STUDIES IN ENGLISH SYNTAX

M. G. MORI

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BY

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PREFACE

C. L. Wrenn, Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford, in his little book on *The English Language,* mentions the following qualities as the more obvious characteristic features which outstand in making the language what it is today, and give it its individuality and its world-wide significance:

I. Its extraordinary receptive and adaptable heterogeneousness—the ease and readiness with which it has taken to itself material from almost everywhere in the world and has made the new elements of language its own. In the fifth and sixth centuries English was almost a "pure" language but it has now become the most "mixed" of languages.

II. Its simplicity of inflection—the ease with which it indicates the relationship of words in a sentence with only the minimum of change in their shapes or variation of endings. Among European languages taken as a whole, English has gone as far as any in reducing the inflections it once had to a minimum. A natural consequence of this simplifying of inflection by reduction, however, is that since the relationship of words to each other is no longer made clear by their endings, this must be done in other ways.

III. Its relatively fixed word-order. An inflected tongue like Latin or Russian can afford to be fairly free in the arrangement of its words, since the inflections show clearly the proper relationship in the sentence, and ambiguity is unlikely. It is quite different with an analytic language like

English, where the order of words is likely to be relatively fixed; and a fixed word-order in relation to meaning in the sentence takes the place of the freedom made possible by the system of inflections.

IV. The growth of the use of periphrases or roundabout ways of saying things, and of the use of prepositions to take the place of the lost inflections. The English simplified verb uses periphrases and compound tenses made with auxiliary verbs to replace the more elaborate system of tenses that once existed. Similarly English, which once had nearly as many case endings as Latin, has come to use prepositions instead of these.

V. The development of varieties of intonation to express shades of meaning which were formerly indicated by varying the shapes of words. This reminds us in the Orient of the vast use of intonation in the speech of our Chinese neighbours.

Wrenn does not assert, as some other scholars do, that all the above qualities are in themselves necessarily good, nor does he think that they have all contributed to the general success of English as a vehicle of thought. But it seems to him probable that of them all it is the adaptable receptiveness and the simplicity of inflection that have done most in this regard.

I have quoted the British philologist at some length, though not all word for word, because what he says above seems amply to justify me in having taken so much pains during the last ten years to make clear the difference between a junction and a nexus (Jespersen's terms); between the restrictive and loose uses of qualifying words; between certain phrases and sub-clauses; between subject-qualifiers and predicate-modifiers; between independent and dependent

clauses; between an interrogative pronoun and a dobuble or condensed relative; and so forth.

My attempts to make these subtle distinctions clear have not always been successful. Far from it. Indeed, I have found the most eminent scholars at variance with one another on some points of usage. (See, for example, Chapters VI, IX, XIII, XIX, XX, etc. of this book, and my articles titled "Relative or Interrogative?" and "Henry Sweet and Otto Jespersen" in *The Study of English Grammar*, Vol. I, Nos. 3 and 5, respectively.) Nor have I ventured to take sides.

Most of the essays forming the twenty-two chapters of the present book appeared first in *The Bulletin* of the Institute for Research in Language Teaching during the ten years ending in 1959, as a loose series of studies in English syntax. One short essay, "Is *There* a Mere Expletive?" was published in the *Rising Generation* in 1953, and is here reproduced by permission of its editors; while the last two chapters, "Tendencies in English Syntax," are reprinted from the *Academia*, organ of Nanzan University, where I was a professor of English for six years (1953-1959). Consequently, the present volume may be regarded as an interim report on a philological pilgrim's progress across mountains and valleys of error and inconsistency.

Bunyan's hero, Christian, went on his pilgrimage alone; but having been completely bereft of sight since 1941, I could not have taken a single step forward on my journey of research without the help of my wife Sadae. I have found other gateways of vision in my two sons, Masakatsu and Masayasu, and in many of my colleagues and pupils at Kaisei and Nanzan. Special thanks are due to the following gentlemen who either read some of my manuscripts aloud to me

before they were sent to Tokyo for publication, or offered me practical hints and constructive criticism, or cheered me with words of counsel and encouragement when I was confused and bewildered in the Slough of Despond:

Dr. L. E. Bassett; Mr. Kazuo Hamada; Dr. Sanki Ichikawa; Prof. Kōtarō Ishibashi; Mr. Eizō Inagaki; Prof. J. C. Jordan; Mr. Chiyoichi Kawakita; Prof. Sakuo Kuno; Prof. Saburō Minagawa; Rev. Father Joseph Mooney; Prof. Shigeshi Nishimura; Prof. Kazuo Satō; Prof. Gorō Kasahara; etc.

Last but not least, it is a genuine pleasure to acknowledge my debt of gratitude to Dr. Arundel del Ré, at one time head of the English Department of Nanzan University, who on the eve of his departure for Australia for reasons of health was good enough to go carefully over the manuscript of this book in the form in which it was to have seen the light of day a few years earlier.

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CHAPTER I

IN DEFENCE OF JESPERSEN

Practically all current textbooks and handbooks of English grammar and usage agree in regarding the full sentence as consisting of two parts, viz. subject and predicate. So unanimous is this view that sentences which apparently defy analysis on this principle of bipartite construction are either explained away on the assumption of ellipsis or else branded as faulty or incomplete. Even in the imperative mood the subject is supposed to be *you* (or *thou*) "understood" except in special cases. And on the whole this attitude seems to me quite sound, for, after all, elliptical sentences, exclamatory utterances, sentence adverbs, and certain formulas which figure so conspicuously in daily colloquy constitute a minority when compared with the innumerable full sentences which make up the vast majority of English sentences, especially in written discourse. And I am of the opinion that Dr. Otto Jespersen was right in calling the subject a primary or principal word, and the predicate verb a secondary in his system of the three ranks (see Chapter II of this book).

I was therefore not a little surprised, not to say perturbed, when I first found this whole conception of bipartite structure seriously challenged by a contributor to the *Eigo Seinen* (or *The Rising Generation*) for April 1949. Mr. Masabumi Naitō, the author of the article, said in effect:

> No difficulty arises with regard to Jespersen's *junction* [for which see *the Essentials of English Grammar*, §9. 1], but it is far otherwise with his *nexus* [ibidem]. Inasmuch as the sentence in grammar is not necessarily identical with the proposition in logic, there is no sense in always considering the subject and the predicate in grammar as being in contrast to each other. Jespersen himself frankly expresses doubt as to the wisdom of treating the subject and the predicate in grammar as opposites. Yet the conception of the nexus is due to this notion of subject and predicate as the contrasted parts of a sentence.... The subject, instead of being the opposite of the predicate, is in reality the subject of the verb. To be more explicit, it is a kind of complement to the verb,—just as much as the object, the adverbial, and the predicative are complements of the verb.... The centre of the sentence is the finite verb, and this latter has around it such complements as the subject, the object, etc. (See the Notes at the end of this chapter.)

The following are Jespersen's own words as to the wisdom of treating the subject and the predicate as opposites: "It may be doubtful whether the bipartition of a sentence into subject and predicate found in most books on the theory of grammar has any great value." (*Analytic Syntax* Chapter 9 on "Predicatives".)

In further confirmation of Mr. Naitō's attitude, I may add that Leonard Bloomfield in his scholarly book, *Language*, §11. 2, observes that the *actor-action* (i.e. subject-predicate) type of sentence is one of the *two* favourite sentence types of English, the other being the imperative sentence (*command*) with the infinitive verb with or without

modifiers. Quite a few of the present-day Indo-European languages, he points out, agree with English in using an actor-action form as a favourite sentence type. Some, such as the other Germanic languages, and French (a Romance tongue), agree also in that the actor-action form is always a phrase, with the actor and the action as separate words or phrases. In some of these languages, however,—for instance, in Italian and Spanish and in the Slavic languages,—the actor and the action are *bound forms* which make up a single word: Italian *canto* (I sing), *canti* (thou singest), *cante-a* (he, she, it sings), and so on.

It is well known that Latin can also indicate person and number in finite verbs by their inflections. The famous boast attributed to Julius Caesar, *Veni, vidi, vici,* is perhaps the best-known instance. And we in the Far East are familiar with examples of subjectless sentences in Japanese, Korean and Chinese, the first two being agglutinative tongues and the last a highly isolating or analytic language.

We have already spoken of the absence of the second-person pronoun as the "subject" of a normal imperative sentence, though exceptions are found in emphatic negative imperatives like: "Don't you ever come near our house!" The first-person singular pronoun is usually understood in stereotyped expressions like *Thank you!* and *Pray come in.* (Note further the absence of *you* as the object of *pray* in the latter example.) *Please* has become almost a sentence adverb like *yes* and *no,* having lost both subject and object when used as a formula of request, or a polite expletive.

Now, having quoted authorities and cited facts largely in favour of Mr. Naitō's position, let us look at the other side of the shield. For, formed as they must have been after an extensive comparative and historical survey of Aryan

and non-Aryan languages, the views summarized above as those of Mr. Naitō struck me as so unorthodox, not to say revolutionary when my wife first read his article to me early in 1949 that I could not accept them in their entirety.

To the best of my meagre knowledge, the only writer who can be quoted in support of Mr. Naitō's contention that the verb is more important than the noun or pronoun in understanding sentence structure, is Philip Bumham, author of *Basic Composition,* who on p. 10 of Book One calls the verb "the foundation of every sentence" and speaks of "a verb and its subject" rather than of "a subject and its predicate verb." But (see Notes) Mr. Naitō, however, goes further than the author of *Basic Composition* when he asserts that a substantive, which is a primary both in itself and in its relation to adjuncts in a junction, drops into the rank of a tertiary as soon as it assumes the position of the subject of a verb. The inevitable logical conclusion from this would be that a sentence made up of a subject (a tertiary) and a predicate verb (a secondary) is a monstrosity without a head (or primary)!

Far be it from me to belittle the importance of the predicate verb. But there are verbless sentences as well as subjectless sentences in most languages. In Japanese and classical Chinese, for instance, adjectives are placed right next after the subject word and have predicative force without the help of any verb corresponding to the English copula *be.* In the English-speaking countries, we are told, children's speech abounds in this type of sentence construction, technically called the appositional sentence. (See Chapters XIV and XV.) Even adults employ it in careless colloquy and interjectional utterances. "John sleepy" is a little child's statement corresponding to the adult's full sentence,

"I am sleepy."

Not only adjectives but nouns and adverbs may be put right next to the subject of the sentence and have predicating power. "You a soldier?" is an example. "You here?" is as eloquent as: "I am surprised to find you [are] here." And how about such subjectless and verbless sentences as: "Down with the traitor!", "How unlucky!", "Good for you!", and the like?

If these instances are considered insufficient to disprove Mr. Naitō's theory that "the chief idea of a statement is always expressed by the finite verb," let me remind the reader of what are technically called subject questions, such as:

"Who goes there?"

"What [will happen] next?"

"Which is better, beer or wine?"

Think of the probable answers to these queries, and you will see which is really the more important word in them —the subject or the verb. Again, many so-called auxiliary verbs have no definite meanings of their own, but simply help to indicate tense, moôd or voice; yet most of them are used as *finites*. Would Mr. Naitō still maintain that it is the finite verb that bears the main burden of a statement? In grammar form and function count almost as much as, if not more than, logical considerations. Even granting that the theory of the Three Ranks is found faulty when applied to the nexus, we cannot afford to underrate the service Jespersen has rendered in making the meaning of certain English collocations much clearer to us than before by his all-embracing (though widely criticized) conception of the nexus.

NOTES. Only a month or so after Mr. Naitō's article appeared in print there was published the posthumous Vol. VII of Otto Jespersen's *Modern English Grammar*, where he partly confirms Mr. Naitō's statement above quoted, by saying (2, 1 [1]): "In such sentences [i.e., fully articulate sentences, those containing a subject and a finite verb]) the verb (V) may be considered the centre round which the other parts are grouped, the subject (S), predicative (P), and object (O) being the parts most closely connected with the verb, while tertiaries (advs., prepositional groups, clauses, etc.) are more peripheral."

For examples of amorphous sentences, by which he means sentences that cannot be analyzed into subject and predicate, see Jespersen, *The Essentials of English Grammar*, 10. 8, and his *Analytic Syntax*, Chapter 26. Amorphous sentences include interjections of all kinds, nouns used vocatively, sentence adverbs, etc. For other examples of the same kind, called by Leonard Bloomfield "minor sentences," his *Language*, 11. 4, should be carefully studied. See also Chapter VI of the present work.

In the opinion of the late Professor George Philip Krapp, of Columbia University, author of *The Elements of English Grammar*, "words like *oh*, and *ah!*, which sometimes stand alone (like the imperative sentence *Fire!*), are not sentences. For if some one, in a moment of surprise, should exclaim *Oh!*, another person merely hearing the exclamation would not know exactly what it meant. It might mean *Oh, I didn't know you were here*, or *Oh, I didn't recognize you*, or one of many things. The word *oh* and similar words are not capable by themselves of expressing a thought completely, and therefore they cannot be sentences. They are called interjections." Compare this view of Professor Krapp's with that of Professor J. C. Jordan in his *Grammar for Heretics*, quoted in Chapter XV.

CHAPTER II

THE MEANING OF THE THREE RANKS

Our first chapter, which, alas! is but a poor attempt to justify Jespersen's theory of the nexus, contains a few technical terms so exclusively his own that those not quite at home with his system of analytic syntax may have had some difficulty in understanding my summary of Mr. Naitō's argument and my rejoinder thereto. For example, what is meant by such terms as the *three ranks, junction,* and *nexus?*

Concisely stated, the *three ranks refers* to the relative syntactical importance of words and word-groups in a sentence or collocation forming part of a sentence. The three degrees of importance are more or less, but not altogether, independent of the so-called parts of speech, or *word-classes,* such as nouns (substantives), adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Thus in the collocation, *extremely cold weather,* the noun *weather* is *grammatically* the most important word and is therefore called a primary (or *principal,* or in Henry Sweet's terminology, a *head-word,* for which see his *New English Grammar,* §40). The adjective *cold,* which qualifies (or is an adjunct to) the primary, is a secondary; while the adverb *extremely,* which modifies the secondary, is termed a tertiary (or subjunct). Incidentally, a collocation of this kind in which a primary is *immediately* qualified or modified by a secondary, is called by Jespersen a *junction.* Again, in the sentence, "Birds sing sweetly," *birds* is a primary, *sing*

(a verb) a secondary, and *sweetly* (an adverb) a tertiary. A tertiary may be further modified by another word of lesser importance, as in *slightly more cold weather*, and "Birds sing very sweetly." And these modifiers may be termed quaternaries, and a fifth and a sixth may conceivably be added. But for all practical purposes such additional modifiers may be included under the general category of tertiaries; hence the term *the three ranks.*

It will have been noticed that in the foregoing examples an adjective (*cold*) and a verb (*sing*) were both called secondaries. A few more illustrations should suffice to show that the three ranks do not always correspond to parts of speech. The two classifications, viz. word-classes and word-ranks, to borrow Jespersen's phrases, "really move in two different spheres," (*E.E.G.*, 8. 1[2]). Here follow some examples:

Besides nouns we may use as primaries:

Genitives: *John's* is cheaper than his *wife's.*

Pronouns: *Who* came here yesterday? *That* is quite true. *Mine* is better than *yours. Those* who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

Gerunds: *Seeing* is believing.

Adjectives: *Young* and *old* enjoyed the festival. The *worst* was yet to come. The *accused* pleaded guilty to the charge.

Participles: The *wounded* were removed from the field; the *dying* left behind.

Infinitives: *To give up* now is unmanly. I want *to see him at once.*

NOTE. *There* in "There is a table in the middle of the room." is not generally recognized as a true primary, though often called a quasi-subject. (See, however, Chapter X.)

Noun-numerals: Only *three* remained out of *ten*. *Millions* lost their lives in the war.

Adverbs: *Now* is the time to act; *tomorrow* may be too late. From *here* to Paris is a long way.

Prepositional phrases: *Over the fence* is out of bounds. *Out of sight* [is] out of mind.

Noun-clauses: *What you say* is quite true. *Who steals my purse* steals trash. *That he is a regular scoundrel* cannot be denied. I see *what you mean.*

Infinitive clauses: *For her to try now* would be foolhardy. I should like *for you to make the attempt.*

Quotations: *"Thank God! I have done my duty,"* were his dying words.

Words referred to as such: *Than* is treated by some grammarians as a relative pronoun as well as a conjunction.

The above examples, and those that follow, were not arranged according to anything like a consistent scheme of word classification. Genitives, for instance, may have been included in the term *nouns;* gerunds, participles, and infinitives may have been regarded as forms of the verb, called by the general term *verbals; now, tomorrow,* etc. are called nouns by some lexicographers; the expression *what you say* is more generally called a relative clause. Furthermore, such words and word-groups as the above are termed noun-equivalents by C. T. Onions. (*An Advanced English Syntax,* 9.)

Besides adjectives and verbs we may use the following parts of speech and collocations as secondaries:

Nouns: *stone* walls; a *preparedness* scheme; the *Welfare* Ministry; the *Yorkshire* dialect; "water *the colour of pea soup*" [where *the colour of pea soup* is an adjunct to *water.*] (Onions, *Ad. Syn.*, §10. 4).