Sentence Analysis from the Point of View of Traditional, Structural and Transformational Grammars

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Abstract

Purpose: To analyse sentence (simple type, statement form) in terms of three types of grammar: traditional, structural and transformational grammars in addition to presenting some hints about analysing sentences which are semantically the same but with different word order, from the point of view of the three grammatical approaches.

Method: Reviewing related literature and presenting examples that show the analysis of the sentence according to each grammatical school, briefly.

Results: Each type of the three grammatical approaches has different terminology and yet strategy when analysing a sentence. For instance, in traditional grammar the sentence is divided into units, into patterns in structural grammar and into elements and phrases in transformational grammar. In addition, in both traditional and structural grammars, a number of sentences which have identical meanings with different word order are considered totally different from one another when being analysed; whereas, in transformational grammar the sentences share the same base and are analysed in terms of surface and deep structure(s) for each one.

Conclusions: The three presented grammatical approaches can be arranged in terms of the most detailed approach as: transformational grammar, traditional, and finally structural grammar.

Keywords: simple sentence analysis, traditional grammar, structural grammar, and transformational grammar.

Introduction

It is totally agreed by most of the world linguists and mainly grammarians that whatever numbers of grammar types we do have; they all basically aim at stating some statements about linguistic units. That is, how each unit, part or even element functions and operates in a sentence, (Lester, 1976). In spite of this, each type of grammar would in one way or another differ from another type of grammar and that is why one type of grammar has an advantage over another. In this research-paper; however, the researcher is going to introduce comparatively the sentence in English mainly the simple sentence type. Put another way, this research-paper is two folded: in one case the sentence is defined from the point of view of

three types of grammar: traditional, structural and transformational and then is analyzed also from the point of view of these grammars. The other part in this research-paper is showing how two types of grammar: traditional and structural would consider two or more sentences which have identical structures as the same and they are actually different or sentences which have different structures with the same constituents as different ones and they actually internally share one base.

Literature Review

Sentence Definitions

Principally and according to traditional grammarians, a sentence is "a group of words containing a subject plus a predicate and expressing a complete thought", (LaPalombara, 1976: p. 76). Unsatisfied with such definition, modern grammarians including structuralists and transformationalists have criticized such a definition for being vague and too general. They claimed that such a definition would make any sentence which contains of a subject plus a predicate as a sentence. To some extent what they have said is true but it is clear that they, for one reason or another, have ignored the last part of the traditionalists' definition, "expressing a complete thought". For instance, consider the sentence (Ahmed having played football), it is true that according to the traditionalists' definition that this sentence is true but if we admit that we have ignored that last part of their definition because they said it must express a complete thought and here this condition is not achieved. Consequently, such a claim directed against traditionalists by other grammarians is not that reasonable.

Therefore, structuralists view a sentence in terms of patterns, one that is made up of constructions and yet constructions are made up of constituents which in turn are made up of words (morphemes). Hence, a sentence is a constituent of nothing. For transformationalists, a sentence is a group of words within which a full syntactic analysis is possible yet which has at least one deep structure and a surface structure or vice versa, usually a sentence will have the same surface and deep structures.

Sentence Analysis

Have presented the definitions of the sentence from the point of view of the three types of grammar, we now look at the sentence analysis or more accurately what kind of statements does each type of grammar would make about a particular sentence in English.

Example

The student did the homework.

Traditional Grammar Analysis

Example
The student |did**/**the homework.

Analytically, the vertical line indicates the elements to the left are the subject of the sentence and on the other hand the elements to the right are the predicate of the sentence. Again, the slanted line indicates that the element to the left is the verb of the sentence and the element to the right is the object. Then, the words are indentified individually by parts-of-speech. For instance, student and homework are nouns the former is subject and the second is object, the as an article and did as a verb.

Structural Grammar Analysis

Example

The student did the homework.

The sentence pattern of this sentence according to structuralists is

Det+ N+ Tran. V+ DO

Analytically, Det would stand for determiner (the) and N for nouns (student and homework) and Tran. V for transitive verb (did) and Do for direct object (the homework). Yet, we have two nouns one functions as the subject and the other as the object of the transitive verb. It is worthy to note that there is also one more way of analysing the sentence from the point of view of structuralists which is with the use of the Immediate Constituent Analysis (ICA) but the above mentioned one is enough for our research-paper here.

Transformational Generative Grammar Analysis

Example

e.g. The student did the homework.
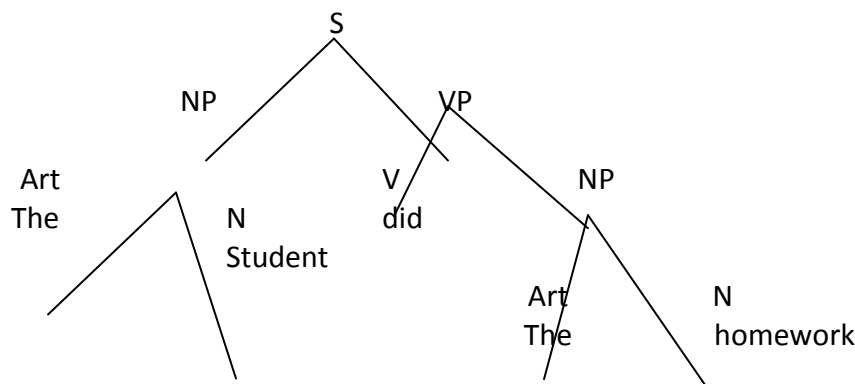
After diagramming the sentence, we then can either explain its analysis from top to down or from bottom up. In the former case S stands for the whole sentence, NP for noun phrase, VP for verb phrase. Yet, the sentence S consists of two elements: a noun phrase (NP) and a verb phrase (VP). Furthermore, the noun phrase consists of two elements: an article or determiner (Det) and a noun (N); the article is the word (the) and the noun is the word (student). Again, the verb phrase (VP) consists of two elements: a verb (V) and a noun phrase (NP); the verb is (did) and the noun phrase is (the homework). Once again, the noun phrase (NP) consists of two elements: a noun (N) which is (homework) and an article (Det) which is (the).

In the latter case, from bottom up the analysis would be something like this: (the) is an article (Det), (student) is a noun (N), (did) is a verb (V), (the) is an article (Det) and (homework) is a noun. Articles and nouns are combined to make noun phrases and the verb and the following noun phrase are combined to form a verb phrase and finally the former noun phrase and the verb phrase are combined to form a sentence.

With the use of symbols and rules of phrase structure grammar, the structure of this sentence would be analyzed in the following way:

S→ NP + VP
NP → Det+ N
VP → V+ NP
V→ T+ V
T→ past
Det→ the
N → { student, homework}
V → do
Past → -ed

Discussion

Basically, provided information in the three types of analysis look apparently the same but they are entirely different. For instance, in the case of the traditional grammar analysis, we essentially have five words (the, student, did, the, homework) and they are divided into three units/elements according to traditionalists' analysis; (the student, did and the homework). Conversely, in the case of the structural grammar analysis we will have these five elements divided into five elements just as they appear in the original sentence. Consequently, one could infer that neither traditional grammar nor structural grammar would tell us how these elements combine to make larger elements or how do they relate to each other. Instead, transformational generative grammar seems to solve this problem by telling us firs how the whole element (S) are/is spilt into parts and yet how these parts are combined to form larger elements till they reach to the highest level which is the sentence.

Have introduced the first point which is defining and analyzing the sentence from the point of view of traditional, structural and transformational grammarians, we now look at the other

point which is how two or more sentences are analyzed under one base in transformational grammar and are different in the other two types of grammar (traditional and structural).

Examples

It is difficult for Ahmed to understand the lesson.
The lesson is difficult for Ahmed to understand.
To understand the lesson is difficult for Ahmed.
Understanding the lesson is difficult for Ahmed.
For Ahmed to understand the lesson is difficult.

Now, in terms of transformational generative grammar such sentences would be considered as semantically identical but syntactically different. More importantly, all these sentences have been derived from one sentence which is technically called the base sentence. However, the first sentence is the base here and all other sentences have been derived from it. Hence, each sentence has been derived on the basis of transformational rules of generative grammar. For instance, we make use of the rule of "it deletion" and then change the word order of some other elements to form the second sentence. Moreover, one can notice that how the subject in each sentence has become different form the other one; it is by applying transformational rules we have been able to form all the above mentioned sentences.

To return to both traditional and structural grammars, they would consider each sentence different from the other one, because they have different structures so each one has a different pattern in the case of structural grammar and each one has different grammatical units in the case of traditional grammar. Unlike both traditionalists and structuralists, transformationalists have argued and yet proved that these sentences, though have different structures but they do share the same base which make them related to each other not only semantically but also syntactically.

We have already seen how one sentence (deep structure sentence) can have a number of the sentences (surface structure sentences), now we look at the opposite; one sentence (surface structure sentence would have at least one or more deep structures).

Example

Sara wrote a letter to her mother.
According to both traditional and structural grammarians, this sentence would have only one meaning as it appears. That is, a subject (Sara) plus a predicate in terms of traditional grammar, and then (S+ V+ DO+ IO) in terms of structural grammar. Dissimilarly, in transformational grammar we have first to derive the possible meanings or sentences of this sentence. That is the deep structure(s) from the surface structure.

Example

Sara wrote a letter to her mother. (*Surface Structure*)
Sara wrote a letter to her mother.
(*Deep structure*, means Sara is away and she wrote a letter to her mother telling her about herself)

Sara wrote a letter to her mother.
(*Deep structure*, means Sara's mother is illiterate, she cannot write so her daughter—Sara wrote a letter to her to send it to someone else)

Conclusion

This research-paper aimed at two main things: defining and analyzing the simple sentence in English from the point of view of traditional, structural and transformational grammars. We have defined the sentence from the point of view of these three grammars and also analysed a simple sentence; form (traditional grammar), form and position (structural grammar) and surface and deep structure (transformational generative grammar). It has also been shown in the next part how transformational grammar relates a number of rules to one base and also derives a number of the sentences from the same base which other types of grammar cannot do. Thus, it does not mean that the researcher want to belittle other grammars, but in one way or another it is just one way of showing the main differences between grammars of English and how do each type analyses a simple sentence in English.

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