

## **Conceptual Shifts in the Science of Grammar: from *Syntactic Structures* to the SMT**

**Robert Freidin**

**Princeton University**

The generative enterprise in linguistics over the past three quarters of a century, beginning with Chomsky's *Morphophonemics of Modern Hebrew*, has resulted in fundamental changes to our conception of grammatical theory, its scope and practice. The way in which Chomsky's earliest work diverged from that of his teacher and mentor, Zellig Harris provides one interesting and important case study. Another concerns the shift in focus from systems of rules to systems of grammatical principles, formulated in terms of both derivations and representations of syntactic structure, crystalizing in the Principles and Parameters framework as explicated in *Lectures on Government and Binding* (1981). The work that followed has attempted to refine the characterization of the computational system for human language in more abstract terms of language design and to demonstrate how this interpretation supports a minimalist program for linguistic theory, hypothesizing that this system is in some significant sense optimal. In addition to opening new lines of investigation, this work has reshaped our understanding of the language faculty in essential ways, most recently in terms of a radical rethinking of the principles and processes that constitute the computational system.

All of this work follows from the foundational and revolutionary idea that "syntax is the study of the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages", which defines the generative enterprise in linguistics. This presentation will attempt to review the evolution of what constitutes these principles and processes, and how current formulations align with Chomsky's Strong Minimalist Thesis, formulated over three decades ago, while at the same time affecting our understanding of the thesis itself.