

The achievements of Generative Syntax: a time chart

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In May 2015, a group of eminent linguists met in Athens to debate about the road ahead for generative grammar. There was a lot of discussion (at least, so I heard) and a shared intention of making a list of achievements of generative grammar, for the benefit of other linguists. This list, to the best of my knowledge, has never seen the light. However, Peter Svenonius did compile a tentative list after the meeting. The list can be found here:

<http://blogg.uit.no/psv000/2016/08/30/significant-mid-level-results-of-generative-linguistics/>

I decided to do an exercise: I put a (tentative) date on every entry of the list, just to map these important results on a time chart. In what follows I report the list (only mentioning the “titles” of the results, unless they are opaque, in which case I leave the short description given by Svenonius; their full description can be found on his page), and I try to place them in time (when possible, and with the disclaimer that I might be wrong). Many of these are shared results, so I tried to select the paper/dissertation in which these ideas were first formulated. Here they are¹:

1. *Unaccusativity*: Perlmutter (1978)
2. *The Agent asymmetry*: NPs bearing Agent roles are higher than NPs bearing other roles in the unmarked structure of the clause. (not sure about this; shall we say Chomsky 1981- theta theory; Chomsky 1986 Projection principle?)
3. *Passive valence reduction*: Agents are the easiest arguments to suppress in valency reduction (Is this a generative discovery?) Baker Johnson Roberts (1989)?

X-bar theory, categories, and headedness

1. *Extended projections*: Grimshaw (1991)
2. *Cinque hierarchy*: Cinque (1999)
3. *Cinque hierarchy for adverbs*: Cinque (1999)
4. *Morphology Mirrors Syntax*: Baker (1985)
5. *CP-DP parallelism*: Abney (1987)
6. *The final over final constraint*: Biberauer, Holmberg and Roberts (2007)
7. *Cinque's version of Greenberg's U20*: Cinque (2010)
8. *Functional Material Doesn't Incorporate* Higher functional structure such as determiners and complementizers doesn't incorporate into superordinate lexical heads: Li (1990)

¹ As Haspelmath (p.c.) notes, not all of these results are ascribable to GG. We will assume for the time being that they are, as this is not directly relevant for the exercise I wish to make.

9. SOV scrambling: All SOV languages allow a degree of word order freedom (scrambling); VO languages may not. Grewendorf & Sternefeld (1990)?

Movement in general (not restricted to A-bar or A)

1. *Coordinate Structure Constraint*: Ross (1967)
2. *Head Movement Constraint*: Travis (1984)
3. *Movement is upward* : Chomsky (1981)
4. *Right Roof constraint*: Ross (1967)
5. *Second position*: There are second position effects which are category-insensitive, i.e. not sensitive to the category of the element in first position, but no second to last effects which are similarly category-insensitive. (This allows for immediately pre-verbal positions in V-final structures): Kayne (1994)
6. *Syntactic clitic placement*: Pullum (1981).

Binding Theory

1. *Principle B*: Chomsky (1981)
2. *Principle C*: Chomsky (1981)
3. *Structure relevant to binding*: Chomsky (1981)
4. *Strong crossover*: Postal (1971)
5. *Weak crossover*: Postal (1971)

Arguments

1. *Improper movement*: Chomsky (1977)?
2. *Control versus raising* : Obligatory control is a subject-to-subject relation (or, in some cases, object-to-subject relation) in which one referent gets thematic roles from two predicates, related to each other by nonfinite complementation; in Raising, the shared argument gets only one thematic role, from the embedded predicate. Williams (1987)?
3. *Structural agreement*: There is a structural bias affecting agreement such that nominals higher in the clause are agreed with in preference to lower nominals, except where marked case on a higher nominal may disqualify it. (reflected in subject agreement over object agreement). Aissen (1999)?
4. *Grammatical Subject*: Chomsky (1981)
5. *Diesing's Generalization*: Diesing (1992)
6. *Person-Case Constraint (PCC)*: Bonet (1991).
7. *No NCC*: Nevins (2011)

8. *Ergative subjects*: Mahajan (1997)
9. *Null subjects*: Perlmutter (1971)
10. *High causatives*: In a morphological causative, the new causee will be higher than any argument of the base verb. Baker (1988)
11. *Marantz' Generalization*: In benefactive applicative constructions, the new argument will be structurally higher than the base internal argument. Marantz (1984)
12. *Erg Agreement is dependent on Erg case*: No language has a nominative-accusative case system and an ergative-absolutive agreement system, although matched systems are possible, and the opposite mismatch is possible (Bobaljik 2008, and typological sources).
13. *No Active Case*: No language has an active system of case marking, whereas active systems of agreement marking are possible. (Baker and Bobaljik in press/in progress, but well documented)

Quantifier Raising

1. *QR*: May (1977)
2. *QR is clause bound*. May (1977)
3. *Widest scope indefinites*: In many languages, morphologically simple indefinites (*some books at least one book*) may take unbounded scope, even across islands (Fodor & Sag 1982)?
4. *Reconstruction*: Chomsky (1977)

A-bar. A-bar phenomena

1. *A-bar Unity*: A class of A-bar (filler-gap) constructions (including interrogatives, relative clauses, focus movement constructions, and operator-variable chains) show unified behavior with respect to locality and configuration (joint result)
2. *Successive Cyclicity*: Chomsky (1977)? Sportiche (1988)?
3. *Covert A-bar dependencies*: Huang (1982)
4. *Subject-object asymmetry for A-bar*: Ross (1967)
5. *Freezing*: Rizzi (2006).
6. *Specifier bias in Pied-piping*: Ross (1967)?
7. *Adjunct extraction is hard* : Lasnik & Saito (1984)
8. *Parasitic gaps*: Ross (1967) / Engdahl (1983)
9. *Resumptive pronouns*: Perlmutter (1972), but see Kroch (1981)
10. *Resumptive pronoun island alleviation* : Chomsky & Wise (1982)

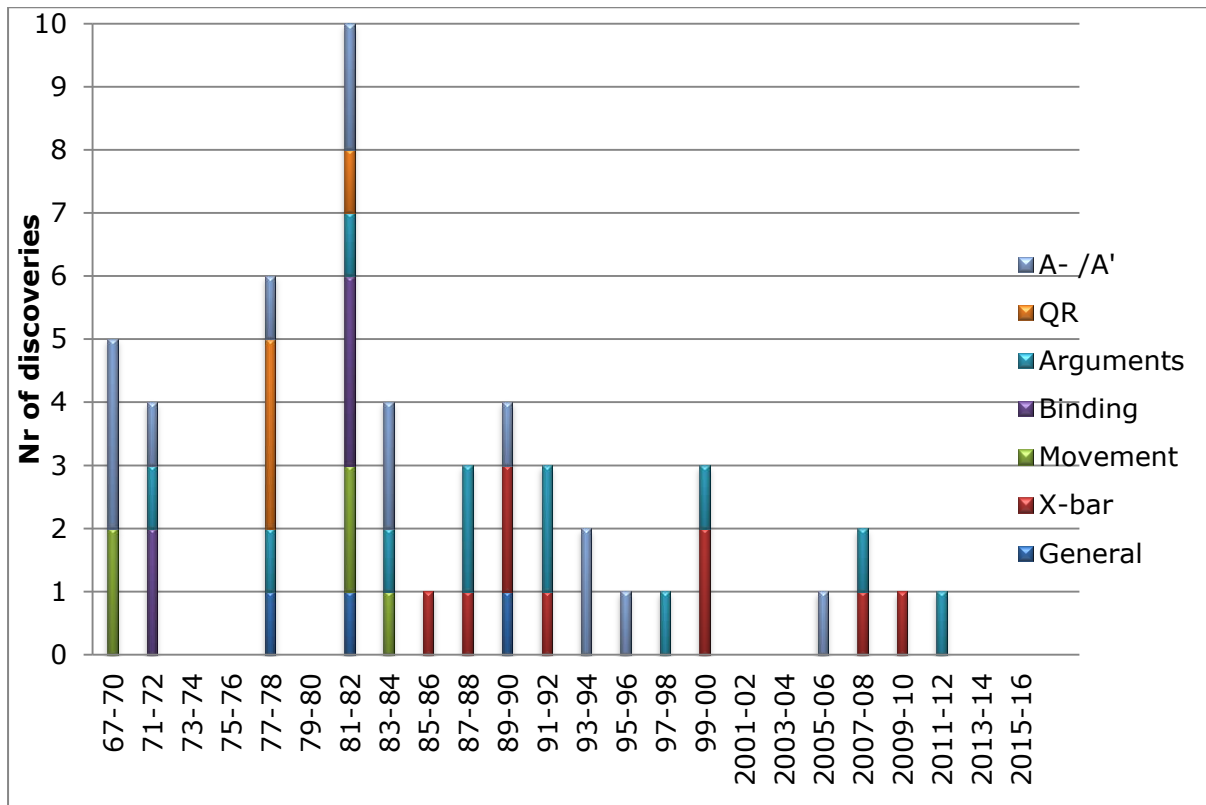
11. *Local subject condition on resumption*: McCloskey (1990)

12. *Left-dislocation*: Lambrecht (1994)

13. *Intervention Effects (Beck Effects)*: Beck (1996)

This is a chart that illustrates the discoveries by year:

Table 1



Question for you all: What do these data tell us?

Comments/corrections/additions VERY WELCOME!

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