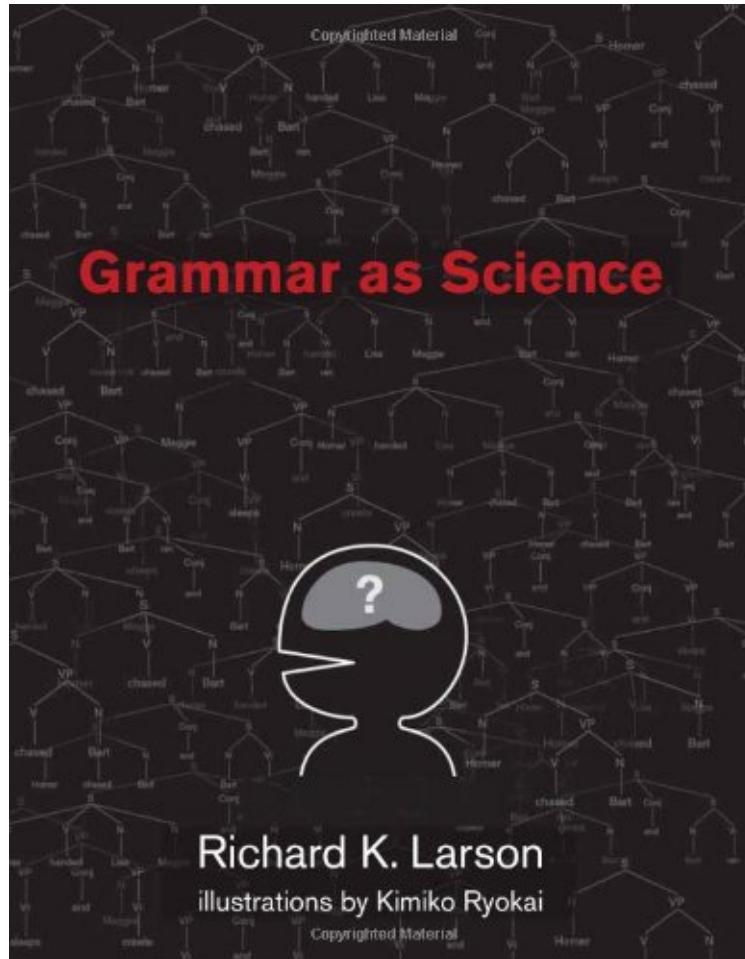


## Grammar as Science (MIT Press)

*Richard K. Larson*

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**Richard K. Larson : Grammar as Science (MIT Press)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Grammar as Science (MIT Press):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good for beginners with little linguistic background  
By L'homme russe  
This book is rather frustrating I you have some knowledge of syntax, since it essentially tells you how to do things "wrong" before doing them right. However, for a true beginner it may be useful since it doesn't use highly complex terminology too quickly.  
7 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Slow-Paced and Misleading Textbook  
By laura  
I majored in Linguistics for my bachelor's and this textbook was used in my Syntax class in 2011. I had no previous experience with syntax except about a week's worth of overview in Intro to Linguistics. I have read all 28 units in Grammar as Science and I found it frustrating and misleading. The material made no sense to me at first, so I went back and read about 20 pages in the textbook from my Intro to Linguistics course, An Introduction to Language, which explained a lot of the material in a clear, straightforward way that I understood in one night, though

it contradicted the material from Grammar as Science, which eventually contradicts itself in the final chapters. I am not familiar with any other beginning syntax textbooks, but I'm assuming there's a better one than Grammar as Science. The text is structured in such a way that is intended to make it easier, by simplifying many aspects of grammar, introducing them in one way at the beginning, and then eventually showing you how it's actually done. The simplified explanations are wrong, but presented at first as if they were right. This was really confusing for me. I wasted a lot of time trying to figure out why it didn't make sense, when really I should have just read ahead to discover that it didn't make sense because it was wrong. I can't speak for everyone, but I would have found it much easier and less stressful to be taught the unsimplified version from the start. Even if it's more complicated, that doesn't mean it's more difficult to understand. I also found the style off-putting. There are cartoons with speech bubbles that contain text that doesn't make sense as dialogue. The Intro is an elaborate metaphor relating the study of syntax to an adventure, complete with a cartoon of Noam Chomsky wearing a safari hat. I found it pointless and patronizing, and it's a good example of the tortuous style that dominates throughout the book. If they wanted to present syntax as a children's story, they shouldn't have used the word 'science' in the title. If the author respected his audience as scientists (or students of science), he wouldn't have introduced the subject matter with asinine metaphors and fallacious explanations of the core concepts. You won't find that in any decent Math or Biology textbook. Maybe they should have called this "The Evolution of Syntax Theory, Presented as We Expect it Would Develop in the Mind of a Novice": it becomes more accurate the more you read, making revisions and corrections and ending up with modern syntax theory. Modern syntax theory is what I expected to learn when I registered for the class and bought the textbook. I did so, eventually, in spite of Grammar as Science. They should have just started out with the modern version, and then they could make actual revisions to the textbook content as syntax theory continues to develop, like they do for other science textbooks. You won't find a Bio textbook that starts out with "The human body is made up of four substances, called humors: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. The bodily humors must be in perfect balance to maintain health." and then, four chapters later, "Remember the thing about the humors? That's completely wrong." No. That's just not how you teach science. I gave it two stars instead of one because I didn't notice any typographical errors, and the true theory behind semantics is eventually explained at the end -- although I almost didn't make it there because I was so confused and frustrated that I almost dropped the class. I also talked to a few classmates who liked the textbook, for whatever reason. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Nikki Tamez Book came in good quality. Content itself somewhat opaque-- not my favorite syntax textbook.

An introduction to the study of syntax that also introduces students to the principles of scientific theorizing. This introductory text takes a novel approach to the study of syntax. Grammar as Science offers an introduction to syntax as an exercise in scientific theory construction. Syntax provides an excellent instrument for introducing students from a wide variety of backgrounds to the principles of scientific theorizing and scientific thought; it engages general intellectual themes present in all scientific theorizing as well as those arising specifically within the modern cognitive sciences. The book is intended for students majoring in linguistics as well as non-linguistics majors who are taking the course to fulfill undergraduate requirements. Grammar as Science covers such core topics in syntax as phrase structure, constituency, the lexicon, inaudible elements, movement rules, and transformational constraints, while emphasizing scientific reasoning skills. The individual units are organized thematically into sections that highlight important components of this enterprise, including choosing between theories, constructing explicit arguments for hypotheses, and the conflicting demands that push us toward expanding our technical toolkit on the one hand and constraining it on the other. Grammar as Science is constructed as a "laboratory science" course in which students actively experiment with linguistic data. Syntactica, a software application tool that allows students to create and explore simple grammars in a graphical, interactive way, is available online in conjunction with the book. Students are encouraged to "try the rules out," and build grammars rule-by-rule, checking the consequences at each stage.

Grammar as Science is an excellent textbook for an introductory syntax course, serving both intended linguistics majors and the general education population equally well. There isn't anything quite like it in the market. If I ever use a textbook, I would use this one. (Jorge Hankamer, Department of Linguistics, University of California, Santa Cruz) About the Author Richard K. Larson is Professor of Linguistics at Stony Brook University.