

**On the publication date of *Syntactic Structures*  
A footnote to Murray (1999)**

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In his 1975 preface to the publication of his 1955/56 *The Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory*, Noam Chomsky told the following about the origin of his first book, *Syntactic Structures*:

In 1956, at the suggestion of Morris Halle, I showed some of my lecture notes for an undergraduate course at MIT to Cornelis van Schooneveld, the editor of the *Janua Linguarum* series of Mouton and he offered to publish them. A slightly revised version appeared in 1957, under the title *Syntactic Structures* (SS). (Chomsky 1975:3)

More recently, in an interview given in December 1996 at Maceió, Brasil, he presented a much more detached view on this historic event:

At the time Mouton was publishing just about anything, so they decided they'd publish it along with a thousand other worthless things that were coming out. That's the story of *Syntactic Structures*: course notes for undergraduate science students published by accident in Europe. (Dillinger & Palácio 1997:162-163)

The historiographer seriously interested in the rise and the fall of the generative paradigm might wish to know when in fact the release of *Syntactic Structures* took place. An answer to this question was given by Murray in two recent articles (1999a, 1999b:264-265). These papers also deal with the publication date of Robert B. Lees' (1922-1996) well-known 1957 review article on *Syntactic Structures* in *Language*, a piece that according to Chomsky (1975:3) came off the presses "almost simultaneously with the publication of *SS*". Or, as it reads in Newmeyer's retelling of the story:

Early in 1957, Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* was released by Mouton in The Hague. But it did not share the fate of most first books by unknown authors distributed by obscure publishers. Within weeks, Robert B. Lees's review of it appeared in the journal *Language*. (Newmeyer 1980:19)

As a matter of fact, the issue in which Lees's review was published, was the third number (July-September 1957) of *Language* 33 (Murray 1999b:345). But when exactly was the release of the book that had been reviewed by Lees? Elsewhere in his *Linguistic Theory in America* Newmeyer (1980:35) notes: "By May of 1957, *Syntactic Structures* was off the presses". However, at the authority of Peter de Ridder, the director of the publishing company, and Cornelis van Schooneveld, the editor of the *Janua Linguarum* series, Murray (1999b:345) states that *Syntactic Structures* "was published in November or December 1957".

To any informed Dutch linguist it has been a matter of fact that Murray's contention could not possibly be correct. As was pointed out quite some time ago (Zonneveld 1982:205-207), *Syntactic Structures* was reviewed as early as 20 July 1957 in a Dutch daily journal, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, by Henk Schultink (b. 1924), who from August 1956 on had a linguistic

column in this newspaper. In the early 1960s Schultink was to be appointed Professor of General Linguistics at Utrecht University.<sup>1</sup>

The most important piece of evidence for determining the date of the publication of *Syntactic Structures* can be found in the 1957 volume of the *Nieuwsblad voor de boekhandel*, the weekly newspaper for the Dutch booksellers. In issue 7 of volume 124 of this periodical, *Syntactic Structures* is announced on page 129 in the rubric of recently published books; this issue is dated Thursday 14 February 1957.<sup>2</sup> As a result, it must be concluded that Murray (1999b:345) is wrong in assuming that Lees' review "has to have been submitted before *Syntactic Structures* was published". What is correct is what Lees wrote to Bernard Bloch (1907-1965), the Editor of *Language*, on Friday, 22 February 1957, namely that *Syntactic Structures* was "released [...] just last week". In the same letter Lees noted: "My review should be finished within a week or so, but I could send you a carbon of most of a preliminary draft". Eventually, he submitted his review on 26 April 1957 (Murray 1999b:346), and his article-length review received a prominent place in one of the next issues of *Language*.<sup>3</sup> It seems safe to assume that Lees had (a copy of) Chomsky's typescript of *Syntactic Structures* at his disposal.<sup>4</sup> In this way Lees was able to prepare the review article he had talked about with Bloch when they met at an earlier LSA meeting (cf. Murray 1999b:345-346, for details).

"I expect that there would have been little notice in the profession had it not been for a provocative and extensive review article by Robert Lees", Chomsky (1975:3) remarked many years later. In 1957 his international career could start its high flight - *with a little help of my friends*.

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<sup>1</sup> Zonneveld rightly remarks that it was Anton Reichling (1898-1986), Professor of General Linguistics in Amsterdam and later on a fierce opponent of Chomsky's generative enterprise, who - on 15 March 1957 - encouraged Schultink to study that "nice booklet". Reichling was the Review Editor of *Lingua*, and as such he may have received a review copy of *Syntactic Structures* from the Dutch publishing house rather quickly. Following the professorial advice, Schultink requested a review copy from Mouton, which he received in May 1957. As I was able to check out myself, Schultink noted on the bastard title page of this copy: 'May 1957'. I do not know whether Schultink's review was the first review ever of *Syntactic Structures*. Note that Koerner & Tajima 1986 do not mention earlier reviews.

<sup>2</sup> Unlike France, the Netherlands did not have a 'dépôt légal', so the listing in the *Nieuwsblad* should serve as the 'official' date of publication.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to see that Zellig S. Harris (1909-1992) was informed about (the publication of) Lees' review. In his paper "Co-occurrence and Transformation in Linguistic Structure", which appeared in the same issue of *Language*, one finds in the first footnote a reference to *Syntactic Structures*, "reviewed by Lees in this number of *Language*" (Harris 1957:283-284). As John Joseph (Edinburgh) suggested to me, it is quite likely that this notice about the review appearing in the same issue was inserted by the Editor, Bloch.

<sup>4</sup> Just as he had been "privileged [...] to read a first version of the larger work", i.e. *The Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory* (Lees 1957:375). On *LSLT* Chomsky recalled forty years later: "Initially, it was about 800 pages long and was completely unpublishable. It was only written for a few friends. My wife and I ran it off a mimeograph machine (there was no xerox at the time), making about 30 copies, and gave it out to a few friends who were interested in this strange topic" (Dillinger & Palácio 1997:162).

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