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Book review / Рецензия

**Review of Mel'čuk, Igor. 2021.  
*Ten Studies in Dependency Syntax*.  
Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton**

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**Рецензия на книгу  
Mel'čuk, Igor. 2021. *Ten Studies in Dependency Syntax*.  
Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton**

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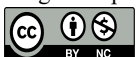
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The book by Igor Mel'čuk, one of the greatest living scholars of modern philology, presents a number of case studies carried out within the Meaning-Text approach with its insistence on scrutinizing the strictly dependent nature of syntax.

Beginning in the 1960s, the work on the development of a functional model of Natural Language grew into a linguistic theory, which came to be known as the Meaning-Text theory, and into the study of the system of logical rules, which constitutes a functional model of language. Though the Meaning-Text approach is

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connected to the traditional study of language structure in its purest state, it differs in its specific emphasis on linguistic synthesis, which is considered more important than linguistic analysis. It could well be said that a readiness to analyze anything is one of the distinctive marks of modern linguistics (a position shared by the current reviewer). However, it is no longer possible to claim to analyze text comprehension without first studying text production. Thus, as Mel'čuk puts it, "text synthesis is obviously primary to analysis" (Mel'čuk 2021: 10). As the author declares in his prologue, "the Meaning-Text approach presupposes three levels of syntactic description for a sentence: the deep-syntactic representation, the surface-syntactic representation, and the deep-morphological representation" (Mel'čuk 2021: 1), with the focus of the book being on the surface-syntactic module of the Meaning-Text model.

There are four parts of the book, collectively broad in linguistic range, all covering major topics.

Part I (Chapter 1) gives a brief overview of the Meaning-Text model, its three postulates, main notions, rules (semantic, deep-syntactic, surface-syntactic, morphological), basic structures of the model of linguistic representations (deep-syntactic, surface-syntactic, surface-morphological), paradigmatic (both free and restricted) and syntagmatic lexical choices. This part explains every concept in a comprehensive manner, which is crucial for understanding the syntactic dependencies and general inventories discussed in the following parts. In fact, Igor Mel'čuk has taken the transition between the surface-syntactic representation of the sentence and its deep-morphological representation, and married them to a useful functional model so that the reader may easily apprehend the author's theory of the world of syntax and syntactic dependencies.

In Part II (Chapters 2–5), the author turns to the notion of surface-syntactic relations found in various languages (Russian, English, German, French, Korean, Hindi, and many others), which are grouped according to their syntactic properties, starting with the strongest subordinative dependencies and going towards the weakest coordinative links: actantial, modifying, attributive, auxiliary, circumstantial, etc. (more than a hundred types). Various surface-syntactic relations have been discovered by the author to prove his theory, and it becomes apparent that these formulations can be extended and deepened (Chapter 2). This part lays the groundwork for the comparative study of languages, and particularly those languages that diverge in many respects from a syntactical point of view and are fundamentally different in character. For instance, Chapter 3 tackles a popular and controversial linguistic problem of basic surface-syntactic relations and the notions of syntactic subject and direct object. Mel'čuk proposes a set of rigorous definitional parameters and discusses several complex cases involving the syntactic subject. The emphasis in this chapter is on the coding, or definitional properties of the syntactic subject; its characterizing, or behavioral aspects, are discussed only insofar as they bear on the former. Chapter 4 continues the focus on the issue of basic surface-syntactic relations and the problem of the so-called "multiple subjects

and objects” in Korean. Fascinated by the syntactic phenomena of Korean, the author attacks the problem within the framework of the Meaning-Text perspective basing his analysis on general typological considerations, dependent syntactic representation and a formal system of linguistic notions and terms. Examining strings of same-case Korean nouns, he formulates “privileges” (the author’s term) of the surface syntactic subject and object in the language and convincingly demonstrates that Korean has neither “multiple subjects” nor “multiple direct objects”: “what is theoretically not possible is impossible in any of the possible worlds (in any language)” (Mel’čuk 2021: 203–204). Chapter 5 is a perceptive analysis of the syntactic organization of genitive adnominal dependents in Russian: it contains a list of the semantic relations between a noun and its syntactic nominal dependent in the genitive case without preposition, and an inventory of surface syntactic relations within phrases of this type.

Part III (Chapters 6–9) cracks “some hard nuts in syntax” by dependency description, in an account that is pleasingly metaphorical without a loss of its formal and even formalized character. The major purpose of this part is to analyze four hot topics which constitute a challenge for today’s linguistics. Chapter 6 brings a typology of relative clauses to the level of modern linguistic theory. Determined to elaborate and perfect the conceptual apparatus of linguistics and propose a rigorous definition of the relative clause, Igor Mel’čuk attempts to refine and standardize the terminology (modifier, clause, relative, head / top node, antecedent), reformulating some concepts that have been used in previous studies, defining the relative clause and its types: restrictive and descriptive, differentiating each from constructions often confused with relative clauses and, finally, sketching a typology of restrictive relative clauses, each featuring a distinctive syntactic structure and allowing different deep-morphological realizations. The chapter marks an important transition in typological research on relative clauses. In Chapter 7, the author addresses a complicated and significant issue of binary conjunctions, sketches their general typology and offers an inventory of Russian binary conjunctions, proposing the surface syntactic description of sentences containing these conjunctions. The next chapter (8) represents a crucial shift in the way in which a passive construction in Mandarin Chinese has been understood. The author provides research evidence that shows that the category of voice does not exist in this language. The point that deserves particular attention in this chapter, in my view, concerns the requirements proposed for scientific definition (both substantive and formal). The principles that are formulated might well apply to the definition of linguistic phenomena and concepts in other fields. Chapter 9 explores pronominal idioms in a case study of a blasphemous noun in the Russian language. Mel’čuk illustrates their surface-syntactic structure, their possible lexicographic description and offers a universal typology of phrasemes, including major classes of lexemic, morphemic, and syntactic instances.

In Part IV (Chapter 10), the author discusses word order in Russian within the framework of the Meaning-Text approach, examining the operation of linearization

and following his own step-by-step strategy. The two steps presented here are input and output representations, defined in terms of dependencies and major classes of linearization rules, their form and their interaction. The importance of Mel'čuk's work here consists in the primacy of this work on word order, which formally presents both the syntactic input structure and the linearization rules.

There is a creative dimension in Igor Mel'čuk's logical and practical approach to presenting the material. The work, which at times has a technical aspect, vastly expands the "syntactic" horizons of the reader. The incorporation of various schemes and tables with rigorous definitions, clear examples and comprehensive explanations makes this an excellent read, as they greatly assist the reader's understanding of dependency syntax. Mel'čuk breaks down syntactic structures so that their meanings are potentially accessible to all.

He shows, with great force and erudition, that the Meaning-Text approach affects other disciplines and fields of study. Meaning-Text models are of high practical utility and crucial for understanding the way philology is applied in various disciplines in the modern world: Natural Language Processing (machine translation, text generation, etc.), psycholinguistic experimentation, teaching and learning languages, manufacturing dictionaries, grammars, and manuals. This book is also important for its typological perspectives: Igor Mel'čuk has refined existing typologies and offered new inventories of syntactic phenomena. Moreover, the examples to illustrate the key points of his theory are taken from more than seventy languages, comprising different language families (Austronesian, Afro-Asiatic, Indo-European, Niger-Congo, Sino-Tibetan, Trans-New-Guinea, etc.), some unrelated isolates (Basque, Burushaski, Seri) and some dead languages (Ancient Chinese, Ancient Greek, Biblical Hebrew, Sanskrit).

Communication involves two parties, the author and the reader, and Igor Mel'čuk always tries to draw the reader into his theory, encouraging them to engage with the text through his specific tone and style of writing. The emphasis is on communicative interaction: the author directly addresses the reader so that the latter will feel more involved with the story of dependency syntax, inviting them to solve linguistic problems and puzzles. The author's comments and remarks, combined with his omniscient point of view, help the reader to better understand the nature of the Meaning-Text approach, exemplified in ten studies in dependency syntax. His metaphors, analogies and jokes used to explain complex phenomena paint a vivid syntactic picture and, in my opinion, deserve as much interpretation as the text itself. On this point, parenthetically, among my favorites are a joke about a Soviet-era military medical cadet and an enema, and a comparison of a woman to a syntactic subject.

From a personal perspective, an ideal title for the review could be "A Journey into the Jungle of Syntax". The field of syntax may at times appear to be a kind of jungle, a thriving system that comprises masses of topics discussed, each having its own basic notions, definitions, principles to study, numerous typologies, examples in foreign languages and challenges to the reader's survival. As a guide in these

difficulties, Igor Mel'čuk assists his reader to find a way through the bushes and trees of syntactic structures. The correct patterns and perspectives are conveyed by means of schemes, tables, symbols, abbreviations and codes. Thanks to the clarity of Mel'čuk's theoretical accounts, then, the complexity of dependency syntax is rendered much less daunting for readers of all levels of linguistic competence.

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