# On Teaching English

## With

## Transformational Generative Grammar

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### § I. Introduction

Many linguists and English teachers are talking about a question as to a generative transformational grammar can be applied to the teaching of English as a second language. And it is also said that the influence of Chomsky's theory on English teaching is not so important as the influence of C. C. Fies. This may mean that the gap between the theory of language or a language and the teaching of a language has recently taken on a greater scope. From ceatain points of views, I wish to discuss the relationship between these two fields.

There are many characteristic features about Chomsky's theory which distinguish his theory from other theories. Two of these characteristics are *explicitness* and *rationalism* in his theory. To emphasize the contrast, gexplicitness relates to the mothodology by which the theory is constructed, and rationalism relates to what the theory itself means or assumes. These two characteristics are my concern in this brief article.

### § II. Explicit Theory and Teaching English

A theory is explicit if the theory itself provides an unambiguous analysis; that is, if the content or the meaning of the theory is fully expressed, or if the theory does not rely on the intuition or the intelligence of the understanding reader, this theory is explicit. This characteristic feature of explicitness is needed for avoiding the misunderstanding

and the quibbling of the theory. These troubles can be derived from the ambiguity of expression. This explicitness is not only one of the most characteristic features of the theory, but also the requirement for its status as a science. It seems clear that Chomsky's theory is based upon one of the principles of the empirical sciences, and this is important for us to notice; it is less improtant for the theory to contain various principles which lead us to the practice of teaching. In order to be an empirical science, the theory must try to find the general characters or rules of a language and languages: in other words, it must seek a universal, as well as explicit, sysem of language. Thus, transformationalists are trying to set up linguistic universals which are represented explicitly.

But it is important to bear in mind that if a man want to find such a general and explicit theory, he must select some of the particular aspects of a language which are able to be systematized in general as well as in explicit form. Langeage, or even a language, is very complex object matter containing many aspects or features. If we try to characterize a langeage informally or in a rather rough way, we can characterize it in anyway. However, when we want a highly explicit theory, we cannot want the theory to cover all the phenomena or aspects of langeage. The whole langeage, or all the attributes considered as a quality of langeage, might be covered, I think, only if the theory were represented in a literary and metaphoric style. In this sense, we should sacrifice some aspects of langeage to the explicit theory; that is, these aspects beimg cut off, the aspects which remain are to be systimatized explicitly into the theory. This selection should be left to the linguist. It is quite reasonable that the explicit theory should cut off some aspects of language from the theory. But the very aspects which were cut off, aren't there any important disciplines for the teaching of a foreign language?

It becomes clear from what has been said that the notion "language" in the phrase "the theory of (a) language" is not quite the same as that

in the field of teaching. The language we should teach is, so to speak, synthetic behavior which operates to communicate with other persons in an actual life, or which cannot be separable from the way of life of members of the community. "A language" which linguists describe is, in a sense, a part of "a language" which we teach in the classroom. It appears that the gap is a necessary result from the theory being explicit as well as universal. For example, we cannot want the theory to have such a serious and needful subject as a question about the relation between a language and a culture, though this question is very important for our translation or interpretation of English sentences. It is the fact that there is a gap between the theory of a language and the teaching of the language. But it might be hoped that the gap may be filled if such a theory can be developed which covers a wider range of languages than the transformational generative grammar, and that deals with the problems about a language and a culture. Therefore, this gap is not so crucial or fatal as we will discover in our continued.

What I have just said is about a general principle: if the general thory should be represented explicitly, it must abandon marginal parts of the objects (whether some parts are central or marginal is determined by the theory itself). It seems to me that some themes concerning the teaching of a foreign language are marginal for transformational generative grammar.

Now consider the next question which is also about the gap between the explicit theory and the practice of teaching. This problem seems to me almost fatal, or at least very serious. At first glance, there are some new notions which seem helpful for the teaching of a foreign language: for example, *deep structure, surface structure, transformation, linguistic vniversals*, etc. However, when we come to consider a good way in which we apply these notions to the practical teaching, we are at once confronted with a question. How shall we present these technical aspects

in a practical way, so that students may grasp some of the meaning? If we employ these notions to teach grammar, translation, and composition, we should give the restatements of these notions in easier words. In an explicit theory, one technical terms defined directly by other technical terms, not by the term outside the theory. In other words, technical notions in such an explicit theory as Chomsky's are more or less defined in terms of each other; this is really a circular definition. If, in a class room, we want to explain one of these notions exactly, we must explain the whole theory containing a number of difficult rules and technical terms. We must paraphrase these technical terms into rather plain words though this is a difficult task, if we desire to use these notions in a class room. We had better recognize that the explicitness of a theory demonstrates its ability (that is, "explicitness" means explicitness literally) just in the field of theoretical statement, but not always in the field of teaching. In this sense, the explicitness of transformational generative grammar often may be nothing but an obstruction in the classroom.

Now, if we use such notions as "deep structure", "transformation", etc. with plain explanation in a classroom, what effect can be expected? Stating my conclusion first, the result is something that suggests traditional grammar. This is, in a sense, not strange, if we remember that Chomsky says

"——the rich descriptive apparatus of traditional grammar far exceeds the limits of the taxonomic model, though it is largely, and perhaps fully formalizable within the framework of the transformational model. However, it is important to bear in mind that even the most careful and complete traditional grammar relies in an essential way on the intuition and intelligence of the user, who is expected to draw the correct inferences from the examples and hints (and explicit lists of irregularities) represented

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① N. Chomsky, "Current Issues in Linguistic Theory" (1963) 1.3

by the grammar"

　　If we refer to the transformationalistic notions in a classroom without using proved rules or explicit fomulations, that is, if we use these notions in a plain style, we cannot help depending *on the intuition and intellingence of the pupil, aud expecting him to draw the correct iuferences from our explanations* in the same sense as Chomsky says.

　　In this way, it is quite natural that the classroom version of generative transfoimational grammar is like a traditional grammar. Suppose, for example, that we want to teach the relationship between the following sentences in a English lesson:

　　　(1)　John is easy to please.

　　　(2)　John is eager to please.

We might draw tree deagrams showing the deep structures corresponding to these two sentenses, and explain that the sentenses are identical in surface structure except for one word, but notice they *are* different in *deep structures.* Does this explanation contrast strikingly with such a rather classical explanation that, in (1), *John* is the sense object of the verb *please,* and that, in (2), *John* is the sense-subject of the verb *please,* and the like?

　　It may be that the traditional explanation is rather useful in the classroom. Suppose again that we would like to explain the relationship between two sentences:

　　　(1)　John loves Mary.

　　　(2)　Mary is loved by John.

It would be rather cumbersome that we explain the relationship by refering to a deep structure, in comparison with explanation by refering to the semantic similarity. I think that it is quite all right for teachers to understand these notions and the theory, but it might be rather difficult to tcach these things in a classroom.

## § III. Rationalism and Teaching English

Another characteristic feature of Chomsky's theory I would like to discuss is *rationalism*. This rationalism means the assumption that, in short, we are born with the knowledge of how human language works. According to this assumption, a child can acquire the language in which he lives, with his innate ability; speaking more exactly, the human brain is so complex and evolved, and if given an input of English sentences, it produces the rules of English grammar naturally (grammar means, in this case, the ability to speak English) ; and if the brain is given an input of Japanese sentences, it produes the rules of Japanese grammar. This innate brain machanism is often regarded as a complicated, but systematic device. Then, we are, by nature, provided with the machine. This machine is constructed so that it can produce the rules of grammar of the language. This grammar is corresponding to the ability to speak the language. Such a machine is not acquired, but inborn; a child innately predicts how human language works, or the language which a child aquires is what he has predicted.

"This (rationalistic) view contrasts sharply with the enpiricist notion —— that language is essentially an adventitious construct, taught by *"conditioniug"* (as would be maintained, for example, by Skinner or Quine) or by *drill and explicit explantion* (as was claimed by Wittgenstein) , or built up by elementary data-processing" procedures (as modern linguistics typically maintains) , but in any event, relatively independent in its structure of any innate faculties."

This quotation is drawn from Chomsky's book, but it would be dangerous to read this passage alone and to interpret it literally. His rationalistic attitude may often lead to an optimistic view about teaching

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② *Aspects of the Theory of Syutax* p. 51

English as a foreign language.  Suppose that we teach English without the work which I italicized in the quotation above: that is, conditioning, drill and explicit explanation, etc. I am afraid I don't know what Chomsky thinks about the teaching of a foreign language, but his attitude toward this problem about the teaching of a foreign language is probably not the same as the attitude cited above.  There are many factors in the acquisition of a foreign language.

The innate ability to learn the mother tongue does not answer the complexities which must be faced when we enter the field of foreign language.  In order to understand, for instance, English as a foreign language, it is necessary to study throughly the culture, the psycholgy, and social thought of English speaking peoples.  We can not separate the culuture and psychology of the people which has contributed greatly to the shaping of the language.  These important factors, as well as training of the language, are needed for the aquisition.

The teaching of a foreign language itself might become rather useless, if only an innate language acquisition capacity would be enough for the pupil.  How should we interpret his rationalistic view from the point of view of the foreign language teacher?

I would like to think that his view is not overwhelmingly accepted by those who are in the field of teaching a foreign language.  What it means, I think, is that Chomsky, who emphasizes the innate capacity of natural language acquisition, dose not differ from those who claim that a man who can speak his native language must be able to speak any foreign language.  For example, we can speak Japanese, we should also be able to speak English.  If we interpret his rationalistic view in this way, his opinion is the same as ours.  We can master English, if discipline our effots.  Our brain mechanism has the capability.

## § Ⅳ. Conclusion.

Finally it must be emphasized that I have no intention to underestimate the value of Chomsky's theory. What I wanted to discuss is the relationship between an explicit theory and its practical application. Transformational generative grammar is a quite attracive and powerful theory, and has an insight into psychology, so it seems to give the similar surprising impact upon the teaching of a foreign language, as well as the learning. Nevertheless, here is a classical and traditional gap between a theory and its practical applicaion.