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David Chiang

# Grammars for Language and Genes

Theoretical and Empirical Investigations

Foreword by Aravind K. Joshi

 Springer

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*JMJ*



# Foreword

It is indeed a great pleasure to write a few comments on this fascinating and inspiring book: **Grammars for Language and Genes: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations**, by David Chiang. First, I would like to acknowledge my good fortune in being able to work with David during his stay at the University of Pennsylvania. Each one of our meetings was a joyful event, informing and learning from each other, to our mutual benefit.

Chiang's work began with the study of the strong generative capacity of grammars, i.e., their capacity to represent structural descriptions. It is this aspect that is truly important for the study of formal grammars from the perspective of linguistics as well as computational linguistics. However, surprisingly, there is not much work done on issues concerning strong generative capacity (SGC). This is because it is not easy to formulate concepts of SGC that are formal enough and also linguistically meaningful. Building on notions of local interpretation functions, Chiang has given insightful accounts of how SGC should be characterized. He has then applied these ideas to a detailed study of characterizing SGC for a variety of formalisms including tree-adjoining grammars, their variants, and also several other formalisms. Further, building on some notions of extracting more SGC without increasing the weak generative capacity, Chiang has obtained some essential results connecting representations and interpretations. I am confident that much of this work will, in time, become the foundation on which to build further work on the formal characterizations of structural descriptions and interpretations and their eventual use in natural language processing (NLP).

The notion of squeezing more SGC without increasing the weak generative capacity plays a very significant role in the work described in the chapters on statistical parsing and machine translation. These investigations have been carried out in the general framework of tree-adjoining grammar (TAG) and some of its variants. I am sure researchers at large in statistical parsing and machine translation will be inspired by this work and will explore its implications for other classes of formal grammars, thus providing some unity in the very extensive work going on in these areas.

By a remarkable coincidence, just as Chiang was engaged in the activities described above, he also became a member of the group which began to explore the role of formal grammars in characterizing biomolecular structures, such as DNA/RNA and proteins, for example. This part of Chiang's book is a delightful treat for those who want to get a quick but thorough introduction to biomolecular structures and how to model a variety of these structures, keeping both the formal and computational aspects in mind at all times.

In summary, Chiang's work on grammars, which is based on solid mathematical foundations combined with a clear understanding of the domains that are being modeled, will lead to both a deeper theoretical understanding as well as usable computational models. I strongly recommend this book to all those who have already embarked on such activities but, more importantly, to those who would like to be involved in these exciting directions of research.

Aravind K. Joshi



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