Lexical-Functional Syntax
Blackwell Textbooks in Linguistics

The books included in this series provide comprehensive accounts of some of the most central and most rapidly developing areas of research in linguistics. Intended primarily for introductory and post-introductory students, they include exercises, discussion points and suggestions for further reading.

2. Andrew Spencer, *Morphological Theory*
3. Helen Goodluck, *Language Acquisition*
4. Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M. Fuller, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Seventh Edition)
5. Martin Atkinson, *Children’s Syntax*
6. Diane Blakemore, *Understanding Utterances*
7. Michael Kenstowicz, *Phonology in Generative Grammar*
8. Deborah Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse*
12. Nigel Fabb, *Linguistics and Literature*
13. Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer, *Semantics in Generative Grammar*
15. Stephen Crain and Diane Lillo-Martin, *An Introduction to Linguistic Theory and Language Acquisition*
23. Bruce Hayes, *Introductory Phonology*
24. Betty J. Birner, *Introduction to Pragmatics*
25. Ronald Wardhaugh and Janet M. Fuller, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*
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Preface to the First Edition

What is LFG?

LFG (lexical-functional grammar) is a theory of grammar which has a powerful, flexible, and mathematically well-defined grammar formalism designed for typologically diverse languages. LFG has provided the framework for a substantial amount of descriptive and theoretical research on many languages, including those in Australia (Warlpiri and Wambaya), America (Navajo, Plains Cree, Greenlandic), Europe (Welsh, Irish, English, German, Dutch, West Flemish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Finnish, Russian, Serbian/Croatian), Africa (Chichewa, Ewe, Moroccan Arabic), South Asia (Malayalam, Hindi), and East Asia (Japanese) which are discussed and analyzed in the text and problem sets of this book.

How is it different?

LFG is closely attuned to the overt perceptible expressions of language, and to the abstract relational information that they directly express. LFG has a constraint-based, parallel correspondence architecture; it has no serial derivations (unlike transformational grammar); there are no “deep structures” or “initial structures.” Abstract relations are locally distributed as partial information across words and overt fragments of structure, and may be monotonically synthesized in any order or in parallel. Being designed for a wide range of nonconfigurational and configurational language types, LFG departs radically from most other grammar formalisms in one striking way: it is noncompositional, allowing the “content” of a constituent to vary depending on its context.

These descriptions may sound mysterious to the newcomer, but LFG is simple. Field linguists doing primary research on languages have found it easy to use. And because LFG is mathematically well defined and simple, it is also easy to implement. It has been employed in many computational systems, ranging from
state-of-the-art industrial wide-coverage grammars used for machine translation and processing to pedagogical systems implemented on personal computers.

LFG is being used as a representational basis in the new crop of data-driven approaches to language, including Optimality Theoretic syntax and probabilistic analysis of natural language. There is an International Lexical-Functional Grammar Association (ILFGA), and there are various websites for LFG resources, the main one being:

http://www.essex.ac.uk/linguistics/external/LFG/

What is in this book?

This book provides both an introduction to LFG and a synthesis of major theoretical developments in lexical-functional syntax since the mid to late 1980s. It can be used both as a textbook for students and as a reference text for researchers. Many references to current work are given, but the only background required is some familiarity with elementary formal constructs such as the definition of functions and relations, and an understanding of the basic syntactic concepts of constituent structure and X’ theory (such as in the short paper by Bresnan 1977). The problem sets provide a hands-on way of learning to use the formalism, analytic concepts, and variety of linguistic ideas that can be expressed.

What is not in this book?

Research in LFG is the cooperative effort of an international community of diverse researchers, of which the first author of this book – though one of the original developers of the theory – is just one. The goal of presenting a coherent and accessible view of the major developments in lexical-functional syntax has inevitably led to some neglect of important topics and alternatives. The deliberate omissions are these. We have omitted coverage of Optimality Theoretic syntax based on LFG (sometimes called “OT-LFG”); references can be found in Bresnan (2000, 2001a,b) and Sells (2001a), among others, but this area has grown rapidly since the publication of the first edition. We have also omitted any account of probabilistic analysis of language using LFG, such as Data-Oriented Parsing (“DOP-LFG”); see Bod and Kaplan (1998), Johnson et al. (1999), and Bod (1999) for several different approaches. This book is devoted to lexical-functional syntax and makes no attempt to cover current research in semantics within the LFG framework. (See Dalrymple 1999 for one recent line of research in semantics for LFG.) Constructive
Morphology is also not covered. (See Nordlinger 1998a, Barron 1998, Sadler 1998, Sells 1999, Lee 1999a,b, and Sharma 1999). New developments in coordination and feature resolution also had to be omitted because of time and space constraints (Dalrymple and Kaplan 1997, 2000). The history of the development of LFG and its relation to other theories is also omitted and awaits other authors. Despite these omissions, the reader of this book will have no trouble following current research, which can be closely tracked from the website resources mentioned above.

How to use this book

In teaching LFG from this text, we do not attempt to teach all of the formalism developed in Part II at once. Instead we break Chapter 4 into three parts:

- Sections 4.1–4.5, followed by Problem Set 1;
- Sections 4.6–4.7, followed by Problem Set 2;
- Sections 4.8–4.9 (read with Chapter 9).