English Syntactic Structures

A Guide to a Pedagogical Grammar
For Teachers of English

英文文法教學導向

黃宣範著

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PREFACE

A great deal of nonsense has been said and written about English grammar. Part of it is due to the attempt to make English grammar consist of definitions and elaborate classifications that can be learned only by rote memorization as acts of memory. Still another part, which is the most damaging, has come from the erroneous notion that grammar is a mass of rules determining what is and what is not correct. As a result, many a student either bogs down in despair or quits in disgust.

This book has been developed from the author's own teaching over a number of years. It is intended to help teachers and teacher trainers gain control of a variety of English sentence structures. Through the knowledge of how English sentences are formed and through much practice in producing sentences of varied structures, they will develop an awareness of the full range of elementary and insertion transformations that writers can use. Thereby they will be able to revise their students' writing for the improvement of sentences--both in grammaticality and in variety of expression. While the principal goal of this book is to foster effective writing, it should also help students enhance their reading power as well.

I am very grateful to my colleagues Dr. David Li and Mr. Patrick O'Donahue for their valuable suggestions and many teachers and students who saw this work in progress and offered worthwhile comments. These forms of assistance and the cited contributions of many scholars have helped to give this book its merits. The shortcomings, whatever they may be, are my own.

T. L. Huang

iii

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

ABBREVIATIONS

S = sentence
NP = noun phrase
VP = verb phrase
Aux = auxiliary
N = noun
V = verb

Comp = complement
Emp = emphasis
RC = relative clause
AC = adverbial clause
Sub = subordinator
Coor = coordinator

SYMBOLS

→ : A single-shafted arrow symbolizes the concept "rewrites as, consists of, or becomes," as in A→B; that is, A rewrites as B.

( ) : Parentheses in formulas enclose rule options, as in A→B (C); that is, A rewrites as B, or A rewrites as B + C.

{ } : Braces enclose choices, as in A→ $\left\{ \begin{matrix} B \\ C \end{matrix} \right\}$; that is, A→B, or A→C.

* : An asterisk marks ungrammatical sentences, as "*Mary hit."

+ : A single plus is used to symbolize concatenation as in this formula: A→NP+Aux+VP; that is a sentence consists of a noun phrase plus (+) an auxiliary plus (+) a verb phrase.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Noam Chomsky, who is generally regarded to be the leader of the school of linguistics known as transformational generative grammar, first set forth the principle of transformational analysis in *Syntactic Structures* (1957) and later elaborated and made certain versions in the theory in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965). Because of the current popularity of transformational grammar[1] and because of its widespread use in textbooks, it is necessary to describe this kind of grammar. The presentation here will serve to illustrate the methods and principles used in many transformationally oriented texts. At the same time, it should be noted that there are currently emerging theoretical positions which are quite different from those proposed by Chomsky in what is now considered to be the the "standard theory." Although the work of the various groups is of considerably theoretical interest, it is, for the most part, far too abstruse to be pedagogically interesting. It is for this reason that the discussion will be limited to an earlier version of transformational grammar instead of the latest available versions.

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1. Although transformational grammars are also generative, not all generative grammars are also transformational. Thus, we can use either the term "transformational generative" or just the term "transformational," and in both cases we mean the same thing.

Definition of Grammar

According to the transformationalists, a grammar is a device which attempts to give an account for intuitive notions of the native speaker about his own language. The theory of transformational grammar begins with the notion that a grammar of a given language is a theory of that language. The theorist posits an idealized speaker-hearer who, in learning his native language, must internalize a system of rules that relate meaning to sound or sound to meaning in certain specified and specifiable ways. That is, in order to explain how a native speaker is able to produce or understand new sentences, including sentences he may never have heard of before, it is necessary to assume that he has internalized the grammar rules of his language. The theorist of transformational grammar refers to this internalized knowledge as the speaker's competence.[2]   A man-made grammar, Chomsky says, should duplicate the native speaker's competence. Thus Chomsky defines a grammar as "a device that generates all of the grammatical sentences of a language and none of the ungrammatical ones."[3]

The grammar of a language, then, is a specification of the system of that language. According to the formulation in Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, the grammar has a syntactic component, a semantic component, and a phonological component. The latter two are purely interpretative; they play no part in the recurrsive generation of sentence structures. Because of the role the semantic and the phonological components are not

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2. Competence is contrasted with performance — the speaker's actual use of language in a communication situation.
3. Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*, 1957, p. 13.

consistently assumed to be part of the "generative mechanism," the present study will deal with only the syntactic component.

Native Speaker's Intuitive Knowledge

Native speakers of English have a number of capabilities that are illustrative of this kind of language knowledge. Among these are the following feelings or intuitions:

1. A feeling that some words go together while others do not. We can say, for instance. "The dog looks terrifying," but we cannot so easily say. "The dog looks barking."

2. A feeling for the word classes of his language—the parts of speech. The sentence is possible: "He saw a picture of John," while this one is not: "He saw a different of John."

3. A feeling that certain sentences are structurally related to others while others are not related. The sentence, "The hot dog was eaten by the boy," is not structurally related to the sentence, "The hot dog was eaten by the river." And if we examine the following sentences we see that they appear superficially to be different, but that they are expressing similar context:

    John broke the window.
    The window was broken by John.
    It was the window that John broke.
    What John broke was the window.
    What John did to the window was to break it.
    The window, John broke it.
    John broke it, the window.
    This is the window that John broke.
    This is the window (which was) broken by John.

John's breaking of the window (caused a stir on campus).

The breaking of the window by John (signaled an end to the window).

For John to break the window (was a mistake).

(It was said) that John broke the window.

4. A feeling for structural differences. Some sentences may appear to have identical structure but when examined more closely, they are found to have distinct structures. The two sentences that transformational grammarians use to illustrate this intuition are the following:

    (1) John is easy to please.

    (2) John is eager to please.

These sentences appear to have similar structures, to describe similar relationships, and to receive identical immediate constituent analysis. Yet the sentences are different, more different than the words, "eager" and "easy," would lead us to believe. Even though "John" appears first in each sentence, its roles or functions in the sentences differ. In sentence (1), "John" is the one being pleased (John is easy for someone to please), while in sentence (2) "John" is doing the pleasing (John is eager to please someone).

5. A feeling that some sentences have more than one meaning. The sentences

    (1) Visiting relatives bored me.

    (2) I saw her in the street.

are ambiguous. "Visiting relatives," the source of ambiguity in sentence (1), could mean, to paraphrase, "Relatives who visit are boring," or "To visit relatives bores me." Sentence (2) means either "I saw her when I was in the street" or "I saw her when she was in the street."

That native speakers have these intuitions is evidence to transformational grammarians that language is characterized by "rule-governed behavior."[4]   "Rule-governed behavior" is an abstract characterization of the speaker's linguistic competence. Even though a language is an unlimited number of sentences, an infinite set, a native speaker neither memorizes all the sentences that he will ever say in his lifetime, nor hears all the sentences that will be said in his lifetime. Life, obviously, is far too limited for these tasks. What he does is to assimilate a number of rules or principles that will give him access to the set of sentences that he will encounter during his lifetime.

Relationships between English Teaching and Knowledge about Grammar

A sound foundation in a grammar for sentences is fundamental to a good command of the English language. No one can write clear, comprehensive prose without conscious control of well-formed sentences. Students who are aware of the structures, processes, and possibilities inherent in the language are more articulate and tend to communicate more efficiently in all areas of study. There is a great deal in transformational grammar that can provide invaluable access to this awareness.

Good writers make greater use of transformed sentences than do poor writers. Even poor writers probably use more transformed sentences in their writing than they do in their speech. A

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4.   R.N. Campbell, "An Evaluation and Comparison of Present Methods for Teaching   English Grammar to Speakers of Other Languages," *TESOL Quarterly*, 1970, 4(1), 37-48.

person who is telling a story can avoid monotony by changes in stress and intonation, but a good writer achieves variety largely by means of the skillful utilization of different kinds of transformations. The passage in example A, for instance, would probably be considered poorly written—or at least less well written than example B, although the former might well hold our attention in a conversation.

Example A:

Another car was parked next to Mr. Scott's car. Mr. Scott had made a dent in the fender of the other car. Mr. Scott saw the dent. He glanced around nervously, and then he moved his car to the opposite side of the parking lot.

EXample B:

On seeing the dent he had made in the fender of the car parked next to his own, Mr. Scott glanced around nervously, then moved his car to the opposite side of the parking lot.

Studies[5] have demonstrated that some understanding of transformational grammar produces significant greater ability to write varied and well-formed sentences and to create sentences of great structural complexity without loss of grammatical quality. Students' reading skills and understanding also improve through the study of transformational grammar. Therefore, there are connections between knowledge of grammar and improvement in writing and reading when we teach transformational grammar, not conventional grammar. Whereas conventional grammar relies on

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5. See Ney 1965, Jackson 1966, Zions 1966, O'hare 1973, Hunt 1977, Kleen 1980, and Sternglas 1980.

prescription, transformational grammar takes place in the process of transformational sentence combining. The process is self-rewarding and self-reinforcing.

Methodology

Certain underlying concepts in this text are derived from the work of structural linguistics as well as from the new theories of transformational grammar. However, the author has carefully avoided being overly scientific. His aim has been to build an integrated structure from the materials of both traditional and modern grammars. Thus, teachers with a "traditional" background should find much that is familiar in this text, and students who have previously studied grammar should find the new approach complementary to their earlier training rather than a source of conflict.

This book draws on transformational grammar, without any attempt to be "complete." Completeness is both impossible and irrelevant. It is impossible because language and theories about it change constantly; it is irrelevant because they are interested only in those ideas that apply to high school English teaching. The objective of this book is to show teachers how to inspire students with wonder at the complexity and flexibility of the English language they can control automatically, and to help students handle English more effectively than they might otherwise.

CHAPTER II

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BASIC SENTENCE

It is most important that we understand the basic sentence thoroughly, for the basic sentence is the key unit of the English language. Although basic sentences are very simple patterns of phrases, they provide the structure for all of the sentences of English regardless of how complex the sentences may be.

The basic sentence patterns that are possible in English are strictly limited in number. If this were not so, we would not be able to learn the structure of the English language. But the actual number of basic sentences is virtually unlimited, because we can insert any of thousands of lexical words into a given structure. With the hundreds of thousands of words in English and the many sentences and combinations of sentences that are possible, the number of English sentences is actually infinite. We can comprehend and produce sentences only if we understand the grammar of English sentences.

As the sentences of English are derived from a limited number of basic patterns, we are going to study the basic rules for forming the basic sentences. This chapter offers the foundations of the grammar. Then we will study the rules for transforming the well-formed sentences from this chapter into more complicated sentences by applying the transformational rules.

A Basic Sentence

A basic sentence is a simple basic statement made of three major constitutents—a noun phrase that functions as the subject, followed by an auxiliary and a verb phrase that function as the predicate. We begin phrase structure rules with *Sentence* (S) and rewrite S more specifically as *Noun Phrase* (NP) plus Auxiliary (Aux) plus *Verb Phrase* (VP). We may state our phrase structure rule this way:

$$S \rightarrow NP + Aux + VP \qquad \text{or}$$

S
NP   Aux   VP
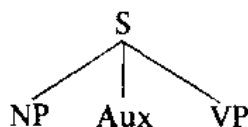
This simply means that a sentence is made up of a noun phrase, an auxiliary, and a verb phrase. The word *phrase* as used here can designate either a single word or group of words. A single arrow ($\rightarrow$) is used to mean *rewrite as* or *contains*. The term *rule* as used is simply a direction, not a prescription telling how the English language should be formed. A rule in English grammar is something like a rule in mathematics, which reads $6 \rightarrow 3 + 3$. Here then are the first rewrite rules:

Sentence $\rightarrow$ Noun Phrase + Auxiliary + Verb Phrase

(S $\rightarrow$ NP + Aux + VP)

Noun Phrase $\rightarrow$ Noun

Noun $\rightarrow$ Tom, Bob, Jane . . .

Verb Phrase $\rightarrow$ see, love, eat . . .

Auxiliary $\rightarrow$ Tense

Tense $\rightarrow$ Present/Past