

# Grammatical theory

From transformational grammar to  
constraint-based approaches

Stefan Müller

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■ Textbooks in Language Sciences 1



# Grammatical theory

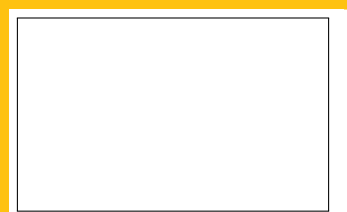
This book introduces formal grammar theories that play a role in current linguistics or contributed tools that are relevant for current linguistic theorizing (Phrase Structure Grammar, Transformational Grammar/"Government & Binding, Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar, Lexical Functional Grammar, Categorical Grammar, Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar, Construction Grammar, Tree Adjoining Grammar). The key assumptions are explained and it is shown how the respective theory treats arguments and adjuncts, the active/passive alternation, local reorderings, verb placement, and fronting of constituents over long distances. The analyses are explained with German as the object language.

In the second part of the book the approaches are compared with respect to their predictions regarding language acquisition and psycholinguistic plausibility. The nativism hypothesis that assumes that humans possess genetically determined innate language-specific knowledge is examined critically and alternative models of language acquisition are discussed. In addition the second part addresses issues that are discussed controversially in current theory building as for instance the question whether flat or binary branching structures are more appropriate, the question whether constructions should be treated on the phrasal or the lexical level, and the question whether abstract, non-visible entities should play a role in syntactic analyses. It is shown that the analyses that are suggested in the respective frameworks are often translatable into each other. The book closes with a chapter that shows how properties that are common to all languages or to certain language classes can be captured.

"With this critical yet fair reflection on various grammatical theories, Müller fills what was a major gap in the literature." Karen Lehmann, *Zeitschrift für Rezensionen zur germanistischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 2012

"Stefan Müller's recent introductory textbook, 'Grammatiktheorie', is an astonishingly comprehensive and insightful survey for beginning students of the present state of syntactic theory." Wolfgang Sternefeld und Frank Richter, *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft*, 2012

"This is the kind of work that has been sought after for a while. [...] The impartial and objective discussion offered by the author is particularly refreshing." Werner Abraham, *Germanistik*, 2012



Stefan Müller

Grammatical theory



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# Grammatical theory

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For Max





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# Preface

This book is an extended and revised version of my German book *Grammatiktheorie* (Müller 2013b). It introduces various grammatical theories that play a role in current theorizing or have made contributions in the past which are still relevant today. I explain some foundational assumptions and then apply the respective theories to what can be called the “core grammar” of German. I have decided to stick to the object language that I used in the German version of this book since many of the phenomena that will be dealt with cannot be explained with English as the object language. Furthermore, many theories have been developed by researchers with English as their native language and it is illuminative to see these theories applied to another language. I show how the theories under consideration deal with arguments and adjuncts, active/passive alternations, local reorderings (so-called scrambling), verb position, and fronting of phrases over larger distances (the verb second property of the Germanic languages without English).

The second part deals with foundational questions that are important for developing theories. This includes a discussion of the question of whether we have innate domain specific knowledge of language (UG), the discussion of psycholinguistic evidence concerning the processing of language by humans, a discussion of the status of empty elements and of the question whether we construct and perceive utterances holistically or rather compositionally, that is, whether we use phrasal or lexical constructions.

Unfortunately, linguistics is a scientific field with a considerable amount of terminological chaos. I therefore wrote an introductory chapter that introduces terminology in the way it is used later on in the book. The second chapter introduces phrase structure grammars, which plays a role for many of the theories that are covered in this book. I use these two chapters (excluding the Section 2.3 on interleaving phrase structure grammars and semantics) in introductory courses of our BA curriculum for German studies. Advanced readers may skip these introductory chapters. The following chapters are structured in a way that should make it possible to understand the introduction of the theories without any prior knowledge. The sections regarding new developments and classification are more ambitious: they refer to chapters still to come and also point to other publications that are relevant in the current theoretical discussion but cannot be repeated or summarized in this book. These parts of the book address advanced students and researchers. I use this book for teaching the syntactic aspects of the theories in a seminar for advanced students in our BA. The slides are available on my web page. The second part of the book, the general discussion, is more ambitious and contains the discussion of advanced topics and current research literature.

This book only deals with relatively recent developments. For a historical overview, see for instance Robins (1997); Jungen & Lohnstein (2006). I am aware of the fact that

## *Contents*

chapters on Integrational Linguistics (Lieb 1983; Eisenberg 2004; Nolda 2007), Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky 1993; Grimshaw 1997; G. Müller 2000), Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin 1993) and Relational Grammar (Perlmutter 1983, 1984) are missing. I will leave these theories for later editions.

The original German book was planned to have 400 pages, but it finally was much bigger: the first German edition has 525 pages and the second German edition has 564 pages. I added a chapter on Dependency Grammar and one on Minimalism to the English version and now the book has 809 pages. I tried to represent the chosen theories appropriately and to cite all important work. Although the list of references is over 85 pages long, I was probably not successful. I apologize for this and any other shortcomings.

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This book was the first Language Science Press book that had an open review phase (see below). I thank Dick Hudson, Paul Kay, Antonio Machicao Y Priemer, Andrew McIntyre, Sebastian Nordhoff, and one anonymous open reviewer for their comments. Theses comments are documented at the download page of this book.

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## On the way this book is published

I started to work on my dissertation in 1994 and defended it in 1997. During the whole time the manuscript was available on my web page. After the defense, I had to look for a publisher. I was quite happy to be accepted to the series *Linguistische Arbeiten* by Niemeyer, but at the same time I was shocked about the price, which was 186.00 DM for a paperback book that was written and typeset by me without any help by the publisher (twenty times the price of a paperback novel).<sup>1</sup> This basically meant that my book was depublished: until 1998 it was available from my web page and after this it was available in libraries only. My Habilitationsschrift was published by CSLI Publications for a much more reasonable price. When I started writing textbooks, I was looking for alternative distribution channels and started to negotiate with no-name print on demand publishers. Brigitte Narr, who runs the Stauffenburg publishing house, convinced me to publish my HPSG textbook with her. The copyrights for the German version of the book remained with me so that I could publish it on my web page. The collaboration was successful so that I also published my second textbook about grammatical theory with Stauffenburg. I think that this book has a broader relevance and should be accessible for non-German-speaking readers as well. I therefore decided to have it translated into English. Since Stauffenburg is focused on books in German, I had to look for another publisher. Fortunately the situation in the publishing sector changed quite dramatically in comparison to 1997: we now have high profile publishers with strict peer review that are entirely open access. I am very glad about the fact that Brigitte Narr sold the rights of my book back to me and that I can now publish the English version with Language Science Press under a CC-BY license.

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<sup>1</sup> As a side remark: in the meantime Niemeyer was bought by de Gruyter and closed down. The price of the book is now 139.95 €/ \$ 196.00. The price in Euro corresponds to 273.72 DM.

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OMP is extended by open review facilities and community-building gamification tools (Müller 2012b; Müller & Haspelmath 2013). All Language Science Press books are reviewed by at least two external reviewers. Reviewers and authors may agree to publish these reviews and thereby make the whole process more transparent (see also Pullum (1984) for the suggestion of open reviewing of journal articles). In addition there is an optional second review phase: the open review. This review is completely open to everybody. The whole community may comment on the document that is published by Language Science Press. After this second review phase, which usually lasts for two months, authors may revise their publication and an improved version will be published. This book was the first book to go through this open review phase. The annotated open review version of this book is still available via the web page of this book.

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If you think that textbooks like this one should be freely available to whoever wants to read them and that publishing scientific results should not be left to profit-oriented publishers, then you can join the Language Science Press community and support us in various ways: you can register with Language Science Press and have your name listed on our supporter page with more than 500 other enthusiasts, you may devote your time and help with proofreading and/or typesetting, or you may donate money for specific books or for Language Science Press in general. We are also looking for institutional supporters like foundations, societies, linguistics departments or university libraries. In case of questions, please contact me or the Language Science Press coordinator at [contact@langsci-press.org](mailto:contact@langsci-press.org).

Berlin, January 14, 2016

Stefan Müller





## **Part I**

# **Background and specific theories**



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