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The Syntax of German

What do you know, if you know that a language has ‘Object Verb’ (OV) structure rather than ‘Verb Object’ (VO)? Answering this question and many others, this book provides an essential guide to the syntactic structure of German. It examines the systematic differences between German and English, which follow from this basic difference in sentence structure, and presents the main results of syntactic research on German. Topics covered include the strict word order in VO vs word order variation in OV, verb clustering, clause union effects, obligatory functional subject position, and subject–object asymmetries for extractions. Through this, a cross-model and cross-linguistic comparison evolves, highlighting the immediate implications for non-Germanic OV languages, and creating a detailed and comprehensive description of the syntactic differences that immediately follow from an OV type in contrast with a VO type like English. It will be of value to all those interested in syntax and Germanic languages.

HUBERT HAIDER is Professor in Linguistics at the University of Salzburg. He has worked in Germany, the USA, Norway, Sweden, Japan and Morocco, and his previous publications include *Deutsche Syntax, Generativ – Vorstudien zur Theorie einer projektiven Grammatik* (1993).

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Foreword

In general we look for a new law by the following process. First we guess it. Then we compute the consequences of the guess to see what would be implied if this law that we guessed is right. Then we compare the result of the computation to nature, with experiment or experience, compare it directly with observation, to see if it works. If it disagrees with experiment it is wrong. In that simple statement is the key to science.

It does not make any difference how beautiful your guess is. It does not make any difference how smart you are, who made the guess, or what his name is – if it disagrees with experiment it is wrong. Richard Feynman, from a lecture he gave in 1964

What you read, when you read this book, is inspired by the desire to live up to Feynman's standard in the field of grammar research. (Un)fortunately, this very desire made it inevitable for me to leave the well-trodden mainstream paths more often than not, for a simple reason. The paths lead to reasonable accounts for VO languages, but to questionable analyses of OV languages. I must admit though that I am not sure whether I have put to test my own pet ideas as squarely as I dealt with most of the competing hypotheses. Falsification is just labour, creativity is gift. You will have to find out.

Here is the point of departure: German is a verb-final Germanic language. Germanic languages are V-‘movement’ languages. This means that in a declarative clause, the finite verb is placed at a position following a single, clause-initial constituent. This is the syntactic hallmark of Germanic languages, viz. the so-called *verb second* property. These two properties – the head-final VP and the ‘movability’ of (finite) verbs – are the core properties that trigger a cascade of implications within a universal grammar framework. It is the major concern of this book to demonstrate in detail how this minimal set of initial conditions is sufficient for a deeper understanding of the major syntactic properties not only of German and its Germanic kin, but also of the systematic contrasts between an OV organisation of sentence structure vis-à-vis a VO organization of sentence structure.

The background understanding of universal grammar (UG) in the domain of syntax endorsed here is this: UG is the mental instantiation of a system of principles and properties that constitutes and guides (the acquisition of) a uniquely human mental capacity, viz. the language faculty. This capacity enables us to efficiently and effectively compute the string-to-structure mapping, and conversely, the structure-to-string mapping in language processing.

Syntax is (in part) an algorithm that projects at least two-dimensional structures on one-dimensional arrays of terminals and compresses two-dimensional structures to one-dimensional strings of terminals. It thereby bridges a dimension gap. It enables the mapping of the one-dimensional representations (strings) of phonetic/phonological structure to the at least two-dimensional hierarchical box-in-box structure of semantic representations, back and forth. The dimension mismatch is an unavoidable consequence of the respective interfaces. Sound structures are organized along the time axis (linear organisation), conceptual representations are timeless, hierarchically organized complex structures (hierarchical, box-in-box organisation).

You should be aware that it is the persuasion of the author that the cognitive capacities underlying the grammar faculty are characterized best in terms of capacities for computing syntactic *patterns* (as a complex ‘geometric’ capacity, that is, as *pattern matching* capacity) rather than in terms of computing syntactic *derivations* (as a complex ‘algebraic’ capacity, that is, *pattern construction and derivation* capacity). A theory of UG may justly be formulated in terms of principles and rules, but the mentally implemented (core) grammar of a given language as the model of the linguistic capacities of the speaker/listener is not a derivational machinery for tree structures; it is a pattern matching capacity.

This conviction is bolstered by findings in other cognitive domains. Human vision is the solution for a dimension management problem, too. Three-dimensional relations must be reliably projected (i.e. mentally reconstructed) from two-dimensional retinal reception patterns (Hoffmann 1998). The UG of vision as a system of rules and principles for 3D-projections is not the blueprint for a derivational system. It characterizes a system that is applied instantaneously, not sequentially.

Be that as it may, the general approach in this book is a representational, and not a derivational, one. A convergent syntactic representation for an array of terminal elements is seen as nothing else but the well-formed syntactic structure of the given array, and not, in addition, as the endpoint of a cascade of derivations (that are even taken to bifurcate into a spell-out structure and a hidden post-spell-out representation). Derivational terminology (e.g. ‘movement’) is used without restraint, though, in this book, just for expository and familiarity reasons, without ontological commitments.

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x Foreword

The agreed objective for me as a contributor to the Cambridge Syntax Guides series has been to produce a comprehensive survey of German syntax while keeping a low profile on the technical apparatus, but nevertheless following a theory-inspired road map. The focus will be on data and argumentation at a primarily descriptive level. If you nevertheless come to think that there are still too many technical details in some chapter, and not enough data in another, blame it on the author.

Acknowledgements

Any substantive piece of work of a researcher is much like a mushroom. It looks like an individually grown thing, but in fact it is just the surface appearance of the activity of a huge underground mycelium which the researcher is but a part of. By the way, mycelia love trees, and so do some syntacticians.

It is impossible for me to figure out a complete inventory of all my influential co-myceliars. So I apologize to those who fed my mushroom but have fallen victim to my mediocre source memory. After all, my concern with OV and VO took shape in the early nineties, presented first at the 1991 Utrecht conference, whose proceedings took their time (Haider 1992, in Coopmans, Everaert and Grimshaw 2000).

My mushroom cultivating award for German surely goes to at least the following eminent grammarians who readily come to my mind: Klaus Abels, Werner Abraham, Josef Bayer, Manfred Bierwisch, Daniel Büring, Gisbert Fanselow, Werner Frey, Günther Grewendorf, Tilman Höhle, Joachim Jacobs, Angelika Kratzer, Gereon Müller, Stefan Müller, Marga Reis, Inger Rosengren, Arnim von Stechow, Wolfgang Sternefeld, Sten Vikner, Angelika Wöllstein, Ellen Woolford, Susi Wurmbrand, Ilse Zimmermann.

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Marga Reis and Gisbert Fanselow invested time and effort in reading (parts of) an earlier version and not only pointed out deficits and problems but supplied highly valuable suggestions, due scepticism and welcome encouragement. My special gratitude goes to them. Whatever blunders are still lurking for you in the present version are to be exclusively blamed on the author, of course.

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Finally, the readability of the text has benefited enormously from my companion-in-life's untiring efforts in hunting relentlessly for typos, inconsistencies and barely understandable formulations during several metamorphic stages of this book. In general, the extent to which it has gained a more butterfly-like than larva-shaped appearance is definitely thanks to her. Hartelijk bedankt, lieveke!

This book, I dedicate to the memory of my beloved younger brother Martin, whose brilliant brain happened to be fatally devastated by bacteria at the time I was finishing this book.

Abbreviations

AC	absolute cartography
ACC	accusative
ANS	<i>Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst</i> ('grammar of standard Dutch'); abbreviation for the title of Geerts <i>et al.</i> (1984)
ARB	arbitrary (PRO _{ARB})
BBC	basic branching constraint
BG	Burzio's generalization
CC	copy construction
CED	condition on extraction domains
CL	clitic
CS	convergent structuring
CUS	clause union syndrome
DAT	dative
DIR	directive
DO	direct object
ECM	exceptional case marking
ECP	Empty Category Principle
EPP	extended projection principle = _{def.} 'clauses have subjects' (Chomsky 1982: 9–10)
fem	feminine
FF	focus fronting
FIN	finite
GEN	genitive
INF	infinite
INTRANS	intransitive
IO	indirect object
IPP	<i>infinitivus pro participio</i> , Latin for 'infinitive instead of participle', in German: <i>Ersatzinfinitiv</i>
IS	information structure
LD	left-dislocation
LF	logical form

xiv List of abbreviations

LFG	Lexical Functional Grammar
LOC	locative
MAC	minimal argument complex
masc	masculine
MLC	Minimal Link Condition
neut	neutrum, neuter
NOM	nominative
OBJ	object
OV	type of language with head-final VP, that is, ‘object–verb’ order
P&P	Principles & Parameter Model (Chomsky 1981)
Part	Participle
PASS	passive
PDI	Principle of Directional Identification
PF	phonetic form
pg	parasitic gap
PRO	silent subject in clausal infinitival constructions
PRT	particle
REFL	reflexive
SUBJ	subject
TP	tense phrase
TRANS	transitive
UG	Universal Grammar
VC	verb cluster
VO	type of language with head-initial VP, that is, ‘verb–object’ order
WC	<i>was</i> (what) construction
XP	phrase of an arbitrary category (<i>x</i> serves as a variable for the head category)
<	Read ‘A<B’ as ‘A precedes B’