

An Introduction to Minimalist Grammars

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Things of note:

- A course website exists here:

`http://wwwhomes.uni-bielefeld.de/jmichaelis/esslli2009`

- Jens and I are friendly people and welcome questions!

What are Minimalist Grammars?

- Grammar formalism introduced by Stabler (1997)
- Proven mildly context-sensitive (Michaelis, 2001; Harkema, 2001)
- Formalize core properties of Minimalism (Chomsky, 1995)

Why this class?

- A large number of linguists work in the minimalist tradition
 - Minimalism tends toward a ‘decompositional’ style of analysis (familiar from generative semantics)
 - Results in an interesting way of looking at many things
- Much work in minimalism is difficult for those not in the tradition to make sense of, much less critically evaluate
- MGs provide a way to do just this!

What are they trying to do?

- Goals of Generative Linguistics
 - How do we use language?
 - How do we learn to use language?
- What is 'use of language'?
 - ability to understand (novel) utterances:
Associate sounds with meanings
 - ability to produce (novel) utterances:
Associate meanings with sounds
- One question:
Which sounds are associated with which meanings?
- Another:
How does this association get computed in real-time?

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⇒ Which sounds are associated with which meanings? ⇐
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Why a restrictive grammar formalism?

- Two questions about learning:
 - ① Which are the learnable languages (sound-meaning associations)?
 - ② How does learning work in real-time?
- A restrictive grammar formalism encodes the (empirical) hypothesis that some languages are not learnable.
- The idea is that these languages are not learnable because they can't be represented in the terms the learner frames hypotheses.
(Assuming: A hypothesis includes a statement of a grammar)

What will we do?

- Mon** Introduction to the formalism
- Tue** Syntactic and Semantic Analysis:
Passive, Raising, Expletive-*it*, and Quantifier Scope
- Wed** Weak Generative Capacity
(Apparently) Problematic Constructions
- Thu** Extensions
A Transductive Perspective
- Fri** Guest lecture by Ed Stabler!

- Chomsky, N. (1995). *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Harkema, H. (2001). *Parsing Minimalist Languages*. Ph. D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles.
- Michaelis, J. (2001). *On Formal Properties of Minimalist Grammars*. Ph. D. thesis, Universität Potsdam.
- Stabler, E. P. (1997). Derivational minimalism. In C. Retoré (Ed.), *Logical Aspects of Computational Linguistics*, Volume 1328 of *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, pp. 68–95. Berlin: Springer-Verlag.