

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Grammatical theory: From transformational grammar to constraint-based approaches*, volumes 1 and 2, 2016

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This review takes a closer look at Stefan Müller's (2016) recent open-access textbook that surveys grammatical theories (with a focus on syntax).

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The study of human grammar from formal perspectives (with a focus on syntax) can be a contentious endeavor. Aside from the *inter*-framework debates and factions that exist, there also exist *intra*-framework divides and disagreements. Given the relatively small number of formal linguists the lack of some degree of literacy and familiarity – at least as I see it – of multiple frameworks is quite surprising. This lack of familiarity with multiple frameworks prevents active communities of linguists from engaging with one another and, on a smaller scale, prevents individual researchers from having full access to the expansive coverage of empirical data from a multitude of different perspectives. Beyond the lack of basic literacy lies the deeper understanding of the (historical) developments of these various frameworks; i.e., what evidence exists that would motivate an analysis to make use of certain axioms and desiderata over others? In this two-volume work, Stefan Müller takes on the unenviable task of attempting to provide a detailed overview of many contemporary frameworks, including Phrase Structure Grammar (PSG), Transformational Grammar (Government and Binding; GB and the Minimalist Program; MP), Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (GPSG), Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG), Categorical Grammar (CCG), Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG), Construction Grammar (CxG), Dependency Grammar (DG), and Tree Adjoining Grammar (TAG). Although the work's primary intent was not to focus on historical developments, the inclusion of chapters on PSG, GPSG, and to perhaps a lesser extent, GB provide readers with a necessary overview to better appreciate and interpret fundamental developments in related – and non-related – frameworks. The overview of these contemporary frameworks comprises the first volume. The second volume provides a detailed discussion of certain fundamental issues upon which advocates of different frameworks often have differing opinions. Topics in the second volume range from discussions on the innateness of linguistic knowledge, generative-enumerative vs. model-theoretical approaches, the competence/performance distinction, language acquisition, generative capacity and grammar formalisms, binary branching and locality, empty elements, extraction and movement operations, phrasal vs. lexical analyses, and the notion of Universal Grammar (UG). Overall, Müller succeeds in highlighting the (continued) need for the application of formal frameworks in the study of grammar, and in addition to this, discusses the fundamental differences in notation

and motivation that separate these contemporary models from one another in this first text book in this new series, which is also available via Open Access.¹ In the remainder of this review, I discuss the design of the scope and content of the individual chapters and provide a critical assessment of various aspects of these two volumes.

Aside from the first chapter in volume 1, which establishes common terminology to be used throughout the remainder of the book, the chapters focusing on the various frameworks adhere to the following structure: general remarks on the representational format of the framework, verb position, long-distance dependencies, passives, local reordering, and a concluding summary and classification of the framework under investigation. The majority of the empirical data comes from modern German from various sources, with occasional inclusion of examples from other languages to illustrate a particular theoretical point. The synopses of the frameworks covered in this volume function well as a detailed hitchhiker's guide of these frameworks. In spite of its rather comprehensive coverage, it is interesting to question why certain frameworks were not included in this overview. (In all fairness, this is a point that Müller himself acknowledges and laments; Müller 2016: xv–xvi). Here two particular frameworks come to mind; namely, Role and Reference Grammar (RRG; Van Valin 1993) and Optimality-theoretical syntax (OT; Legendre et al. 2001, 2016). The exclusion of OT-syntax is a missed opportunity to discuss how this scientific paradigm connects with multiple formalisms (such as LFG and MP) as well as the opportunity to introduce basic concepts of gradience and probability in grammars. With respect to the general tone of the chapters, although most topics in volume 1 are presented in a very straightforward, declarative manner, Müller does direct particular queries and criticisms at certain aspects of formalisms. In particular, Müller's chapter on Minimalism (Chapter 4) includes criticisms directed at traits specific to this model such as, transderivational economy, the notion of functional projections and the modularization of linguistic knowledge (4.6.1.1), feature checking in particular specifier positions (4.6.1.2), and the issue of labeling (4.6.2) to name a few. In addition to these critical discussions, Müller compares the MP with other models such as HPSG and CxG (4.6.4), something that is not commonly done in other chapters (with the only exceptions being the comparison between CxG and HPSG in 10.1 and another between DG and PSG in 11.7.2). Although there is an uneven amount of challenges and criticisms directed at the MP, Müller poses these questions in a non-pejorative way. The challenges laid out by Müller represent recalcitrant issues that must be acknowledged, and eventually addressed, if one wishes to continue to employ the MP. One chapter is somewhat of an odd fit for this first volume, namely, the 10-page chapter dedicated to feature representations (Chapter 6). Although the motivation for such a chapter is relatively clear, the exact nature of *features* here remains somewhat vague. A revision of this chapter that addresses the unit of *feature* in a multitude of frameworks (e.g., MP, CxG, HPSG, LFG, etc.) would be a solid improvement.

The content of volume 2 is a welcome companion to the condensed overview of the contemporary frameworks discussed in the first. Many of these topics correspond with hotly debated issues related to the decision to adopt one framework over another, therefore, Müller's ability to summarize these issues in a relatively non-combative and non-biased way is a laudable feature of this volume. There are, however, a few areas in which Müller could improve the contents of this second volume in future revisions: first, it would be beneficial if some sort of chart and discussion were provided indicating which stance each of these frameworks makes with respect to these aforementioned issues. Although it may not be simple to classify these distinctions through binary “yes” and “no”, such a

¹ This book can be downloaded at the following URL: <http://langsci-press.org/catalog/book/25>.

chart would be a valuable tool for those unfamiliar with (aspects of) certain frameworks. Second, in his treatment of the debate between arguments of linguistic nativism vs. emergentism in Chapter 13, it is surprising that Müller either does not or only sparsely mention the research of scholars such as Joan Bybee and Brian McWhinney in connection with the latter view. Finally, Müller's treatment of the possibility of multiple movement types (i.e., A/A'-movement, head movement, and scrambling) in Chapter 20 is quite terse, consisting only of 10 pages. This issue represents a relevant distinction between transformational approaches to grammar and those that are not.

These two volumes represent one of the first attempts since Sells' (1985) seminal work to provide theoretical linguists and those who work closely with them with an overview of the general representational machinery of contemporary frameworks and the key issues that separate those who prefer one over another. In general, the presentation of empirical data and theoretical concepts is highly accessible to scholar and student alike. The best use of these materials is for those seeking to gain a better understanding of the core concepts that motivate the general representations present in these frameworks. Although there are traits that are shared across many of these covered here, there are also fundamental differences that persist. These volumes at the very least enable those with different perspectives on key issues to engage in discussions and perhaps gain a better understanding and appreciation of each other's research moving forward. In closing, contra Sternefeld and Richter's (2012) somewhat pessimistic statements directed at an earlier version of this work and toward the state of generative grammar *a priori*, I view Müller's work here in a positive light as a conduit that has the potential to bring formal linguists together to gain a fuller appreciation of theoretical work beyond their own immediate communities.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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