

FOUNDATIONS OF PATTERN MATCHING ANALYSIS

A New Method
for the Cognitively Realistic Description
of Natural Language Syntax

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Preface

All of us should know that nothing can be accounted for correctly if it is not described correctly. If so, how about language, or more specifically, language syntax? Have we already described it correctly?

I think not, definitely not. Before Noam Chomsky, there were few linguists who clearly recognized what linguists today call “syntax”. So, the Chomskian revolution in linguistics was, if I could say so, better estimated as a discovery of a new “object” which everyone now identifies under the name of syntax rather than a discovery of a new “method”, called generative grammar, necessary for the description of the object. Even three decades after the revolution, however, syntax is at best correctly recognized, and still is far from correctly described. How could we “account for” syntax despite the fact that it is not yet correctly described?

But, why have generations of linguists failed to describe syntax properly? My idea is that they failed because the “tools” that they used to describe it were not appropriate for their purposes. More specifically, “phrase markers” or “trees” do not correctly specify structures of language syntax. Syntactic structures, which I believe, like most generative linguists and unlike most cognitive linguists, are a “real” object of scientific inquiry, are more complex than tree structures can describe adequately.

If syntactic structures are such a complex object, what does it follow? Clearly, we have to develop “better tools” to describe them more adequately. I believe I found one, and I wanted to share it with others who are interested in language syntax. This is why I wrote this thesis.

I admit that my work forces a “retreat” from a number of already made “explanations” of language syntax and sets us back onto (dull) descriptions of it. Surely, some of us would feel uneasy, and say, “Why do we have to throw away those great achievements of generative and cognitive linguistics already made?”

I want to say, “Please, be patient for a while. Please, do not judge before you have seen if most, if not all, of such “achievements” are not illusions”.

I want to stress that good descriptions precede good explanations, though, of course, good descriptions are not enough by themselves, no matter how good they are. Good descriptions do not bring us to good explanations automatically, and we need good “imagnations” to arrive at good explanations. Never-

theless, we may not “leap”. We still need good descriptions to start with, and where we might arrive without them is nowhere but a land of dogma, where no scientists can survive.

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