following couplet (from a later verse):

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!”

the word *beamish* contains an ending *-ish* which is found in many adjectives; this confirms what we could already guess based on position.

Finally, the form of the poem as a whole conforms to a number of important conventions. The poem is divided into stanzas containing exactly four lines each. The first stanza, which seems to provide a kind of setting, is repeated verbatim at the end of the poem to create a frame around the story. The last word in each line, whether it means anything or not, fits into the A–B–A–B rhyme pattern typical of much English poetry. Each line has exactly four stressed syllables, with stressed and unstressed syllables alternating in a fixed rhythmic pattern. These features serve to identify this extended utterance as a coherent text, or DISCOURSE, of a certain type.

So there are at least four kinds of formal properties that Carroll manipulates to make his poem effective: sound patterns, word shapes, sentence patterns, and discourse structure. In this book we will be very much concerned with sentence patterns (SYNTAX) and word shapes (MORPHOLOGY), but only indirectly concerned with sound patterns (PHONOLOGY). And, due to limitations of space, we will not be able to deal with discourse structure here.

1.3 Grammar as a system of rules

One way to evaluate a person’s progress in learning a new language is to measure their vocabulary: how many words do they know? But it does not make sense to ask, “How many sentences does this person know?” Vocabulary items (words, idioms, etc.) are typically learned one at a time, but we do not “learn” sentences that way. Rather than memorizing a large inventory of sentences, speakers create sentences as needed. They are able to do this because they “know” the rules of the language. By using these rules, even a person who knew only a limited number of words could potentially produce an extremely large number of sentences.

Now when we say that a speaker of English (or Tamil, or Chinese) “knows” the rules for forming sentences in that language, we do not mean that the person is aware of this knowledge. We need to distinguish between two different kinds of rules. There are some rules about using language that must be consciously learned, the kind of rules we often learn in school. Rules of this kind are called **PRESCRIPTIVE** rules: rules which define a standard form of the language, and which some authority must explicitly state for the benefit of other speakers.

The rules we are interested in here are those which the native speaker is usually not aware of – the kind of knowledge about the language that children learn naturally and unconsciously from their parents and other members of their speech community, whether they attend school or not. All languages, whether standardized or not, have rules of this kind, and these rules constitute the grammar of the language. Our approach to the study of grammar will be **DESCRIPTIVE** rather than prescriptive: our primary goal will be to observe, describe, and analyze what speakers of a language actually say, rather than trying to tell them what they should or should not say.

We have seen that there are rules in English concerning the sequence of sounds within a word. Similarly there are rules for the arrangement of words within a sentence, the arrangement of “meaningful elements” within a word, etc. The term **GRAMMAR** is often used to refer to the complete set of rules needed to produce all the regular patterns in a given language. Another, perhaps older, way in which the term **GRAMMAR** is sometimes used means roughly “all the structural properties of the language except sound structure (phonology),” i.e. the structure of words, phrases, sentences, texts, etc. This book is concerned with grammar in both senses. It is intended to help prepare you to analyze and describe the word and sentence patterns of a language (sense 2) by formulating a set of rules (sense 1) which account for those patterns.

1.4 Conclusion

Even though there is a close relationship between linguistic form and meaning, there is also a certain amount of independence between them. Neither can be defined in terms of the other: speakers can produce both grammatical sentences which are meaningless, and meaningful sentences which are ungrammatical.

In our comparison of English with Teochew, we saw that both languages employ a special form of sentence for expressing Yes–No questions. In fact, most, if not all, languages have a special sentence pattern which is used for asking such questions. This shows that the linguistic form of an utterance is often closely related to its meaning and its function. On the other hand,

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