

# Epilogue\*

## Generative Syntax: Questions, Crossroads, and Challenges

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Borges said somewhere that an epilogue is easier to write than an introduction. If nothing else, a coda lets readers judge the volume for themselves, without raising any expectations as to what (not) to expect, while allowing for *post-hoc* reflections.

This special issue of the *Catalan Journal of Linguistics* grew out of a workshop titled *Generative Syntax: Questions, Crossroads, and Challenges* (GenSyn), which took place at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the summer of 2017. The declared goal of the event was to reconsider the questions that motivate Generative Grammar (GG) and the answers given thus far, the crossroads that its practitioners must navigate, and the challenges they face given the current state of the field. These are the issues addressed by the papers collected here. As readers of the volume will no doubt have noticed, the contributions are highly heterogeneous in character. This is a direct reflection of the wide range of perspectives and questions voiced during the workshop, which was vaguely defined as an open forum for the exchange of ideas free from the strictures of traditional formats. We thank all of our contributors for accepting our invitation to Barcelona and their willingness to be thrown in at the deep end.

With two exceptions (the contribution by Chomsky et al., and the transcription of Chomsky's lecture at the University of Reading), the papers in this volume were presented as talks at the GenSyn workshop, an attempt to go beyond what a similarly motivated, earlier event (*Generative Syntax in the Twenty-first Century*):

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*The Road Ahead*, Athens 2015) had covered. The goal of both events was to evaluate and reconsider the insights and prospects of GG. For the last sixty-odd years, GG has been the dominant approach in the formal study of human language within the cognitive sciences. Drawing in equal parts on classical ideas (e.g. the infinite character of natural language) and then-novel developments (e.g. formal-language theory), the generative revolution of the 1950s provided the basis for a new wave of investigations that gave rise to significant theoretical and empirical discoveries, establishing a fertile ground for synergies with other disciplines such as computer science, psychology, biology, and mathematics. While the interest in GG from some of these disciplines has waned over the decades as the field became more and more impenetrable from the outside, other, novel connections have emerged, such as the recent surge of neurolinguistic research addressing issues germane to GG. Ultimately, it seems to us that further advancement of the enterprise will only be possible if it can find a common vocabulary with related fields (as well as different schools of thought within our field), ask questions that connect meaningfully with those raised by other disciplines, and appreciate the recognition that a complex phenomenon such as language can, and must, be studied from a variety of perspectives. But for the most part, this vision of cross-disciplinary collaboration remains wishful thinking.

The above considerations highlight but one of the many challenges and conceptual crossroads that GG is facing today. The GenSyn workshop was intended as an invitation, especially to young researchers, to reflect on the current state of the field several decades after the revolution. In an increasingly specialized field, where many of the questions and insights at the core of the discipline form the conceptual backdrop of the work carried out but are seldomly addressed explicitly, we thought it beneficial to attempt to step back and evaluate where actual progress has been made and what new questions this progress has raised in turn. We are not sure that we succeeded in realizing this vision; but we hope that this issue conveys to the reader a sense of how much has been achieved, and how much remains to be done—and that achievements and questions alike should strengthen our appreciation of the enterprise as a whole.