



7 ways of looking at grammar

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*The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.*

(from 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' by Wallace Stevens)

1. grammar as rules
2. grammar as structures
3. grammar as mathematics
4. grammar as algorithms
5. grammar as texture
6. grammar as collocation
7. grammar as an emergent phenomenon



Grammar as rules

We use ***must + be + -ing*** to say that something that is in progress at or around the time of speaking is logically necessary, or that we suppose it to be certain:

The blackbird must be flying.

Old Possum's Book of Practical Grammar



“It ... does not follow that grammars that are descriptively adequate are psychologically real.”

Larsen-Freeman, D., and Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 113.



Grammar as structures

“The grammar of a language consists of the devices that signal structural meanings... All the structural signals in English are strictly formal matters that can be described in physical terms”.

Fries, C. C. 1952. *The Structure of English*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co. pp. 56 & 58.



“TO LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE ONE MUST ESTABLISH ORALLY THE PATTERNS OF THE LANGUAGE AS SUBCONSCIOUS HABITS”.

Lado, R., and Fries, C. (1943, 1970) *English Pattern Practices: Establishing the patterns as habits*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. xv (emphasis in original)



Grammar as mathematics

“It is reasonable to regard the grammar of language L ideally as a mechanism that provides an enumeration of the sentences of L in something like the way in which a deductive theory gives an enumeration of a set of theorems.”

Chomsky, N. (1957) A review of B.F.Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*.



“Because linguistics is only indirectly applicable to language teaching, changes in linguistic theory or arguments amongst linguists should not disturb language teachers.”

Spolsky, B. (1970) Linguistics and language pedagogy - applications or implications? In J.E. Alatis (ed.), *Linguistics and the teaching of English to speakers of other language or dialects*. Georgetown University Press. (pp. 143-153)



Grammar as algorithms

algorithm /'ælgəˌrɪð(ə)m/ noun [C]

COMPUTING a set of rules for solving problems or doing calculations, especially rules that a computer uses

Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2nd edn) 2007



“A grammar can provide an accurate description of performance and yet ... play no part in the production of that performance.”

Johnson-Laird, P. (1988). *The Computer and the Mind: An Introduction to Cognitive Science*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 325.



Grammar as texture

Effect	Possible cause
<i>The river is moving.</i>	<i>The blackbird must be flying.</i>
<i>The dog is barking.</i>	<i>Someone must be coming.</i>
<i>People are cheering.</i>	<i>Barcelona must be winning.</i>



Grammar as collocation

“There is no boundary between lexis and grammar: lexis and grammar are interdependent.”

Stubbs, M. (1996). *Text and Corpus Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 36



priming

“Every word is primed for use in discourse as a result of the cumulative effects of an individual’s encounters with the word”.

Hoey, M. 2005. *Lexical Priming*. London: Routledge, p. 13.



“What we think of as grammar is the product of the accumulation of all the lexical primings of an individual’s lifetime.”

Hoey, M. (2005) *Lexical Priming*. London: Routledge, pp.160-161.



Grammar as an emergent phenomenon

Emergence – the idea that certain systems are more than the sum of their parts, and that “a small number of rules or laws can generate systems of surprising complexity.”

Holland, J. (1998, 2000) *Emergence: From Chaos to Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



“Language is not fixed, but is rather a dynamic system. Language evolves and changes... [it] grows and organises itself from the bottom up in an organic way, as do other complex systems.”

Larsen-Freeman, D. 2006. The emergence of complexity, fluency, and accuracy in the oral and written production of five Chinese learners of English. *Applied Linguistics*, 27/4, 558-589.



“Language is the way it is because of the way it has been used.”

Larsen-Freeman, D., and Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 115.



Cognitive view – language is the way it is
because of the way we think

Functional view – language is the way it is
because of what it has to do

Emergent view – language is the way it is
because of the way it has been used



“According to the emergentist perspective, grammar is not a prerequisite of communication, rather it is a byproduct of communication....

Language learning emerges from participation in linguistic practices, such practices always being steeped in historical, cultural and institutional meaning systems.”

Van Lier, L.(2004) *The Ecology and Semiotics of Language Learning: A sociocultural perspective*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, p. 88

