

Resensi Buku (5)

Judul : **Syntax: A Generative Introduction**
Pengarang : Andrew Carnie
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The nearly half-a-century development of Generative Grammar is best characterized by continual linguistic theorizing, and yet the core of generative theory remains the same: the centrality of syntax. The key term in the Chomskyan school is no doubt “theory”, as incorporated in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965) best known as Standard Theory, set out through “Remarks on Nominalization” (1972) known as Extended Standard Theory, explored further in *Lectures on Government and Binding* (1981) known as GB Theory, and eventually condensed in *The Minimalist Program* (1995) known as Minimalist Theory. The best linguistic theory, as noted explicitly in three of these four major references (excepting “Remarks”), should be internally simple and elegant, and externally meet the conditions of descriptive and explanatory adequacy. As for the centrality of syntax, it can be seen in the synonymous definitions of “linguistic competence” and “syntactic competence”, namely, “the specific mental ability that enables humans to create and interpret novel grammatical utterances” (see Fromkin et al. 1997: 70; Radford 1997: 2). Human language is thus fundamentally creative, and linguistic creativity is best explained formally by means of recursive phrase structure rules in generative syntax. In linguistic theorizing and arguing for syntactic theory, Chomsky has notably been a hard reading. When *Aspects* (1965) and *LGB* (1981) were first published, devoted followers and interpreters around Chomsky were busy writing more ‘readable’ textbooks to make Standard Theory and GB Theory, respectively, accessible to beginner students of language.

1. CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

Just like earlier interpretive textbooks, Carnie’s book now being reviewed, *Syntax: A Generative Introduction* (2002), has been written for the same purpose: to make the latest version of generative syntax more digestible for linguistics students. The book contains four major parts: Preliminaries, The Base, Transformations, and Alternatives. Each part is further subdivided into chapters.

Part I, Preliminaries, consists of four chapters. Chapter 1, Generative Grammar, gives an overview of Chomskyan linguistics. The generative approach remains mentalistic, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, “Language is a psychological, or cognitive, property of humans” (p. 1). The emphasis on the distinction between “language” and “Language” (P. 4) is the same as that on the distinction between E-language and I-language (Chomsky 1986: 19-24). More clearly, Language or I-language is better known as “Universal Grammar”, or “the set of linguistic principles we are endowed with at birth in virtue of being human” (Smith, 1999: 42). Overall, the goal of generative syntax is to come up with the modeling of UG, as an attempt to explain the logical problem of language acquisition.

Chapter 2, Fundamentals: Rules, Trees, and Parts of Speech, begins with the rejection of semantic definitions of parts of speech and, following the post-Bloomfieldian

approach, explains the nature of N, V, P, and A/Adv (the last two combined into one lexical category, p. 36) by looking at their distribution. Syntax deals initially with the linear order and eventually with the hierarchical structure of phrases and sentences. The “rules” show how to expand the linear order, and the “trees” show the inner mechanism of the hierarchical structure. Chapter 3, Structural Relations, further dwells into the intricacies of tree structures. The structures of “dominance” (pp. 68f) and “precedence” (pp. 72f) are explained by referring to the technical term “c-command” (p. 75f) and the familiar term “grammatical relations” (pp. 78f): subject and object (the latter further subdivided into direct object, indirect object, and object of a preposition).

Chapter 4, Binding Theory, is a brief discussion of Principles A, B, and C constituting Binding Theory. In essence, this theory is presented as evidence for the “poverty-of-stimulus argument”. That is, the human mind, with no instruction whatsoever, “knows” that “an anaphor must be bound in its local domain”, “a pronoun must be free in its local domain”, and “an R-expression must be free” (pp. 96-7).

Moving ahead to Part 2, The Base, readers are introduced to X-bar Theory (chapter 5). The elegant simplicity of Generative Grammar shows up, among other things, in X-bar Theory. The phrasal categories NP, VP, PP, AP (AdjP/AdvP) are generalized into XP, whose configuration is shown in Figure 1.

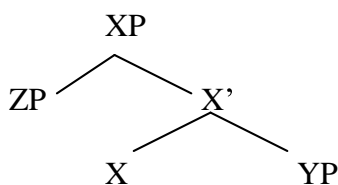


Figure 1. XP Configuration

In this configuration, the lexical head X takes the complement YP, and it is maximally projected into the phrasal category XP, which takes ZP as its specifier. Chapter 6, Extending X-bar Theory: CP, TP, and DP, is an attempt to obtain greater generality of the theory. X represents not only a lexical head (N, V, P or A) but also a functional head (C = complementizer, T = tense, or D = determiner). Hence, the maximal projections of these functional heads are CP, TP, and DP, respectively. Illustrative examples are presented in order: _{CP}[... *that the student loves syntax*], _{TP}[*The student loves syntax*], and _{DP}[*the student*]. As these examples show, TP is the new node label for S and DP for NP.

Chapter 7, Constraining X-bar Theory: Theta Roles and the Lexicon, is part of the effort to combine semantics and syntax. A theta role is “a bundle of thematic relations associated with a particular argument” (p. 178); and thematic relations are “semantic relations between a predicate and an argument” (p.177). For example, in the sentence *The hunter killed the tiger*, the subject NP *the hunter* is assigned the thematic relation “agent”, and the object NP *the tiger* the thematic relation “theme”. Other thematic relations introduced in this chapter are experiencer, goal, recipient, source, location, instrument, and benefactive.

Part 3, Transformations, consists of 5 chapters; it discusses all types of movement in chapters 8 through 11, and introduces Minimalism in chapter 12. Chapter 8, Head-to-Head Movement, discusses two types of movement. The first is the parametric variation of V or T movement (pp. 192f): either moving the lexical head V to the position of the functional head T (as that in French) or moving the functional head from the T position to the V position (as that in English). The second is T movement (pp. 205f): moving T to the

C position, such as auxiliary-fronting in English in the formation of Yes/No question. Note that “positions” of these heads (i.e., V, T, and C) refer to their respective positions in the binary tree structure.

Chapter 9, NP/DP Movement, is the movement of NP/DP as motivated by case assignment. The best example is the NP movement in passive: the NP moves from the object to the subject position to obtain the nominative case. To illustrate, the passive sentence [*The building was destroyed t*] has as its D-structure [__ *was destroyed the building*]. The NP *the building* moves from the object to the subject position to obtain the nominative case, leaving a *t* (trace) behind.

Chapter 10, Raising, Control, and Empty Categories, is further discussion of transformation as related to the Case Filter and the Theta Criterion. Raising is an upward movement of an NP/DP to obtain case. In subject-to-subject raising (e.g., [*Jean is likely [t to leave]*]), the NP *Jean* moves to the specifier of TP to obtain the nominative case. In subject-to-object raising (e.g., [*Jean wants Robert [t to leave]*]), the NP *Robert* moves to the object position to obtain the accusative case. Control and the empty category PRO are two major components of the Control Theory. It is a theory which governs how PRO gets its meaning. In subject control (e.g., [*Jean is reluctant [PRO to leave]*]), PRO is controlled by the matrix clause subject *Jean*. In object control (e.g., [*Jean persuaded Robert [PRO to leave]*]), PRO is controlled by the matrix clause object *Robert*. Chapter 11, *Wh*-movement, discusses the upward movement of a *wh*-phrase to the specifier of CP to check a *wh*-feature in C. *Wh*-movement is thus called non-argument movement, whereas NP/DP movement (discussed in chapter 9) is called argument movement. The latter, but not the former, is motivated by case assignment.

Chapter 12, Toward Minimalism, points out the progress in linguistic theorizing. “The Minimalist Program is motivated not only by the search for explanatory adequacy but also for a certain level of formal simplicity and elegance” (p. 315). As an example, the three types of movement discussed in the previous chapters (i.e., head movement, NP movement, and *wh*-movement) are tied together into a single principle, “Move”. This principle says, “Move something somewhere”—to meet the requirements set out by each theory in UG.

Part 4, Alternatives, presents two other approaches (besides Minimalism): Lexical-Functional Grammar (chapter 13) and Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (chapter 14). They are viewed as “alternatives” and may well be “considered to be generative grammars”, since they also try to account for the nature of syntactic competence but “differ ... in [their] precise formulation of the rules and constraints” (p. 335).

2. CRITICAL COMMENTS

Carnie’s book deserves special praise but also critiques. The division of the book into four parts is very helpful. It highlights the goal and basic assumptions of Generative Grammar, shows the prominent role of X-bar Theory in generative syntax, ties together all types of movement under “transformations”, and broadens the reader’s perspective by introducing alternative approaches. The summary and the glossary of technical terms at the end of every chapter provide great help in understanding abstract concepts in syntactic theory. Although illustrative examples in the book are mostly English, the exercises have been enriched with a great variety of world languages, such as—in alphabetical order—Arizona Tewa, Bambara, Dogrib, Dutch, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Malagasy, Mandarin Chinese, Nootka, Serbo-Croatian, Vata, Walpiri, Yaqui, and Zapotec. By providing these examples, the writer intends to prove that theories and principles in UG

apply cross-linguistically and, hence, have the right to claim to be truly universal. Finally, “Further Reading” at the end of every chapter allows making further and deeper exploration of every topic under discussion. The references at the end of the book (pp. 379-84) also tell us that Chomsky, as the great *guru*, remains very influential in linguistic theorizing. After he published *The Minimalist Program* in 1995, attempts to give further interpretation of Minimalism are obvious in the scholarly works by Culicover (1997), Haegeman and Gueron (1999), Heim and Kratzer (1998), Lasnik (1999a), Radford (1997a, 1997b), and Uriagereka (1998).

The first critique of Carnie’s book is directed toward the configuration of Minimalism. As shown on p. 321, Carnie still keeps the inverted Y-Model (Figure 2a), which was in fact the GB Model, instead of introducing the Minimalist Model (Figure 2b), which has a more simple configuration.

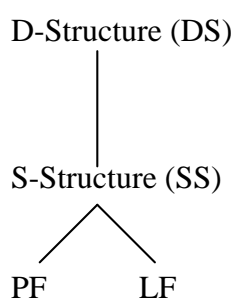


Figure 2a. GB Configuration

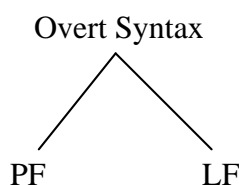


Figure 2b. Minimalist Configuration

In Minimalist Theory, as Figure 2b shows, D-Structure and S-Structure are condensed into a single representation: Overt Syntax, which serves as the basis for interpreting phonetic form (PF) and logical form (LF). Chomsky himself states, “If the theoretical consequences [of Minimalism] can be explained ... and D-Structure eliminated, then the Projection Principle and the Theta-Criterion can be dispensed with” (1995: 188). In terms of configuration, Minimalism has indeed accomplished the desired elegant simplicity.

In extending X-bar Theory (pp. 143f), there is no mention of how IP or Infl Phrase (in GB syntax) has changed into TP or Tense Phrase (in Minimalism). In GB Theory, a clausal category used to be given the node label IP. Then following the “split-I hypothesis” introduced by Pollock (1989), I (Infl) is further broken down into T (Tense) and Agr (Agreement). A brief mention of the split-I hypothesis (see Chomsky 1995: 377) would save the reader familiar with the IP version from losing orientation.

My own critiques of Minimalism, specifically the flaws of X-bar Theory and Binding Theory (Kadarisman 2000, 2004), are based on the fact that both theories fail to account for the nature of Indonesian data. By giving a sentence in any language the node label TP, X-bar Theory has “forced” a language like Indonesian to “have tense”, whereas in reality it is a “tenseless” language. Sentences such as [*Ani mahasiswa*], [*Ani di kampus*], and [*Ani sibuk*] are counter-examples that negate universality claimed by X-bar Theory. Similarly, sentences such as [*Ani tahu [bahwa dirinya dipuji Hasan]*] and [*Dirinya telah lama menderita*] are counter-examples for Principle A of Binding Theory, since the anaphor *dirinya* in both sentences is not bound in its local domain.

A closer look at the head-to-head movement (pp. 189f) will also reveal that moving V to the T position and moving T to the C position (in the tree structure) apply well in a language like English but not in a language like Indonesian, since the former is [+tense]

language but the latter a [-tense] language. Likewise, *wh*-movement in English is completely different from *wh*-movement in Indonesian, particularly if the *wh*-phrase represents the object. Let's compare the following examples. In an English sentence such as [*What did you t buy t*], *what* moves from the object position to the specifier of CP, and *did* from the T position to C. Now, how will the theory explain the movement in an Indonesian sentence such as [*Apa yang Anda beli t*]? It is right that *apa* moves from the object position to the specifier of CP. But what about *yang*? It is not an auxiliary, and yet it moves there to the C position. Furthermore, transforming the affirmative [*Anda membeli X*] to the interrogative [*Apa yang Anda beli t ?*] involves the obligatory change of *subject meN+V* into *subject+V*. This Indonesian-specific structural phenomenon is beyond the reach of Minimalism.

Here I have presented strong counter examples that invalidate the universality claimed by many principles in UG. As criticized by Comrie (1989: 15), the principles may aptly be called “putative universals”, that is, abstract analyses consistent with any conceivable set of data. Why “conceivable”? Because UG principles are also “conceived” to be universals, partly because it is more strongly theory-driven than data-driven. Comrie (*ibid.*) further gives a wry comment, “[Putative universals] may tell us something about linguists, but they do not tell us anything about language”. In brief, while the grand theory in Generative Grammar remains fascinating, the universality of UG principles—in the face of numerous counter-examples in natural language data—now becomes questionable, looks shaky, and sounds doubtful.

Finally, the word “introduction” as part of the title of the book (i.e., *Syntax: A Generative Introduction*) should be read with caution. Without prior knowledge of the latest version of generative syntax, the book—albeit meant to be introductory—is not an easy reading. In his personal note accompanying the copy of the book sent to me, Professor Soenjono Dardjowidjojo mentions that the book is used as a compulsory reading among the S3 students at the Graduate Program, Unika Atma Jaya. In Indonesian academic context, the book, with lucid explanation from the lecturer, is an appropriate reference at the S2 or S3 level, but it is an “impossible reading” at the S1 level. Together with Radford's book, *Syntax: A Minimalist Introduction* (1997), Carnie's book should serve as a good introduction to Minimalist Theory.

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