Book review

The Syntactic Phenomena of English (Second Edition), James D. McCawley

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The Syntactic Phenomena of English (Second Edition)
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James McCawley was[1] a Professor in the Departments of Linguistics and of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago. He wrote this book as a syntax textbook to be useful for a two-quarter sequence devoted to a detailed analysis of a large number of syntactic phenomena in English and to an exposition of the ideas of syntactic theory that are valuable as aids to exploring and understanding syntactic phenomena. He mentioned as a prerequisite a reasonably demanding introductory linguistics sequence. However, thanks to the clear and accessible writing style, as well as a coherent and systematic presentation, the amount of prior knowledge of syntax necessary for comprehending the material is fairly low.

To the readers' benefit, the book contains a great amount of material, certainly far more than could be covered in a two-quarter sequence, and probably even more than would be feasible to cover in a one-year sequence. Therefore, as a textbook it offers an abundance of course material for the instructors to choose from, and for the students to

[1] Regretfully, during the time that has elapsed between the publishing of the book and the completion of this review, it became necessary to use the past rather then present tense in the first sentence.

supplement the material covered in the classroom. Each chapter except the first includes exercises which encourage students to practice doing linguistics by asking the sort of questions that a linguist asks oneself when investigating, describing or explaining some phenomenon. Quite a few selected wrong answers to exercises are also provided.

One thing that I personally miss in comparison to other fine textbooks is a "recommended further reading" section at the end of each chapter. Although citations are given throughout the text, and although (or perhaps: because) the book as a whole contains a vast list of bibliographical references covering 15 pages, it would have been useful to have a short survey of related literature relevant to the phenomena discussed in individual chapters.

Last but not least, thanks to the breath and depth of the discussion as well as a well worked out index, the book lends itself as an excellent reference work of English syntax.

The syntactic theory developed in the book is, using McCawley's own words, "a highly revisionist version of transformational grammar that probably no one other than [the author] accepts in all its details and to which [he] refuse[s] to give any name". The approach shares with orthodox transformational grammar the gross outline of its conception of syntactic structure and of the notion of "transformation" (the transformations of a language are a system of rules specifying how underlying and surface syntactic structure are related in that language), as well as the central ideas of many well-known analyses of particular syntactic constructions. However, as the author makes clear, his approach differs in many aspects, e.g., with regard to the goals of syntax and of linguistics, the relationship between syntax and other things both within and outside of linguistics, and in the more specific details of syntactic structure.

The primary goal of the book was to be about the facts of syntax, and English syntax in particular. Thus, the leading principle in choosing what to discuss in the book was that top billing be given to the phenomena and second billing to the theory. This is not because of a disdain for theory, but because of the view that the greatest value of any theory is in the extent to which it makes phenomena accessible to investigators, enables them to discover facts that would otherwise have escaped notice or to see connections among facts that would otherwise have remained unrelated to them. Accordingly, thoroughness in the coverage of the syntactic phenomena of English was a primary objective, while diverging theoretical ideas were intentionally covered very selectively. Well-known alternatives to the author's own ideas were taken up principally to clarify issues in which those ideas figure and are discussed only in as much detail as necessary to make those issues clear.

A real attempt is made, however, to deal in detail with those analyses of specific phenomena that have been influential enough to have acquired the status of a landmark, analyses presupposed to be familiar in most of the published literature, and often alluded to in common descriptive terminology.

There are two more aspects in which McCawley chose to diverge from common practice. One is his rejection of any fixed "official" notation system. Rather, he adopts the policy of stating in English what class of "inputs" each rule allows to correspond to what sort of "outputs", aiming at complete coverage of the factors that affect applicability of the rule and of the details of the ways in which the "output" differs from the "input".

Another policy adopted in the book which differs from the standard is that no topic is being disguised from the students (readers) until they have had "the lesson on" that topic. In the many cases in which important insights into phenomena discussed in earlier chapters can be obtained by examining interactions with phenomena discussed in later chapters, the discussion is conducted in terms of the advanced analyses that are adopted later in the book, instead of patching up by using spurious "elementary" analyses at first and replacing them later.

This book is a second edition. Those who are familiar with the first edition published in 1988 should find it interesting that new material has been added, some terminology and notation has been improved and substantial revisions have been made, concerning mainly the systematic presentation of material without switching notations. Also, any attempts at an initial "dumbing down" of the analyses have been dispensed with.

The order of chapters in the second edition largely matches their counterparts in the first edition. Chapter 2, which overviews the adopted scheme of syntactic analysis and introduces the notation for syntactic categories, is a result of extensive rewriting, due to the decision to dispense with any attempt at dumbing down the early chapters. Chapters 3 ("Some Tests for Deep and Surface Constituent Structure") and 13 ("Relative Clauses") have remained substantially the same as for their content, but have been reorganized and rewritten. On the other hand, chapter 11 ("Anaphora") has been substantially improved with regard to taking up the conditions under which pronominalization is obligatory.

The coverage of several topics such as cleft sentences and free relatives has been significantly enlarged. Also, new sections have been added, covering apposition, parasitic gaps, contrastive negation, superlatives and comparative conditional sentences. Last but not least, new exercises and additional citations have been added in this edition.

The material in the book is divided over 22 chapters in total. Most of the chapters presuppose considerable material from the first ten of them, which constitute an intertwined whole. The remaining chapters are much less mutually dependent. Below, I shall present a short guided tour of the contents of the first ten chapters. For the remaining chapters, which constitute more than two thirds of the book rather than the "second half", I only mention the topics they cover, because any deeper presentation would require excessive space.

The first two chapters are introductory, although important for the correct interpretation of the rest. They outline the understanding of syntax and syntactic structure adopted in the book and introduce the basic notions and notations employed throughout the book. The essential notions explained in chapter 2 are those of *surface* and *underlying structure*, *transformation, derivation, rules, rule interaction* and *rule ordering.* This chapter gives the reader a taste of the flavor of the linguistic approach pursued in the book, and makes her familiar with the essential methodology.

Chapter 3 identifies and explains in detail a number of tests for constituent structure, which are commonly used and broadly applicable. Many of these tests use as a criterion the applicability of particular transformations. Tests for shallow constituent structure and tests for deep constituent structure are distinguished in this chapter. For example, constructions involving *verb phrase deletion*, *stripping*, *conjunction reduction*, *right node raising*, *gapping*, *cleft* and *pseudo-cleft* and *focussing* are discussed as the former class of tests.

Chapter 4 is devoted to subject-changing transformations. The constructions discussed here in detail are *passive*, there-*insertion, quantifier-float, extraposition* and tough-*movement.* Chapter 5 is about complements, i.e. clauses, possibly with a subordinating marker, which stand in the grammatical relation of subject, direct or indirect object. Full as well as reduced complements are addressed, and issues of control are raised.

By the time the reader studies her way through the first five chapters, she has been exposed to a fair variety of phenomena, a vast number of examples and a decent number of rules in McCawley's transformational grammar. Thus, she is ready for the next two chapters addressing more general issues. Chapter 6 takes up in detail rule interaction. Various possibilities for specifying the ordering of rules' application are compared, and cyclic vs. post-cyclic and obligatory vs. optional transformations are distinguished. Chapter 7 presents the approach to syntactic categories adopted in this book, and explains each category concisely.

Chapter 8 is about auxiliary verbs, including a discussion of modal, temporal and aspectual characteristics. Chapter 9 is about another intriguing issue, namely coordination; it picks up some issues that appear already in chapter 3, and provides a detailed and comprehensive discussion of various types of coordinated structures. Chapter 10, which completes the "essential ten", overviews surface combinatoric rules, i.e., the list of the syntactic configurations allowed in the surface structure of English.

The following 10 chapters proceed on with in-depth discussions of one phenomenon or syntactic construction after another: anaphora, the structure of noun phrases, relative clases, interrogative clauses, other types of non-declarative sentences, negation, scope of quantifiers and negations, adverbs, and comparative constructions. Chapter 15 addresses the principles that restrict and extend the application of transformations, building on and extending the standard constraints introduced by Ross in 1940.

The last two chapters exceed the traditionally understood area of syntax: Chapter 21 provides a brief, and rather limited, excursion into discourse syntax. Finally, in the last chapter 22, McCawley explores some ways in which English allows its syntactic structures to be used in a broader class of cases than the rules of the language, understood straightforwardly, appear to allow.

Let me provide a closing quote from footnote 3, p. xix:

> *The title of this book was chosen to reflect this assignment of star and supporting roles [i.e., phenomena and theory, respectively, I.K.]. That policy was also reflected in the title that I originally gave the book: "More about English Syntax Than You Probably Want to Know", a title that hardly anyone but me seemed to like. [...] I encourage users of this book to refer to it informally by its original title and to complain if it does not measure up to that title [....].*

I leave it to the readers to decide for themselves whether the book presents them with *just enough* or *more than enough* material about English syntax. Leaving McCawley's characteristic humor aside, the book covers an enormous wealth of phenomena in a comprehensive, coherent, and technically explicit way, that can only be commended. This gives it a prominent place alongside other classical linguistic works.