

SYNTACTIC THEORY AND TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR, THE USEFULNESS OF SYNTACTIC THEORY

Sanusi Altine Binanchi

State College of legal and Islamic Studies, Sokoto

sanalbin4@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Language is an area with a higher concentration of theories that assists in language development, and the impact of both teacher and learner are essential. This paper attempts at providing an answer to the topical issues raised by the paper, it symbolically looks at the definition of syntax, history, modern theories of syntax. Categorical grammar, dependency grammar, functionalist grammar, and traditional grammar. It went ahead to discuss certain controversies, of syntactic theory. The paper was concluded with conclusion and recommendations.

Keywords: Syntactic Theory, Traditional Grammar, Usefulness.

INTRODUCTION

The paper will focus its attention on syntactic theory to understand some theoretical postulations. Also, it will highlight traditional grammar and its relationship with syntactic theory. It goes further to provide the uses of syntactic theory. Summary of the paper will be bringing the significant discussions to a logical conclusion. Since this paper is attempting at improving teaching and learning, some recommendations will be provided to help the classroom teacher to enable him function in the classroom effectively.

Definition of Syntax

In linguistics, the **syntaxis** is the study of the principles and rules for constructing sentences in natural languages. In addition to referring to the discipline, the term syntax is also used to refer directly to the rules and principles that govern the sentence structure of any individual languages. Modern research in syntax attempt to describe languages regarding such rules. Many professionals in this discipline attempt to find general rules that apply to all natural languages.

Early History

Works on grammar were being written long before modern syntax came about; the Astadhyayi of Panini is often cited as an example of pre-modern works that approach the sophistication of a modern syntactic theory. In the west, the school of thought known as “traditional grammar” began with work of Dionysius Thrax.

For centuries, work in syntax was dominated by a framework known as grammatic general, first expounded in 1660 by Antoine Arnauld in a book of the same rules. This



system took as its basic premise the assumption that language is a direct reflection of thought processes and the most natural way to express it as it was in French.

However, in the 19th century, with the development of historical-comparative linguistics, linguists began to realize the sheer diversity of human language and to question fundamental assumptions about the relationship between language and logic. It became apparent that there was no such thing as a most natural way to express a thought, and therefore it could no longer be relied upon as a basis for studying the structure.

The port-royal grammar modeled the study of syntax upon that of logic (indeed, large parts of the Port-Royal Logic were copied or adapted from the *Grammaire general*). Syntactic categories were identified with logical ones, and all sentences were analyzed regarding “Subject-Copula- Predicate.” Initially, this view was adopted even by the early comparative linguistics such as Franz Bopp. In the 20th century, the roles of syntax within theoretical linguistics became clear, which could reasonably be called the “century of syntactic theory” as far as linguistics is concerned.

Modern Theories of Syntax

There are some theoretical approaches to the discipline of syntax. Many linguistics see syntax as a branch of biology since they conceived of it as the study of linguistic knowledge as embodied in the human mind. Others (e.g., Gerald Gazdar) take a more Platonistic view.

Since they regard it as a problematic study of an abstract formal system. Others like Joseph Greenberg consider grammar as taxonomical devices to reach broad generalizations across languages. Some of the major approaches to the discipline are listed below.

Generative Grammar

The hypothesis of generative grammar is that language is a structure of the human mind. The goal of generative grammar is to make a complete model of it (known as I-language). This model could be used to describe all human language and to predict the grammaticality of any given utterance (that is, to predict whether it would sound correct to native speakers of the language). This approach to it was pioneered by Noam Chomsky. Most generative theories (although not all of them) assume that syntax is based upon the constituent structure of sentences. Generative grammar is among the theories that focus primarily on the form of a sentence, rather than its communicative functions.

Among the many generative theories of linguistics, the Chomskyan theories are:

- Transformational grammar (TG) (Original theory of generative syntax laid out by Chomsky in syntactic structures in 1957).
 - Government and binding theory (G.B) (revised theory in the tradition of TG developed mainly by Chomsky in the 1980s).
 - The Minimalist Program (MP) (revised version of GB published by Chomsky in 1995).
- Other theories that find their origin in the generative paradigm are:
- Generative semantics (mostly out of date)

- Relational grammar (RG)
- Are pair grammar
- Generalized phrase structure grammar (GPSG)
- Head-driven phrase structure grammar (LFG)
- Lexical functional grammar (LFG)

Categorical Grammar

Categorical grammar is an approach that attributes the syntactic structure not to rules of grammar, but to the properties of the syntactic categories themselves. For example, rather than asserting that sentences that are constructed combine noun phrase (NP) and the verb phrase (VP). So in the syntactic category for an intransitive verb is representing the fact that the verb acts as factors which require an NP as an input and produces a sentence level structure as an output. The complete category is noted as (NP/S) instead of V. NP/S is read as "a category that searches to the left for an NP and outputs a sentence on the left and the element on the right"; the categories of a transitive verb.

Defined as an element that requires two NPS (its subject and its direct object), to form a sentence. This is notated as (NP/ (NP/S) which means "a category that searches to the right (indicated by /) for an NP (the object) and generates a function that searches to the left for an NP and produces a sentence.

Tree-adjointing grammar is a categorical grammar that adds in the partial tree structure to the categories.

Dependency Grammar

Dependency grammar is a different type of approach in which structure is determined by the relations (such as grammatical relations) between a word (head) and its dependents, rather than being based in constituent structure. For example, syntactic structure is described regarding phrase.

Some dependency-based theories of syntax:

- Algebraic syntax
- Word grammar
- Operator grammar
- Meaning-text theory

Stochastic/Probabilistic Grammars/Network Theories

Theoretical approaches to syntax that are based on probability theory are known as stochastic grammars. One typical implementation of such an approach makes use of a neural network or connectionism. Some theories based on the approach are:

- Optimality theory
- Stochastic context-free grammar



Functionalist Grammar

Functionalist theories, although focused upon form, are driven by an explanation based on the function of a sentence (i.e., its communicative function). Some typical functionalist theories include:

- Functional grammar (disk)
- Prague linguistic circle
- Systemic functional grammar
- Cognitive grammar
- Construction Grammar (CxG)
- Role and reference grammar (RRG)
- Emergent grammar

Traditional Grammar

In linguistics, traditional grammar is a theory of the structure of language based on ideas. Western societies inherited from ancient Greek and Roman sources. The term is mainly used to distinguish it from those of contemporary linguistics. In the English-speaking world at least, traditional grammar is still widely taught in elementary schools.

HISTORY

Traditional grammar is not a unified theory that attempts to explain the structure of all languages with a unique set of concepts (as is the aims of linguistics). There are different traditions, each with its traditional vocabulary and analysis. In the case of European languages, each of them represents an adaptation of Latin grammar to a particular language.

Traditional grammar distinguishes between the grammar, i.e., elements that constitute a sentence (i.e., inter-elemental) and the grammar within sentence elements (i.e., intra-elemental).

1. Controversy

The term mainly distinguishes these ideas from those of contemporary linguistics, which are intended to apply to a much broader range of languages and to correct some errors in traditional grammar.

Although modern linguistics has exposed the limitations of traditional grammar, it is still the backbone of the grammar instruction given to the general population in Western countries. As such few people have encountered linguistics in Western culture in traditional grammar. This is one of the difficulties that linguists face when they try to explain the ideas to the general public. Modern linguistics owes debts to traditional grammar. However, it departed from it in the following ways:

Linguistics aims to the general, and to provide an appropriate form of analyzing all languages, and comparing them. Traditional grammar is usually concerned when it has been applied to non-European languages; it has very often proved very inappropriate.

- Linguistics has broader influences than traditional grammar has. For example, modern linguistics owes as much of debt to panini's grammar of Sanskrit as it does to Latin and Greek grammar.
- Linguistics in many ways more descriptively rigorous, because it goes after accurate description as its end. In traditional grammar, is often only a means towards formulating usage advice.

While there is an overlap between traditional grammar and prescriptive grammar, they are not entirely the same. Traditional grammar is best thought as the set of descriptive concepts used by nearly all prescriptive words on grammar. Linguistics critiques of prescriptive grammar often take the form of pointing out that the usage prohibition in question is stated regarding a concept from the traditional grammar that modern linguistics has rejected.

2. Use Of Syntactic Theory

To explore the structure of language which is intellectually challenging and fascinating its grammatical organization provides a transparent window on the structure of the human mind. It provides an avenue for understanding the rules of the language.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper defines the concept, its history, theories of syntax, traditional grammar and its controversies, it also provides the uses of the theory, and later recommendations are provided to help the classroom teacher.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations that can be used by the classroom teacher:

- The teacher can use this theory in an application as a mechanism for understanding the rules governing sentence formation by teaching sentences within the framework of the syntactic theory.
- Since language rule-governed, the teacher abides by the governing rules provided by the syntax for more natural application in the classroom.

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