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THE ARGUMENT STRUCTURE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The omission of essential sentence elements such as subject, predicate, complement or the misuse of transitive and intransitive verbs in the discourse of L_2 users of English prompted the writing of the paper. The improper use of these elements has resulted in the production of ungrammatical statements. It became necessary therefore to provide information for the second language users to beef up their knowledge and help them produce possible and acceptable sentences in the language. Chomskyan grammar advocates explanatory adequacy in the description of a grammar and its application has been found very useful in the acquisition of language. Its principles were applied in a brief description of the proper use of these essential sentence elements. The argument structure of English and the obligatory use of the subject in English declarative sentences were presented in a nutshell. Some syntactic configurations that predicators participate in and their resultant constituents required for attainment of grammaticality and acceptability in the use of argument structure were shown. Emphasis was also laid on Universal Grammar and its models of syntax usefulness in promoting the acquisition of language. A conclusion was drawn to the effect that the second language user of English could benefit from the application of its methods in the classroom. The paper advocated the presentation of positive input in the classroom for L_2 acquirers of English to set parameters. The paper thus briefly provided material that the second language teacher could use in the classroom.

Keywords: Argument, Subject, Predicate, Complement, Valency.

Introduction

The introduction of description into the study of the grammar of a language has revolutionized the system. This method has grown ever since and Transformational Generative Grammar, its off shoot, advocates achieving explanatory adequacy in the description of grammar. It provides a description that reveals what is possible in a language

and acceptable to the native speakers of that language. The possible and acceptable sentences are termed grammatical sentences. The goal set before learners of English as a second language is to produce statements that are grammatical and acceptable. Language learning under this model receives a boost. The writers believe that the second language learner's desideration therefore will be an analysis of the principles guiding the use of structures in a language as this will facilitate the acquisition of the language structure and enhance the subsequent performance of the acquirer. In line with descriptive grammar, the description of a sentence can be approached from different angles and a learner can make grammatical or syntactic judgments and produce grammatical statements when empowered with such knowledge.

Cook and Newson, (2007, p. 7) posited that "Syntax has always been the key element of knowledge of language". There is no language that forms acceptable sentences by simply putting words together, *a* grammatical sentence is formed when a particular word order is observed in a particular language. Tallerman, (2005, p. 8) states that English language has a fixed word order. A violation of this word order will yield ungrammatical utterances. The meaning of a sentence depends on the order in which words occur in that sentence. The examples below buttress this fact

1. The man painted the picture
2. the man the picture painted
3. painted the man the picture
4. painted the picture the man
5. the picture painted the man

Number 1 has the normal English word order (SVO) and is therefore grammatically well-formed while the rest of the examples are ill formed because each contains a violation of the normal word order.

Cook and Newson, (2007, p.6) posit that syntactic devices are used in grammar to show how individual words relate to one another in a sentence. Bas {2001, p. 99) gave different levels of describing sentences in English. Sentences are described by 'assigning functions to constituents (functional level) and then by assigning categorical labels to them (form level). He proposed a third level of assigning thematic roles to them. The functional form levels were regarded by him as referring to syntactic notions. Sentence 1 above can be divided into parts at the functional level to give the man (subject) painted (Verb) and the picture (direct object). At the form level the subject the man will be called NP, the, predicator (VP) and this contains the verb while the direct object has another NP that contains a determiner and a noun.

An observable trait in the discourse of users of English as a second language is the omission of essential sentence elements such as subject, predicate, complement. In some cases, the intransitive verb is used in place of the transitive verb or vice versa. Verbs like sit, set, lie lay, rise and raise are often confusing to the second language learner L_2 for short. The L_2 learner should be made aware of the operations of the structures involved in this aspect of syntax. The second language users should learn how to have subjects in all sentences, how subjects come before verbs and verbs before objects as in.

6 Andy loves Mary.
The Subject Andy comes before the verb loves and the object Mary comes after the verb. An understanding of these principles and careful application of same will result in the production of grammatical utterances.

Theoretical Framework
The Government and Binding (GB) model of syntax does not only account for phenomena we observe in language but establishes the fact that a learner will respond to language input given to him. Chomsky's pursuit of universality for all languages and explanatorily adequate grammar led to the postulation of the Principles and Parameters Theory (P&P) within GB. In this theory, the contents of the language under study are identified and accounted for. This is very useful in the acquisition of language. The model provides insight to the teachers who are conversant with the features of the learners' language provided by their students and have been confined to the traditional model of grammar used in language teaching. The teachers are encouraged to refine their method of instruction to maximize inter-language development.

In P&P Theory, Universal Grammar (UG) specifies a principle while a parameter states the different forms the rule can take. Principles do not vary from one language to another because they are built into the human mind. Human languages' conform to them.

The variations between languages are confined within parameters' circumscribed limits. Fromkin. Rodman and Hyams (2007, p. l58) posited that although UG provided basic designs and languages conform to basic designs there are choice points of variation. Wikipedia (2011) elaborates on this by stating that the central idea of principles and parameters is that a person's syntactic knowledge can be modeled with two formal mechanisms.

1. A finite set of fundamental principles that are common to all languages eg that a sentence must always have a subject even if it is not overtly pronounced.

2. A finite set of parameters that determine syntactic variability amongst languages, e.g a binary parameter that determines whether or not the subject of a sentence must be overtly pronounced. This example is sometimes referred to as the pro drop parameter.

This principle is a significant aspect of grammar. Souza (2011) quoting Jackendoff (2002, P.137) revealed that the problem of argument structure is central to any theory of grammar.

The Argument Structure
The Predicate expresses a relationship that embodies other participants that play roles in it. This means that "a predicate describes an event or situation in which some participants are required" Chung (2000, p. 39I). These participants are obligatorily dependent on the verb. Each dependent element (required participant) is known as argument. A predicate and its arguments constitute a predicate argument structure. The predicates determine the number and type of arguments that can occur in their environment. This is mainly done by the content verbs. Argument structure shows how verbs behave in a language. Verbs express events and states. These verbs map syntactic functions such as subject and object onto their arguments. Frequently used arguments are the subject and object phrases. These are the core arguments.

Arguments are obligatory elements to complete the meaning of a verb because when a participant is missing ungrammatically results

7. enjoyed the party
8. The man enjoyed

Each of these examples presents an incomplete idea. In example 7, the participant. subject is missing. A listener will wish to know who performed the action. Number 8 lacks a direct object because the listener will like to know what was acted upon, specifically, what the man enjoyed.

An argument structure concentrates on providing syntactically relevant information. This information ignores syntactic function changing operations such as changing of active voice to passive voice. This means that an object in active sentence will become the subject of the passive sentence. This variation of syntactic forms will always show up as movement occurs.

Every predicate determines its argument structure which is also called Valency, Carnie (2007, P. 5I). A predicate that allows only one argument to occur in its environment has a Valency of I. This argument precedes the verb and is said to be intransitive. Verbs like smile, sneeze belong to this group. A predicate that accepts two obligatory arguments has a Valency of 2 and is transitive. Transitivity is determined by the number of arguments that follow the predicate. One argument precedes the predicate and the other follows. This is exemplified by verbs like hit, lift, help. Some predicates take three arguments and have a Valency of 3. Two arguments follow the verb. Such predicates are said to be ditransitive and they include give, put. Obligatory NPs and PPs help one to a large extent to determine the number of arguments a verb has. The following configurations show how verbs form their argument structure:

9. Grace sneezed [NP----------] a single NP
   One argument - intransitive
10. Ada lifted the box [NP—NP] two NPs
    two arguments- transitive.

Some verbs like 'give' accept both NP and PP.

11. (a) The bank gave the farmer a loan
    [NP--------NPNP]
    Three arguments = ditransitive

(b) The bank gave a loan to the farmer
[NP--------NP PP] a combination of the two = ditransitive
'give' thus has the structure
[NP ------ [NP/PP]
which indicates that either of the two could be chosen.
Some ditransitives like 'put' will accept both NP and PP arguments.

12. Put the money in the bank

[NP ------- NPNP1

13. * I put the money in the bank

[NP--------NP NP]

Number 13. is not permissible. Verbs like 'say', 'think', 'ask' can accept an NP or a CP (embedded clause) as object.

14. (a) I said it [NP --------- NP]
(b) I said that he would come [NP- -CP]

'say' thus has this structure
[NP--------[NP/CP]]
Tell can accept three different features as a ditransitive verb.
[NP--------[NP/PP/CP]]]
15. a. I told you [NP--------NP]
b. I told you a story [NP -------- NP NP]
c. I told the story to you [NP--------NP PP]
d. I told you that he would come [NP--------NP CP]
There is a rare case of a predicate accepting four arguments in its environment. This is illustrated by the verb 'bet' 'Bet' has the feature.
[NP-------NP NP CP]. It takes three noun phrase arguments and a clausal argument BAS (2001, p. 92).
16. The boys bet the girls ten thousand naira that Nigeria would win the cup
[NP------NP NP CP]
A noun phrase will remain an argument of the predicate even if it moves from the usual position as in
17. Jacob I loved, Esau l hated.
Jacob and Esau should be placed immediately after the verb but for emphasis they have been moved from their usual positions.

There are some verbs that have both intransitive and transitive uses. 'Sing' has this feature.
18. a. She sang a song [NP-------NP] transitive
b. How beautifully she sang [NP-------] intransitive
This sounds contradictory considering the fact that only obligatory elements should be found in an argument structure. Carnie (2007, p.52) explaines that the way to handle such occurrences is to see two different verbs of the same type; one that takes an object and one that does not.

The arguments inside the VP (that is the arguments that are following the VP) are regarded as internal arguments. This is because the object is close to the verb and plays a major role in the choice of the subject. Transitive verbs will first merge with their objects and the resultant constituents will merge with the subject to give it its interpretation. The distance between the subject and the verb is farther. Cook and Newson, (2007 p.84) state that according to the VP-Internal subject Hypothesis, the subject originates in the specifier of the VP and then moves to the specifier of Inflectional phrase (IP) at surface structure.
It is important to note that the features that are set up for verbs depend on the number and the kind of argument a particular verb takes. A violation of this principle will produce ungrammatical expressions.
19. * Mary smiled the tea
This statement is impossible in English language because 'Smiled" an intransitive verb, cannot take an object, how much more a noun phrase object to complete its meaning.
20. * He bought for me a bag
Number 20 has the structure NP - — PP NP]. This has resulted in ungrammaticality because the **acceptable** structure is [NP - NP – PP] which should rearrange the word order to read.
He bought [NP], a bag [NP], for me [PP].
An L_2 learner should be shown this.

English Language- A Non Pro Drop Language

Pro-drop is a government and binding theory term which is a parameter determinant of subject suppression in a clause- that is a subjectless sentence. A pro-drop language means that its subject of clause/sentence may be dropped or suppressed. To this regard, the verb agreement system must be rich to allow inversion of subject and verb. Crystal (2008) opines that pro-drop languages are also known as, 'Null subject languages. Such languages can drop not only subjects but also objects and other phrases and can be called radical pro-drop eg Japanese (P. 339).

In English language, the subject is overtly pronounced and this automatically assigns the non-pro-drop parameter to it. This is opposite of pro-drop languages which allow null subject sentences. This means that subjects are not overtly pronounced. English as a non-pro-drop language does not allow null subject sentences because English verbs themselves cannot constitute complete sentences Cook and Newson (2007 p. 9I). There is a need for the obligatory presence of the subject in declarative sentences for grammaticality to be achieved.

21.* left
22. * painted the picture
23. * hope you are fine
24. * was sung by the choir last night.

One will observe that the statements above are not permissible in English. They require that the ones engaged in the various acts described, must be stated.

Sentences that give commands or make requests have subjects which are phonologically null.

25 Sit down!
26. Watch out!
27. Have some rest please!

The person addressed in the examples above constitute the subjects. The subject "you' is understood in all the examples. Warriner and Graham (1977, P. 21).

(You) sit down!
(You) watch out!
(You) have some rest please.

The subject necessarily comes before the verb and this establishes subject (S) verb (V) object (O) (SVO) as the normal word order in English.

It is important to mention the expletive or pleonastic pronoun (it and there) that are usually found in subject position when there is no other subject.

28. It rained last night
29. There is an intelligent girl in the class.

The Extended Projection Principle (EPP) enforces them. The EPP states that all clauses must have subjects (i.e the specifier of Tp (tense phrase) must be filled by a DP (determiner phrase) or CP (complementizer phrase). Carnie (2007. p. 229). These expletives appear in a sentence when there is no DP (or CP) that is theta-marked in order to give a one-to-one correspondence between arguments. An ungrammalical sentence will be produced if such is allowed. The expletive insertion *rule* is therefore applied to provide an expletive subject so as to save a sentence from being filtered out (ill formed or ungrammatical).

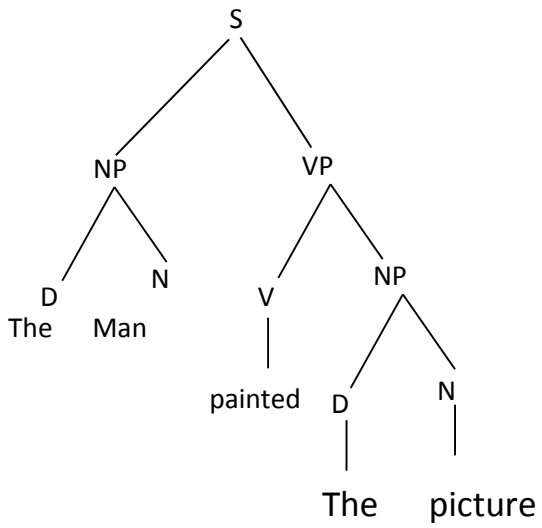
Cook and Newson (2007. P. 215) posited that UG is concerned with core grammar and inside the core grammar certain parameter settings are more marked than others. The P&P model shows that a learner can acquire language from the least amount of positive evidence that is

made available to him in the classroom. Cook and Newson (2007, P. 240) stated thus, "some of the descriptive devices used by UG Theory may be of use in f explaining grammar to L_2 students, say the pro-drop parameter. An analysis of syntactic structures will be of immense help to the second language learner. Also, O'grady, Archibald and Katamba (2011: P. 653) stipulate that UG is the innate system of categories, operations and principles that are shared by all languages, this is in line with the on-going discussion an language universities. The language teacher should therefore provide evidence in the classroom that will create opportunities for parameter setting to take place. The learner will through this, see how the language operates.

The tasks before the teacher in this case are to show how to have subjects in all sentences and how verbs come before objects and subjects before verbs. The teacher can provide a tree diagram that will give a graphic representation of English as a non pro-dop language. Concatenation which is a process for forming of elements in relation to linear succession reduces an English sentence to phrases. It continues until only words remain. The first binary division produces the subject made up of the noun phrase and the predicate. The declarative sentence below will show this.

The man painted the picture

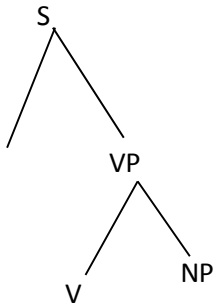
S ⟶ Np Vp (phrase structure re-write rule). This can be converted to a tree digram



Ungrammaticality will result when the subject is ignored

* Painted the picture

S ------ Vp



This is not a sentence in English as the verb's external argument has been violated. The argument structure should be presented to the learners and they should be made to see that a violation of principles would result in the production of ungrammatical sentences.

Conclusion

UG emphasizes the innate ability the child has that enables him acquire language. UG maps out principles that .the child can manipulate in his acquisition of language. Krashen D & Tracy D. (1983)in Finegan (2012: 20) maintains that, if there is sufficient comprehensible language use surrounding a learner the acquisition of a second language, even by an adult, can proceed as effortless and as efficiently as first language acquisition, provided that the affective filter is not blocking the operation of these capacities. The above is in line with Chomsky's position regarding language learning capabilities and process. Chomsky (1988, P.134) posits that "language learning is the process of determining the values of the parameters left unspecified by Universal Grammar". The properties of UG already exist in the child when he sets out to determine values that UG has not specified. The child therefore needs a little positive evidence to help him see the application of a principle and set parameters. The second language learner can also benefit from this process for setting parameters of the grammar. The teacher should provide this evidence in the classroom for learners to set their parameters.

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