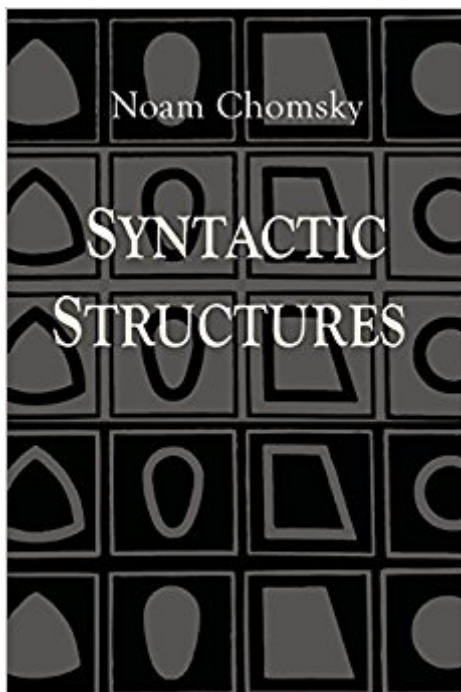


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# Syntactic Structures



## Synopsis

2015 Reprint of 1957 Edition. Full facsimile of the original edition. Not reproduced with Optical Recognition Software. American linguist Paul Postal wrote in 1964 that most of the "syntactic conceptions prevalent in the United States" were "versions of the theory of phrase structure grammars in the sense of Chomsky". British linguist John Lyons wrote in 1966 that "no work has had a greater influence upon the current linguistic theory than Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures*." Prominent historian of linguistics R. H. Robins wrote in 1967 that the publication of Chomsky's "*Syntactic Structures*" was "probably the most radical and important change in direction in descriptive linguistics and in linguistic theory that has taken place in recent years". Another historian of linguistics Frederick Newmeyer considers "*Syntactic Structures*" "revolutionary" for two reasons. Firstly, it showed that a formal yet non-empiricist theory of language was possible and more importantly, it demonstrated this possibility in a practical sense by formally treating a fragment of English grammar. Secondly, it put syntax at the center of the theory of language. Syntax was recognized as the focal point of language production, in which a finite set of rules can produce an infinite number of sentences. As a result, morphology and phonology were relegated in importance. "*Syntactic Structures*" also initiated an interdisciplinary dialog between philosophers of language and linguists. American philosopher John Searle wrote that "Chomsky's work is one of the most remarkable intellectual achievements of the present era, comparable in scope and coherence to the work of Keynes or Freud. It has done more than simply produce a revolution in linguistics; it has created a new discipline of generative grammar and is having a revolutionary effect on two other subjects, philosophy and psychology". With its formal and logical treatment of language, *Syntactic Structures* also brought linguistics and the new field of computer science closer together.

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## Customer Reviews

"Chomsky's book on syntactic structures is one of the first serious attempts on the part of a linguist to construct within the tradition of scientific theory-construction a comprehensive theory of language which may be understood in the same sense that a chemical, biological theory is ordinarily understood by experts in those fields. It is not a mere reorganization of the data into a new kind of library catalog, nor another speculative philosophy about the nature of Man and Language, but rather a rigorous explication of our intuitions about our language in terms of an overt axiom system, the theorems derivable from it, explicit results which may be compared with new data and other intuitions, all based plainly on an overt theory of the internal structure of languages; and it may well provide an opportunity for the application of explicit measures of simplicity to decide preference of one form over another form of grammar."Robert B. Lees in: 'Language' "I had already decided I wanted to be a linguist when I discovered this book. But it is unlikely that I would have stayed in the field without it. It has been the single most inspiring book on linguistics in my whole career."

HenkvanRiemsdijk"Chomsky's book on syntactic structures is one of the first serious attempts on the part of a linguist to construct within the tradition of scientific theory-construction a comprehensive theory of language which may be understood in the same sense that a chemical, biological theory is ordinarily understood by experts in those fields. It is not a mere reorganization of the data into a new kind of library catalog, nor another speculative philosophy about the nature of Man and Language, but rather a rigorous explication of our intuitions about our language in terms of an overt axiom system, the theorems derivable from it, explicit results which may be compared with new data and other intuitions, all based plainly on an overt theory of the internal structure of languages; and it may well provide an opportunity for the application of explicit measures of simplicity to decide preference of one form over another form of grammar."Robert B. Lees in: 'Language' "I had already decided I wanted to be a linguist when I discovered this book. But it is unlikely that I would have stayed in the field without it. It has been the single most inspiring book on linguistics in my whole career." HenkvanRiemsdijk --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Noam Chomsky is Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA.David W. Lightfoot

is Professor at Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Very nice copy.

Frankly, I could not understand this book. But simply because I don't understand this, I don't want to give it a bad rating, so I've given it a high rating to be consistent with the other reviewers. This short book is a classic in linguistics, so I don't want to diminish its importance. I learned of Noam Chomsky from reading Steven Pinker's, "The Language Instinct". He describes Chomsky's work in a much more accessible way, describing a "toy grammar". I've been able to use Pinker's toy grammar to analyze German. I use the tree diagrams for sentences, with VP, NP, and PP phrases. It is a great tool for understanding the underlying meaning of sentences. But Chomsky's work, with all the "X's" and transitive equations is not user friendly... at least to someone on my level.

ordered for my husband saved christmas thank you.

Whether you love him, hate him or haven't the first clue what he's about, it's hard to deny that Noam Chomsky is *the* father of modern formal linguistics. This book is still considered a "gold standard" even after nearly 60 years. If you have any interest in studying or working on formal or computational linguistics, this relatively brief monograph is essential reading.

this is a must read for all students of linguistics. linguistic theory has progressed far beyond what Chomsky describes here, but this describes the origins of the theory and the issues that motivated the original analysis, that are still relevant today.

chomsky is brilliant. Love thinking my way through this book.

*\*Syntactic Structures\** is utterly famous, but it is remembered from a fairly great distance; in the sixty years since it was published Noam Chomsky has not only been a celebrity of the American left but an equally central and prolific figure in American linguistics, his academic critics often reduced to some form of "It's not fair, it's just not fair". It would be convenient if his first book were a compact introduction to his scientific way of thinking, and reality obliges in this instance: the main text of the book does not quite reach 120 pages, and if you are relatively sophisticated about imposing formal

structures on a language -- if you know how to program, for instance -- you will pick up what Chomsky has to say relatively quickly. (However, if it seems difficult, why not put in a little time and learn why a canonical scientific text is canonical?) The material can be absorbed *relatively* quickly, for the contents of this short book (culled from lecture notes for undergraduates, but for *Harvard* undergraduates) touch on some fairly abstract and difficult concepts from the formal theory of languages, concepts Chomsky was playing a major role in formulating for all related disciplines at the time. The book begins by studying whether a "finite state machine", a simple automaton which accepts or rejects a proposed formulation based on a simple heuristic, could provide an adequate grammar of a natural language. If you have taken a CS class in the theory of computation, you will instantly recognize a "finite state automaton", and will already know that the *regular* languages it "accepts" are relatively poor: it does not provide enough structure to model a *computer* language, and Chomsky quickly rejects this seemingly plausible "cybernetic" model of language. The "phrase structure grammar" a la rules of the type "S = N + VP" which he goes on to introduce in the next sections is equivalent to the CS model for "context-free languages". This *is* rich enough to describe normal programming languages, and Chomsky demonstrates that it does quite a bit more in accounting for grammatical structure in natural language. *Not* enough, though, for there are many grammatical relationships between sentences (active and passive voices, statements and "Wh-questions") which context-free grammars cannot easily account for. Chomsky thusly develops a third model of grammar, "transformational grammar", which has rules for systematically deriving "John was hit by the ball" from "The ball hit John" and the like. This would be the dominant paradigm in linguistic syntax for the rest of the century. This "Second Edition" includes no new matter in the body of the text or footnotes, but I'm sure Mouton de Gruyter produces much nicer books than the Identifier publisher reissuing a facsimile of the original edition. Furthermore, this slightly more expensive version includes an introduction by David Lightfoot which explains where Chomskyan linguistics would go from there (Unfortunately, I feel an opportunity has been missed to explore the relationship of Chomsky's thinking at this time to Harvard analytic philosophers like Quine and Nelson Goodman, whom Chomsky had recently been interacting with as a Junior Fellow and who are cited as important influences in Chomsky's methodological chapters.) Still important reading for linguists in training - and who's not one of those?

Although Chomsky later changed his ideas towards linguistics in 'Aspects of the Theory of Syntax', but this book is essential in understanding his relation to the Bloomfieldian school and is essential for understanding 20'th century linguistics.

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