What is a grammatical description?

- A grammatical description is an act of communication.
  - It takes place in a context.
  - It is simultaneously underspecified ("impoverished") and redundant ("exuberant").
  - It makes assumptions about the audience, and attempts to engage them "where they are."
- A grammatical description is a work of non-fiction literature.
  - It should be generously illustrated with examples.
  - It should start with simple, clear topics, and gradually introduce complexity and irregularity.
  - Most of the exposition should be in clear prose, rather than complex diagrams, charts and formulas.

What is a “form-driven” description?

- Nouns
  - Noun prefixes
  - Noun suffixes
- Verbs
  - Verb prefixes
  - Verb suffixes
- Noun phrases
  - Elements occurring before the head
  - Elements occurring after the head
- etc.

What is a “function-driven” description?

- Participant reference
  - Introduction of new referents
  - Re-mention of established referents
  - . . .
- Actions, states and processes
  - The expression of temporal reference
  - The expression of modality
  - . . .
- Grammatical relations and semantic roles
  - Voice and valence

Advantages of a form-driven approach

- Relatively easy to outline – lots of precedents
- Relatively easy to write – just “march through” the outline.
- Consistent with the way many students and teachers view “grammar” – a list of structural facts expressed as rules.
- Can be very clear. It is relatively easy to identify structures – identifying functions is more challenging.
Disadvantages of a form-driven approach

• Boring!
• Can misrepresent or fail to represent “functional systems” that span more than one word class or level of structure (see the next slides).
• Emphasizes idiosyncratic facts of the individual language, making it more difficult to relate the language to typologically very different languages.

Disadvantages of a form-driven approach

• Languages involve “functional systems” that transcend traditional word classes and levels of structure.
  You mock my pain! Present zero
  You mocked my pain! Past morphological
  You will mock my pain! Future analytic
• Western Austronesian “Focus” systems
  For many years linguists were blind to the focus system simply because they viewed the verb marking apart from the noun marking (cont.).

Disadvantages of a form-driven approach

• Cebuano “Focus” and “Topic” marking:
  Gi-basa ni babae ang libro kang bata
  GF-read NT.ACT woman TOP book DAT child
  ‘The woman reads the book to the child.’
  Gi-basah-an ni babae ug libro ang bata
  RF-read-RF NT.ACT woman NT.INDEF book TOP child
  ‘The woman reads the child a book.’
  Mi-basa ang babae ug libro kang bata
  AF-read TOP woman NT.INDEF book DAT child
  ‘The woman reads a book to the child.’

Disadvantages of a form-driven approach

• The same or similar functions are accomplished at different “levels” in different languages.
  French: marchait Past imperfective = morphological
  English: was walking Past imperfective = analytic+morphological

Disadvantages of a form-driven approach

• The boundary between morphology and syntax is quite arbitrary, and need not have any implications for linguistic description.

Structural facts as analogous to propositional content

The propositional content of ordinary communication is analogous to the structural “facts” of a language. The structures are important, but their use is often (always?) more important and more interesting than the facts themselves. Whether a particular construction is possible or not is often not as interesting or important as when it is used, how frequently it is used, who uses it and what range of purposes it tends to fulfill.
### Advantages of a function-driven approach

- Acknowledges the common sense fact that language serves a purpose – namely communication.
- Brings together different structural pieces that conspire to accomplish ranges of communicative functions (“functional systems”).
- Makes comparison among typologically distinct languages more possible.

### Disadvantages of a function-driven approach

- Hard to outline.
- “Open ended” in that almost anything can serve almost any function, given enough context.
- Unconstrained. Functions tend to be “scalar” whereas forms are much more categorical.
- Tends to make typologically distinct languages seem more similar to each other.

### Disadvantages of a function-driven approach

- “Functional” Definition of passive voice
  
  A passive is a construction that downplays the topicality of an AGENT and/or upgrades the topicality of a PATIENT.

  Then, what about the following . . .

### Disadvantages of a function-driven approach

- Hard to constrain functions apart from reference to forms. Example: “Deixis” is a (very broad) functional system:
  - Time deixis
  - Place deixis
  - Person deixis
- Place deixis may be expressed via:
  - Demonstratives/demonstrative pronouns
  - Verb affixes
  - Adverbial elements (including gestures)

### The solution: A balanced formal-functional approach

- The controlled, systematic and rule-dominated parts of language are often best approached with an emphasis on structure. These would include:
The solution: A balanced formal-functional approach

- Phonology (excluding intonation).
- Morphophonemics
- Inventory of derivational morphology (which derivational categories apply to which roots, etc.)
- Inflectional inventory (determining the range of inflectional possibilities for person and number "agreement" and case marking)
- Pronoun inventory (isolating the entire set of free pronouns or pronominal clitics)
- Lexical inventory (acquiring the words for a large number of culturally significant things and activities)

The solution: A balanced formal-functional approach

- The more pragmatic, semantic and nuanced parts of language are best approached from a "function first" perspective, via a large body of naturally occurring text. These would include:

The solution: A balanced formal-functional approach

- Intonation.
- Constituent order.
- Inflectional morphology (determining the precise functions, principally tense/aspect/mode).
- Voice (alignment of grammatical relations and semantic roles of verbal arguments) . . .
- Sentence level particles (evidentials, validationals and pragmatic highlighting particles).

The solution: A balanced formal-functional approach

- Clause combining (including relativization, complementation, adverbal clauses and clause chaining)
- Lexical semantics (determining the nuances associated with various lexical choices, including derivational morphology).
- Pragmatically marked structures, such as clefts, questions, etc.

Conclusion

- The grammar of a language consists of structures that serve communicational functions.
- To a large extent, the structures are motivated by the functions.
- Therefore, in order to understand grammatical structures, one must understand their functions.

Conclusion

- However, function disembodied of structure is vague and unconstrained.
- Structure uninspired by function is dry and insignificant.
- For these reasons, a grammatical description should strike a balance between form and function.
- Some areas of grammar are best approached from a form-first perspective, while others from a function-first perspective.
Toward a Balanced Formal / Functional Grammatical Description

*Thomas E. Payne, November 2009*

Items followed by an asterisk (*) are considered essential. Other items may or may not appear in the grammar outline, depending on a) the intended use of the grammar, b) the special experience and interests of the author and c) the individual characteristics of the language. Of course any particular grammar may also include more headings than what are found here.

**Front matter**

Acknowledgements (*)

Introduction (Including theoretical assumptions and purpose of the grammar.)

List of abbreviations (*)

1. Part I: The Cultural, Ecological and Sociolinguistic Context of the Language

1.1. The name of the language (*)

1.2. Previous research (*)

1.3. Demography (*)

1.3.1. Map(s)

1.3.2. History/migrations

1.4. Ecology

1.5. Ethnography (material culture, cosmology) (*)

1.6. Genetic and areal affiliations (*)

1.7. Literary traditions

1.8. Dialects (including classical/written varieties if applicable) (*)

1.9. Sociolinguistic situation (*)

1.9.1. Multilingualism and language attitudes

1.9.2. Contexts of use and language choice (*)

1.9.3. Viability (*)

1.9.4. Loan words

1.10. The corpus (*)

1.10.1. The nature of the research (affiliation, location, duration) (*)

1.10.2. Consultants and other sources (*)

1.10.3. Presentation of data (*)

2. Part II: Structural Overview (form driven approach)

2.1. Typological Sketch

2.2. Phonological inventory and orthography (*)
2.2.1. Consonants (*)
2.2.2. Vowels (*)
2.2.3. Tone / stress (*)

2.3. Phonetics (*)

2.4. Syllable structure

2.5. Word structure

2.6. Major phonological and morphophonemic processes (*)
   2.6.1. Process 1 (*)
   2.6.2. Process 2 (*)
   2.6.3. Process 3
   2.6.4. Process 4

2.7. Relaxed speech rules and contractions

2.8. Word Classes (*)
   2.8.1. Nouns (*)
      2.8.1.1. The structure of the noun word
      2.8.1.2. Derivational processes
      2.8.1.3. Inflectional processes
      2.8.1.4. Count vs. mass nouns
      2.8.1.5. Proper names
      2.8.1.6. Other grammatically distinct subclasses of nouns
   2.8.2. Pronouns and/or anaphoric clitics (*)
      2.8.2.1. Personal pronouns (*)
      2.8.2.2. Demonstrative pronouns (*)
      2.8.2.3. Other (relative pronouns and question words may be more efficiently treated in the sections on relative clauses and questions.)
   2.8.3. Verbs (*)
      2.8.3.1. Verb structure (a diagram of a verb and its morphology) (*)
      2.8.3.2. Derivational (stem-forming) processes
      2.8.3.3. Inflectional processes
      2.8.3.4. Grammatically distinct verb subclass 1
      2.8.3.5. Grammatically distinct verb subclass 2
      2.8.3.6. Grammatically distinct verb subclass 3
      2.8.3.7. Grammatically distinct verb subclass 4
   2.8.4. Modifiers
      2.8.4.1. Descriptive adjectives
      2.8.4.2. Non-numeral quantifiers
      2.8.4.3. Numerals
   2.8.5. Adverbs
   2.8.6. Auxiliaries
   2.8.7. Ad-positions (prepositions or post-positions)
   2.8.8. Particles or other minor word classes

2.9. Constituent Order Typology
2.9.1. Constituent order in main clauses
2.9.2. Constituent order in verb phrases
2.9.3. Constituent order in noun phrases
2.9.4. Adpositional phrases (prepositions or post-positions)
2.9.5. Comparatives
2.9.6. Question particles and question words
2.9.7. Summary

2.10. The structure of the noun phrase (*)
2.11. The structure of the verb phrase (*)

2.12. Predicate nominals and related constructions (*)
   2.12.1. Predicate nominals (*)
   2.12.2. Predicate adjectives
   2.12.3. Predicate locatives
   2.12.4. Existentials (*)
   2.12.5. Possessive clauses (*)

2.13. Intransitive clauses (*)
2.14. Transitive clauses (*)
2.15. Ditransitive clauses (*)

2.16. Dependent clause types (*)
   2.16.1. Non-finite
   2.16.2. Semi-finite
   2.16.3. Fully finite

   3.1. Grammatical relations (*)
   3.2. Voice and valence related constructions (*)
      3.2.1. Causatives
      3.2.2. Applicatives
      3.2.3. Dative shift
      3.2.4. Dative of interest
      3.2.5. 'Possessor raising' or external possession
      3.2.6. Reflexives and reciprocals
      3.2.7. Passives
      3.2.8. Inverses
      3.2.9. Middle constructions
      3.2.10. Antipassives
      3.2.11. Object demotion and/or omission
3.2.12. Object incorporation

3.3. Nominalization
3.3.1. Action nominalization
3.3.2. Participant nominalizations
   3.3.2.1. Agent nominalizations
   3.3.2.2. Patient nominalizations
   3.3.2.3. Instrument nominalizations
   3.3.2.4. Location nominalization
   3.3.2.5. Product nominalizations
   3.3.2.6. Manner nominalizations
3.3.3. Clausal nominalization

3.4. Tense/aspect/modality (*)
3.4.1. Tense
3.4.2. Aspect
3.4.3. Modality
3.4.4. Location/direction
3.4.5. Evidentiality, validationality and mirativity
3.4.6. Miscellaneous

3.5. Pragmatically marked structures (*)
3.5.1. Constituent order variation
3.5.2. Contrastive/emphatic particles
3.5.3. Contrastive/emphatic intonation patterns
3.5.4. Cleft constructions
3.5.5. Negation (*)
3.5.6. Questions (*)
   3.5.6.1. Yes/No Questions (*)
   3.5.6.2. Question word (information, content) questions (*)
3.5.7. Imperatives (*) (including subtypes)

3.6. Clause Combinations (*)
3.6.1. Serial verbs
3.6.2. Complement clauses (*)
3.6.3. Adverbiacl clauses (*)
3.6.4. Clause chaining, medial clauses and switch reference
3.6.5. Relative clauses (*)
3.6.6. Coordination

3.7. The Language in use
3.7.1. Lexical Typology
   3.7.1.1. Space, direction and motion
   3.7.1.2. Causation
   3.7.1.3. Valence
   3.7.1.4. Salience of semantic features

3.7.2. Continuity (cohesion) and discontinuity
   3.7.2.1. Topic (referential) continuity
   3.7.2.2. Thematic continuity
   3.7.2.3. Action continuity

3.7.3. Episodic prominence
   3.7.3.1. Climax/peak
   3.7.3.2. Intensification

3.7.4. Genres
   3.7.4.1. Conversation
   3.7.4.2. Narrative
      3.7.4.2.1. Personal experience
      3.7.4.2.2. Historical
      3.7.4.2.3. Folk stories
      3.7.4.2.4. Mythology
   3.7.4.3. Hortatory
   3.7.4.4. Procedural
   3.7.4.5. Expository
   3.7.4.6. Descriptive
   3.7.4.7. Ritual speech

3.7.5. Miscellaneous and conclusions
   3.7.5.1. Idiomatic expressions / proverbs
   3.7.5.2. Sound symbolism
   3.7.5.3. Summary of typological findings

End matter:
   Text with interlinear translation
   Glossary
   References cited (*)
   Index (*)