
Reviewed by Terje Lohndal, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

This collection of papers constitutes another volume in Wiley-Blackwell’s important series ‘Linguistics: The essential readings’. The topic of the volume is syntax, and although not made explicit, more specifically, generative transformational approaches to syntax. It presents a collection of ‘excerpted foundational articles in the field of syntax’, as it says on the cover of the book. In this brief review, it is impossible to summarize and discuss each particular chapter. I therefore mostly focus on more general issues that arise in the context of a collection like the present.

The editors have included thirty-five papers in the volume, each consisting of about ten to twelve pages. These pages are excerpts from the original papers, which inevitably means that the chapters do not always read as well as the original papers. The book contains contributions from the following scholars: Stephen R. Anderson, Mark Baker, Filippo Beghelli, Joan W. Bresnan, Anna Cardinaletti, Lisa Lai-Shen Cheng, Noam Chomsky, Sandra Chung, Guglielmo Cinque, Liliane Haegeman, Kenneth Hale, Anders Holmberg, Norbert Hornstein, C. T. James Huang, K. A. Jayaseelan, Richard S. Kayne, Samuel Jay Keyser, Hilda Koopman, Jan Koster, Richard K. Larson, Julie Anne Legate, Giuseppe Longobardi, Diane Massam, Jean-Yves Pollock, Paul Postal, Luigi Rizzi, Dominique Sportiche, Michael Starke, Tim Stowell, Rint Sybesma, Anna Szabolcsi, Lisa Travis, and Raffaella Zanuttini. Each paper is prefaced with ‘Lasting insights’, which places the paper in its historical context and illustrates the impact the paper has had since it was first published. At the end of the excerpt, the editors have come up with fifteen to twenty-three questions per paper. In terms of year of publication, the papers range from 1966 (Ch. 1) to 2005 (Ch. 35). The editors state that they made an explicit decision to only include papers published before 2006. In addition to the thirty-five chapters, the volume contains a well-written introduction and a comprehensive index.

The introduction outlines some of the rationale behind the selection of chapters. In addition, it provides an overview of some of the core notions that have remained central throughout the history of generative transformational syntax. These are: (i) constituent structure, including phrase structure, (ii) transformations and locality conditions on transformations, (iii) mismatches between the surface position of a constituent and the position where the constituent originated, (iv) deletion of elements in the syntax, (v) silent elements in the syntax, (vi) the (universal) distinction between nouns and verbs, and (vii) parameters. These notions are covered in various chapters in the volume, and it is very helpful for the reader that they are so clearly outlined in the introduction. The editors also mention a few cases where the theory has changed so that what were movement operations in earlier versions of generative transformational grammar are now analyzed in other terms. They provide the following examples: agent-postposing in passives, downward movement from subject position in sentences like There has arrived a letter for you, and rightward heavy-NP shift. Some of these phenomena are also discussed in the book. I think the editors have written a very helpful and concise introduction that every reader will benefit from reading.

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Each chapter’s introductory ‘Lasting insights’ section contextualizes the chapter and briefly outlines its major claim(s). It is laudable that the editors also outline why the issues addressed in each of the chapters are important to the field. At the end of the section, a general issue emerging from the paper is highlighted, either as a challenge for current theoretical approaches, or as a review of how later research has dealt with the issue. Although primarily intended for students and scholars from other fields, I think this section will be appreciated by senior researchers as well.

The editors’ questions that close each chapter vary widely. Some deal with relevant technical issues, or how to recast a technical analysis in a more recent framework. Others are very general, for example, question 14 on p. 39: ‘Is it justified to ask why human languages have complementizers in the first place? Give your reasons’, or question 2 on p. 545: ‘In what sense does evidence bearing on Japanese syntax have to (or not have to) come from within Japanese?’. A few questions in each chapter are typically marked ‘extra credit’. Despite the heterogeneity of the questions, the majority of them are genuine research questions, for example: ‘An important part of Szabolcsi’s paper concerns the syntax of dative possessors in Hungarian. To what extent can her analysis of these dative possessors be transposed to genitive possessors in Turkish?’ (360). These questions can be used by senior scholars and graduate students alike, and I can easily see at least one paper emerging from each of them. As such, the questions are a gold mine and a great asset of the book.

Whenever one is reviewing a collection of published papers, it is tempting to discuss the selection of papers. Why are particular authors missing? Why are particularly influential papers missing? Each reader will probably be able to come up with such a list of questions when reading a book like the present one. The editors state bluntly in the introduction that they were bound to make a series of arbitrary decisions about which papers to include and which not to include. They say that they easily could have added another thirty-five or seventy equally important papers. That is just the nature of a project like this, and for that reason, I am not going to discuss which authors or papers I personally missed. Instead, I want to raise another issue, namely the lack of certain major topics.

An important issue throughout the history of generative syntax has been language acquisition. ‘Plato’s problem’ (Chomsky 1986) has motivated a lot of empirical and theoretical work. It has been at the forefront ever since Chomsky (1965) introduced the term ‘explanatory adequacy’ in the context of research on language competence. A lot of work on language acquisition has been informed by the current syntactic framework, or contributed to shaping the framework. From this point of view, the reader may wonder why there is not a single article on language acquisition and syntax in this collection. This may be because the editors wanted to focus squarely on syntax, in which case the decision is understandable. Further support for this hypothesis can be drawn from another topic: the interfaces.

Over the past twenty years, the interfaces have gained prominence within generative transformational grammar. More and more work is being done on the syntax-phonology interface and the syntax-semantics interface. This trend is not reflected in the present volume. There are, for example, no papers dealing with antecedent-contained deletion and other phenomena that have been argued to involve syntactic movement at LF (logical form). Again, this may have been a conscious decision made by the editors. At any rate, I think the issue could have been commented on in the introduction.

There is also a particular theoretical framework that is missing in the volume, namely DISTRIBUTED MORPHOLOGY. The approach originated with Halle and Marantz (1993) and has been very influential ever since. It has also accommodated developments in the MINIMALIST PROGRAM, such as phase theory. I realize that not all theories or proposals can be represented when the entire field of syntax is to be put between two covers, but in this case, I think there are good arguments why this framework could be included. Some of these are: (i) distributed morphology’s influence in the field, (ii) the new research questions that have emerged as a result of this framework, and (iii) the focus on the syntax-morphology interface that the approach has triggered. Granted, the framework is mentioned (e.g. in Ch. 20). However, given that the cartographic approach (Rizzi 1997, Cinque 1999) is well represented in the volume (Chs. 24, 31, 34, and 35), I think distributed morphology could have been represented by a paper as well.
Despite these quibbles, An annotated syntax reader is an invaluable collection of essays for students and scholars alike. The historical contextualization reminds the reader of the intellectual history of today’s ideas, whereas the questions may set the stage for research in the years to come.

REFERENCES


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During the past decade there has been a growing interest in crosslinguistic variation in the domain of the count/mass distinction. Since Chierchia’s influential work on parametric differentiation of the distinction in the late 1990s (Chierchia 1998a,b), a large amount of new crosslinguistic data has become available, revealing the complexity of the question as to how to characterize linguistic variation in this domain. This collection of papers addresses many of the issues that are currently at the center of interest. The scope of the volume is very broad, both in the choice of languages that are discussed and in the linguistic subfields that are represented. The result is a book that, by means of its variety, gives a good overview of phenomena that should be taken into account in order to gain a better understanding of the various linguistic reflexes of the conceptual distinction between count and mass in the languages of the world.

The book starts with a comprehensive introduction by Jila Ghomeshi and Diane Massam, summarizing the contributions of the volume, while commenting on the most important issues in current research on count and mass. The authors signal in particular that even though there are no reasons to doubt that the conceptual difference between count and mass is available to all humans, the way this difference is reflected by grammars and the lexicon varies substantially across languages.

In the first paper, Francis Jeffry Pelletier sets out the main challenges for a formalization of the count/mass distinction in English. If count and mass are encoded lexically as syntactic features of nouns, one runs into the problem that nouns are usually not exclusively mass or count (e.g. chocolate(s)). By contrast, if count and mass are semantic features, one runs into the problem of mismatches between the meanings of nouns and their grammatical behavior, often discussed in relation to nouns such as furniture (semantically count but syntactically mass) and pairs of count and mass nouns with similar reference (baklava/brownies, knowledge/beliefs). Based on this, Pelletier proposes that the lexicon is blind to the distinction between count and mass. A noun such as chocolate has a denotation that comprises both chocolates and portions of chocolate-stuff. The combination of count syntax and a noun activates a semantic rule that deletes the mass part.