

A Historical Grammar of the English Language

by

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(Work in Progress)

Chapter 1. Introduction

This work has two aims: (i) to collect, present, and analyze as many as possible historical examples from the English language; (ii) to analyze them from a generative perspective to reveal how the English language has changed over its history. In other words, the ultimate goal of this work is to make a comprehensive historical grammar book comparable to the ones by Visser (1963-1973) or Jespersen (1909-1949). Visser (1963-1973) collects a vast amount of data from Old, Middle, and Modern English and analyzes these data using linguistic theories from all over the world. Jespersen (1909-1949) also cites ample examples and provides insightful explanations. Although both of these works are old, they are still renowned for the data they provide.

One of the noteworthy points about Visser (1963-1973) is that he tried to keep up to date the linguistic theory he used as much as he could. For instance, while Visser was working on his project, Chomsky's transformational grammar was gathering attention. Although Visser started his project in a traditional perspective, he adopted Chomsky's theory in the later volumes. This kind of approach is laudable. Unfortunately, Visser himself died soon after he completed this monumental work. Therefore, Visser's work does not adopt the Minimalist Approach, which formed itself in the 1990s.

Indeed, there are other comprehensive grammar books which adopt the Minimalist Approach, such as Huddleston and Pullum (2002). Although references cited in Huddleston and Pullum (2002) do not include Chomsky's works, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) are clearly influenced by the generative approach. This means that we have at least one comprehensive grammar book written from a Minimalist perspective. However, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) do not adopt a historical approach. They concentrate on Present-Day English. Although a synchronic approach has some advantages, we can learn

a lot about language changes under historical approach. Summarizing thus far, we have two kinds of comprehensive grammar book: (i) works which adopt diachronic approach but fail to adopt Minimalist approach; (ii) works which adopt synchronic approach and are written from Minimalist perspective. Therefore, we lack major works which adopt both diachronic approach and Minimalist approach.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Merge

Although this work presupposes generative background, I give a concise explanation of generative grammar. This work adopts Minimalist Approach. Under Minimalist Approach, we merge Syntactic Objects (SOs) to form a larger Syntactic Object (Chomsky 2008 among others). Chomsky (2008) restricts the number of SOs we merge at one time to the minimal, i.e., two (he attributes this finding to personal communication from L. Rizzi and Kayne (1981)). Therefore, Merge can be defined as an operation which combines two SOs to form a larger SO (Chomsky 2007, 2008 among others).

Another matters we need to consider is what Syntactic Objects are. According to Berwick and Chomsky (2016), Syntactic Objects (SOs) are either word-like element stored in our lexicon or structures resulted from merger of these elements. For instance, both a definite determiner *the* and a noun *book* can be considered to be Syntactic Objects. These two SOs can Merge to form a larger SO *the book*. The resulting Syntactic Object (SO) *the book* can Merge with another Syntactic Object (SO) such as a verb *read* to form an even larger SO *read the book*.

Here, we need to consider the syntactic labels assigned to these resulting Syntactic Objects. Chomsky (2013, 2016) supposes that phrases need labels for further syntactic operations. For instance, if the attained phrase *the book* has no syntactic label, it cannot enter further syntactic operations. Indeed, if one does not know whether the book is a noun phrase, verb phrase, or adverbial phrase, one cannot use such a phrase as inputs for further Merger. (Inputs refer to the two constituents which are merged. The resulting Syntactic Object is referred to as output by some researchers such as Roberts (2021).) Therefore, we need to decide on the category to which the SO belongs to. Leaving aside technical complications, we consider this SO (i.e., *the book*) is labelled as a determiner phrase (DP) (Radford 2016 among others).

As we have already considered, this DP *the book* merges with the verb *read* to form the larger phrase *read the book*. We need to label this Syntactic Object. Following

Chomsky (2008, 2013) we label this SO as a verb phrase (VP). This verb phrase read the book is then merged with a tense category (T) *will* to form a larger Syntactic Object *will read the book*. We encounter technical

(1) The internal structure of the phrase read the book

Glossary and the list of abbreviations

Merge: A syntactic operation which combines two Syntactic Objects (SOs). In other words, Merge combines two constituents to form a larger constituent.

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