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This book is the second title in the series ‘Key topics in syntax’, which, according to the text facing the title page of the book, aims to ‘bridge the gap between textbooks and primary literature’ and ‘consists of accessible yet challenging accounts of the most important issues, concepts, and phenomena to consider when examining the syntactic structure of language’. The key topic treated in this book is clause structure. This topic is viewed from the point of view of contemporary generative syntax, which means the minimalist program, broadly understood. Thus, this book traces the developmental paths of minimalist syntax, highlighting the various theoretical shifts and problems, and the empirical data that led to them. Sometimes, substantial research findings are pointed out and described, but quite often no well-founded theoretical conclusions are reached and the issue at hand remains unresolved, albeit still illuminated.

In the preface, the author mentions (x) that the book ‘is more of a textbook than a monograph’, and it is stated (xi) that the intended audiences for the book are advanced students and colleagues. Also, it is mentioned that a familiarity with the basics of generative and minimalist syntax is presupposed. The book focuses on clause structure in English, other languages being considered whenever it is appropriate, which happens quite frequently. In addition, all of the central chapters contain a substantial section titled ‘Cross-linguistic observations’, which broadens the empirical perspective further. Even though the theoretical focus clearly is on contemporary minimalist theory, facts and analyses from the history of generative syntax are often considered as well, which is welcome, since it adds depth to the discussion.

The book contains seven chapters. Each chapter (except Ch. 7, the conclusion) has a section called ‘Discussion points’ and suggestions for further reading. The introductory chapter (Ch. 1) provides a compact introduction to generative syntax, including a short history of the role of universal grammar in generative syntax, the change from rule-based to principles-and-parameters-based syntax, and phrase structure theory from phrase structure rules, via X-bar principles, to features and bare phrase structure. There are brief discussions on topics like VP-shells, Agree, probe-goal checking, Merge, minimalism vs. cartography, the linear correspondence axiom, phases, and the nature of features, to mention some of the topics that are covered. Chs. 2–6 comprise the core of the book. Ch. 2 discusses some of the basics concerning the clause and presents the three structural layers of the clause, viz. the VP-layer, the TP-layer, and the CP-layer, which provide the organizing arrangement for the chapters that follow. Thus, Chs. 3–5 are devoted to each of the three layers, starting with the VP-layer, and Ch. 6 is concerned with the connection between the layers.

Ch. 2 starts out with an examination of the main clause, focusing on main clauses in English. The basic characteristics of the main clause in English are said to be that it has a certain mood and

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contains a tensed verb and a subject that agrees with the verb—properties that together anchor the clause to a speech event and are known as finiteness. Mood, tense, and agreement, as well as case, are examined very briefly, and it is shown how the mood and tense properties of the clause are analyzed structurally as the core of the CP and TP layers, respectively. The basic distinction between the semantic role contra the grammatical function of a phrase/clause is discussed in some detail, including the argument vs. adverbial (adjunct) distinction and subordinate vs. coordinate clause functions. This is followed by a quite detailed discussion of types of subordinate clauses and their complementizers. The chapter is wrapped up with a more systematic presentation of the three layers, where the CP is characterized as the pragmatic layer, the TP as the grammatical layer, and the VP (or vP) as the layer for argument and event structure.

Ch. 3 is devoted to the VP-layer, namely the layer where argument structure and event structure are represented, and where the central problem is said to be how to map the arguments of a clause onto the syntactic structure. Two basic approaches to argument structure are discerned. The traditional approach is projectionist or lexicalist, where it is assumed that the lexical-semantic content of the given main verb specifies a given set of semantic roles (theta-roles) that are projected into the syntactic structure as arguments of the verb. In this approach, syntax is lexically driven. The other approach is constructionist, where it is assumed that the event structure of a clause defines a structural or syntactic skeleton where lexical items are inserted. In the constructionist approach, syntax is not lexically driven, but is generated on the basis of the abstract event structure, independently of the lexical content items. The author advocates a middle ground between these two approaches, claiming that ‘both the information about the verb in the lexicon and structure added from the outside play a role’ (75). From this point of departure, the chapter examines, among other topics, valency, theta-roles, expletive subjects, thematic hierarchies, psych verbs, the motivation for vP, unaccusative and unergative verbs, causatives, ditransitives, aspect and Aktionsart, phrasal verbs, and VP adverbs.

Ch. 4 examines the TP-layer, which the author suggests is the layer that shows the most crosslinguistic variation of the three layers, for example, in agreement and case properties. The chapter starts with a historical theoretical overview where it is shown how INFL developed into the I-projection, which in turn developed into separate AGRs-, T-, and AGRo-projections, until Noam Chomsky in the mid-1990s rejected the AGR-projections so that just the T-projection remains (along with the closely related little v-projection). Another useful feature of this chapter is the emphasis that is laid on showing explicit analyses of auxiliary verbs and how they are represented in the overall clause structure. This is welcome, since it is not often done in minimalist literature. The chapter contains a critique of elaborate structural hierarchies, as seen in cartographic analyses like Guglielmo Cinque’s analysis of ‘middle field’ adverbs, where the order of different types of adverbs is rigid, corresponding to the order of the various underlying functional heads that are postulated. Instead, the author advocates a more flexible approach where certain areas or zones in the TP area accommodate corresponding classes of adverbs. The chapter also contains quite detailed discussions about case and agreement and the possible connection between the two, and about the EPP, object shift, and whether verb movement is phonological or not.

Ch. 5 examines the CP-layer, which is dubbed the pragmatic layer, that is, the layer that looks outside the clause, be it to the linguistic or nonlinguistic context like in main clauses, or to a matrix clause, as is the case with subordination. The chapter starts out by providing some background on the history of the CP domain, where it is shown how the early S′/S″ changes to the CP in the mid-1980s, until the CP domain is split into several CP-related projections in the late 1990s. There then follows a fairly detailed treatment of complementizers and the features contained in them as well as the positions that complementizers may occupy in the split CP domain. This section introduces the CP-domain heads Force, Fin, Top, and Foc, and their projections, together with the idea of feature inheritance from C to T, illustrated with a compact discussion of exceptional case marking (ECM) and subject-raising structures. After this treatment of the subordinated CP, the indicative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamative moods of English main clauses are examined, followed by a discussion of CP adverbials in English. Apart from the crosslinguistic section at the end, the last big theme examined in this chapter is topic and focus.
First, a characterization of topic and focus is given. Then, different types of topic and focus are discussed, before the section ends with a brief examination of topic and focus in main vs. embedded clauses.

Ch. 6 is quite short, and its concern is the various connections that exist between the three layers that have been examined in detail in the preceding chapters. While the three layers to a great extent form independent chunks with their own specific properties, they also communicate with each other, giving rise to the particular hierarchical order CP-TP-vP/VP. This chapter discusses how this ordering comes about and examines the link between tense and mood in the three layers, as well as the links between aspect and the verb. There is also a treatment of negation and topic/focus.

Ch. 7 is just four pages long and very briefly sums up some of the main functions of the three layers, pointing out some of the major issues and challenges that each layer poses. There is also a very brief mention of so-called third-factor effects and universal grammar. The book contains a glossary and an index, and of course a list of references.

This is a great book for the experienced scholar. It can best be described as a catalogue of key topics pertaining to the syntactic analysis of the clause, which is probably part of what it is meant to be, to judge from the title of the book and the description of the book series. It is written in a fresh style with brief but to-the-point discussions of the chosen topics. Also, the organization of the book—where the central chapters center around questions and problems concerning the three layers: VP, TP, CP—makes perfect sense and helps greatly in focusing on the key topics in a systematic way. My minor criticism is that the suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter could have been richer and therefore more useful. This point is especially relevant for this book, since the discussions of the various topics are often very brief.

A catalogue of key topics is useful for the experienced scholar, but less so for the student. The author says that the book is intended for advanced students and colleagues, which in this connection means readers who have a basic knowledge of generative and minimalist syntax. It is also the case, however, that the author refers to the book as mainly a textbook (x), and the description of the book series states that the books are intended to bridge the gap between textbooks and primary literature. In my view, the book is less successful as a textbook or as a book bridging that gap. As for the latter desideratum, it is not obvious what bridging the gap would amount to, since a textbook should be elementary, not in the sense that it glosses over difficult issues, but in the sense that it carefully explains and motivates the basic elements that go into an (already established) analysis or theory. Similarly, the primary literature should scrupulously explain and motivate more advanced analyses and theories that are at the frontier of research. Whatever bridging the gap between these two means, scrupulous explanation and motivation of analyses and theories is the common denominator, and the basic problem with this book is that it contains far too many topics to be treated satisfactorily.

Very often during my reading I got the feeling that prior knowledge of the problem/data/analysis was necessary to really understand the author’s treatment of it. Just to mention a few examples, I found the discussion of ECM on pp. 52ff. very dense, and a huge topic like subjacency is allotted just a few lines on p. 64, as if the mention of it is intended to remind us about something that we all know. There is a quick mention of affix-hop on p. 118, which, by the way, is referred to as an empirical phenomenon rather than a mechanism of a theoretical analysis, which would be more appropriate, as far as I can see. An explicit hint that the author actually assumes that the reader knows everything beforehand is found on p. 131, where we read: ‘The base generation of the subject outside the VP changes, of course, around 1988 with the VPISH’. (‘Of course’, since both author and reader know this already.) This apparent assumption is the reason why I referred to the book as a catalogue above. Therefore, in my view, this book does not bridge the gap in any meaningful sense, and I suspect it will not be very successful as a textbook either, not even at an advanced level.

Apart from the more general objection raised above, I want to point to one other basic shortcoming that has to do with the notion of clause that is assumed or advanced in the book. Surprisingly, the answer to the basic question of what a clause actually is turns out to be quite elusive. In the introduction, it says that main clauses (in English) ‘minimally contain a finite verb and a sub-
ject, whereas subordinate clauses may lack an independent subject or a finite verb’ (1). In Ch. 2, in the section summing up the three layers, the author states that ‘[w]e have defined a clause as having mood, tense, a grammatical subject, and a lexical verb’ (65). This is stated following a long section on subordinate clauses, and since it is presented as a definition, the statement must be taken to characterize the notion of clause itself (probably as applied to English), that is, the common clausal properties of both main and subordinate clauses. In the glossary, by contrast, it is stated very briefly that a ‘clause contains at least a lexical verb’ (208). My point is that, apart from the book’s elusiveness regarding the definition or characterization of the core notion of clause, the characterizations that are in fact given actually exclude nonverbal small clauses from the class of clauses. Given the central place in generative grammar of the topic of small clauses, at least since Stowell 1981, this is strange, to say the least, and having no mention of (nonverbal) small clauses and secondary predication in a book on clause structure in (generative/minimalist) syntax must be said to be a serious shortcoming. At a minimum, small clauses should have been mentioned, if only to say that they will not be discussed further.

As should be clear from what I have said above, I think that this is a great book for the experienced scholar or for the advanced student who wants a catalogue as a reminder of what the key topics in the area of clause structure in generative or minimalist syntax are, and for sketches of how the various phenomena have been analyzed. From this perspective, this book is very useful, and it is evident that the author is in full command of the subject matter discussed in the book. However, this book is not the place to go for thorough and painstaking step-by-step explanation in a textbook-style manner.

REFERENCES


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