PhD Course in Syntactic Theories

- Case Grammar

- Tagmemic Grammar

- Constraints, Universals, and Acquisition

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Case Grammar

Introduction

The word case is from the Latin "casus" which means a "falling". The old grammarians regarded the nominative as the upright case and all the others as falling from that. In Latin, the role of words in a sentence or the word relationship with others is reflected by the change of suffix forms. These specific suffix forms are given a specific meaning. We call this particular mode as case of a word.

In the twentieth century, case grammar has become very popular because it can account for linguistic structures that can not be accounted for by traditional, structural and transformational grammars. This is due to the fact that this theory deals with sentences without losing sight of the interaction of syntactic and semantic valency. In addition, it presents a set of semantic cases (such as agent, experience, instrumental, patient, etc.) that replace traditional labels (such as subject, object, complement.etc.).

Thus, case grammar is an approach to grammatical analysis devised by the American linguist Charles Fillmore in the late 1960s, within the general orientation of generative grammar. It is primarily a reaction against the standard theory analysis of sentences, where notions such as subject, object…etc are neglected in favor of analyses in terms of NP, VP etc.

In fact there is no unified theory of case grammar. Fillmore himself has come up with a series of versions.

Different Views of Case Grammar

1-The Traditional Case Grammar

The traditional notion of case grammar backs to Latin. According to the traditional grammarians, case is the most important inflectional categories of the noun. Traditional grammar is interested in the morphological inflections on nouns and base on this, different case forms were identified.

English language does not show any morphological inflection on their noun to distinguish the different syntactic functions. However, based on the use or absence of a preposition as well as the word order, the traditional case grammar is applied to English language. Then, there are six roles of traditional case grammar in English

1-Nominative: is the doer of the action. It is usually the subject of the sentence.
e.g. The girl killed a snake.
2-Accusative: is the acceptor of the action, usually the case of direct object.
e.g. The snake bite the girl.
3-Dative: is the case of indirect object.
e.g. The doctor gave the girl some drug.
4-Vocative: is used to name a person, an animal or an object.
e.g. john, come here.
5- Ablative: is used to express instrumental, method, concomitant.
e.g. I saw the kid with the girl.
6-Genetive: is case of the attribute. e.g. the girl's bag is missing.
According to Fillmore, the verb is termed as pivotal.

However, it has been argued that the traditional notion of case can be extended to many languages, although there are some kinds of objection against this. For example, Fillmore (1968), observes that looking for man's case system in another man's language is not of course a good example of the study of the case". So the number of case markers varies from language to language, for instance, there are two cases in French and three in Arabic.

2-Case in Generative Grammar

Chomsky (1957:1965) developed a system of rules for generating infinite number of sentences in a language. This system of grammatical analysis is referred to as generative grammar. Within this framework, the idea that case can be

extended to languages without morphological inflections on their nouns is incorporated. In the version of generative grammar developed in Chomsky (1965) popularly known as Standard Theory or Aspects model, case is seen as a surface structure phenomenon and not present in the deep structure at all. It is merely the surface realization of particular syntactic relationships. These surface realizations include: noun inflections, prepositions, constraint on word order, etc. These surface reflexes are introduced by rules of various kinds of deep and surface syntactic relationships. Let us take for example the English pronominal system that is morphological marked for case. The case form of pronoun is dependent on its surface syntactic relation. In other words, case form is assumed after transformation has taken place. Compare the two forms below:

(a) John killed him.

(b) He was killed by John.

The two structures above are semantically similar. 'He' in (b) takes the nominative case due to the passive transformation which has moved the pronoun from its base position as the complement of the verb to the subject position.

This shows that case, according to the Aspects model is structurally assigned at the surface structure by means of prepositions, affixes, constraints on word order etc.

3-Fillmore's Case Grammar

Case grammar was developed in the late 1960s by Charles Fillmore (1966, 1968, 1969,1971 ,1971), who saw it as a 'substantive modification to the theory of transformational grammar' (Fillmore, 1968, p.21), as represented by, for instance, Chomsky (1965). The latter model was unable to account for the functions of clause items as well as for their categories; it did not show, for instance, that expressions like in the room, towards the moon, on the next day, in a careless way, with a sharp knife, and by my brother, which are of the category prepositional phrase, simultaneously indicate the functions, location, direction, time, manner, instrument, and agent respectively .Fillmore suggested that this problem would be solved if the underlying syntactic structure of prepositional phrases were analysed as a sequence of a noun phrase and an associated prepositional case-marker, both dominated by a case symbol indicating the thematic role of that prepositional phrase (Newmeyer, 1986, p. 103), and that, in fact, every element of a clause which has a thematic role to play should be analysed in terms of case markers and case symbols.

For Fillmore (1968), a sentence consisted of a "proposition," the tenseless set of verb-case relationships, and a "modality" constituent consisting of such items as negation, tense, mood, and aspect.

Case roles which identified by Fillmore are as follows:

1- Agentive(A)
2- Instrumental(I)
3- Dative(D)
4- Factive(F)
5- Locative(L)
6- Objective(O)

As far as subject hierarchy in English is concerned, case grammarians agree on the fact that if there is an agentive in a sentence, it is obviously the subject. If there is no agentive but there is an experienced this becomes the subject. If there is no agentive or experiencer but there is an instrumental, this instrumental becomes the subject. Finally, if there is no agentive, experiencer or instrumental, an objective or locative becomes the subject of the sentence. In short, the subject selection hierarchy is as follows:

(1) agentive;
(2) experiencer;
(3) instrumental;
(4) objective, and
(5) locative.

Concerning the direct object choice hierarchies, Nilsen (1973:39), after a deep investigation, goes as far as to combine the hierarchies of Stockwell, Lambert and Fillmore to form a composite picture which reads as follows :

(1) objective;
(2) locative;
(3) experiencer;
(4) goal;
(5) instrumental, and
(6) agentive.

Components of Fillmore's Case Grammar

Charles Fillmore (1968) proposed that the deep structure of any sentence consists of a **MODALITY** (similar to the Aux. constituent in Transformational Grammar) and a **PROPOSITION**. The latter consists of a verb and a sequence of one or more case roles, each of which is realized as a case marker (preposition, postposition, or case affix) and a noun phrase.

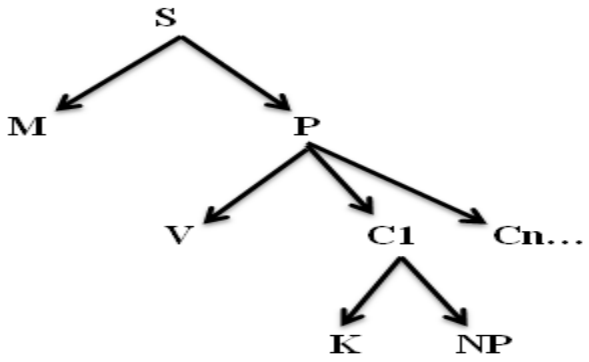

Figure (1) Fillmore's Case Grammar

Examples:

The door opened.

The key opened the door.

The boy opened the door.

The door was opened by the boy.

The boy opened the door with a key.

"The door" in the first sentence is the subject. But to our knowledge, the door can't open itself. It's opened by the people. So according to case grammar, "the door" is the affected substance of the action. We may call it the objective case. The same goes to "the key" in the second sentence. "The key" in the second sentence is the subject. However, the key can't open the door by itself. It is the people who use the key to open the door. So the key is an instrument with which people can carry out an action. Here, we call the key instrumental case on the basis of case grammar. "The boy", obviously, it is the issuer of the action. Without any doubt, it is the agentive case. The fourth and fifth sentences can let people have a clear understanding of the relationship between the verbs "open" and the rest nouns "the door", "the key" and "the door". That is to say, no matter what the three nouns are in grammar structure or no matter whether the sentence is active voice or passive voice, from the angle of semantics, "the boy" is always the issuer of the action "open"; "the door" is always the object of the action "open"; "the key" is always

the instrumental of action “open”. Therefore, in the scope of case grammar, these nouns each belong to a particular kind of case. From above, we can see that this kind of case in deep structure can not be compared with neither subject or object in surface structure nor cases of inflectional surface structure.

The case is determined by the semantic relations. To some extent, it has some relationships with the grammar, but the relation is not strictly correspondent. Fillmore advocated the concept of traditional case be divided into two parts: form and meaning. The morphology studies the variation of inflectional forms, such as adding “-s” or “-ed”. The case grammar studies the meaning of cases, which is the syntactic - semantic relation in the deep structure of the sentences. The form of the case differs from language to language, but the case relationship is the same.

Semantic classifications in general seem to be very useful for learners of foreign languages because they codify their intuitions in the generation of sentences and texts. For example, the verb 'break' may occur in different case frames such as:
+ [_____ 0] + [_____ A,0] + [_____ I,0] + [_____ A, I, O] but it is said to have a single conflated case frame: + [_____ (A), (I), 0] in which agentive and instrumental are optional and objective is obligatory.

Problems of Case Grammar

Just like any other grammatical model, case grammar has met some problems:
First, there is no agreement among case grammarians on the number of cases identifiable in human language and how they should be defined.
Second, case grammar involves the use of different verbs. With SEE the subject is not an agent - he does not 'act', whereas with LOOK AT he takes positive action. We may, therefore, argue that the NPs with SEE are experiencer and objective, but with LOOK AT agentive and objective as in:
The man saw the dog.
The man looked at the dog.
Third, Fillmore's case theory requires a deep structure that incorporates more directly semantic information. But such a deep structure cannot be purely syntactic, as Chomsky maintained it should be.
Fourth, to some degree Fillmore's arguments are not valid. Verbs like OPEN and BREAK is elated in a way very like that of active and passive. Why should they not be handled in terms of transformations and deep structures? A partial answer is

that this kind of relationship holds only for a small number of lexical items. It does not hold, for instance, for HIT:
The boy hit the girl with a stick.
The stick hit the girl.
*The girl hit.

That notwithstanding, case grammar could not account for certain NPs associated with verbs. Fillmore himself noted towards the end of his work (Fillmore (1968)), that his proposed model (case grammar) could not adequately account for the so called 'cognate NPs'.
e.g. He sang a song.

Tagmemic Grammar

The word tagmemics is originally derived from the word "tagmeme". It comes from the Greek word tagma meaning "arrangement".

The important role of language in communication has inspired people from generation to generation to learn about it. The need to learn other languages is inevitable when we want to communicate with the native speakers of the language for various purposes such as economic, social, and cultural purposes. This need leads to the development of linguistics, the scientific study of language.

The development of linguistics is also influenced by the Renaissance Era in Europe which results in the revival of various sectors such as architecture, paintings, sculpture, and literature. During this period, the economic and industrial development in Europe was very progressive. The exploration for raw materials in new territories was progressively conducted. The exploration was usually initiated by sending troops to occupy the new territories. If the new territories were successfully occupied, traders would be sent to take care of the economic sectors. When the security, social and economic conditions were conducive enough, the missionaries would be sent to preach Christian religious teachings in the new territories. To ensure successful mission, each missionary was required to master the local language. The mastery of local languages was not only important for missionaries but also for the administrative purposes of the colonial government.

In their efforts to master the local language, the missionaries used traditional grammatical analysis from Greek and Latin. In many cases, this kind of analysis (traditional grammar analysis) turned out to be insufficient and inappropriate. Therefore, they were looking for new approaches which could help them perform

their mission. This situation induced the proliferation of new linguistic approaches and one of them was tagmemic analysis.

Tagmemic analysis offers a comprehensive analytical approach which is worth considering in language analysis. Tagmemic analysis has been successfully used to describe many languages which have not been studied before. A number of Red Indian and African languages have been analyzed using tagmemic analysis. Some vernacular languages in Indonesia have also been analyzed using tagmemic model.

Tagmemic analysis is concerned primarily with the grammatical analysis in which the basic or the smallest grammatical unit is called tagmeme. The term firstly came to be used in the 1930s by the linguist Leonard Bloomfield, who defined it as the smallest meaningful unit of a grammatical form (It is similar to the morpheme, so it is defined as the smallest meaningful unit of lexical form). The term was later adopted, and its meaning become famous , by Kenneth Pike and others, at the beginning of the 1950s. Unlike Structuralism which ignores the functions of a linguistic form and concentrated only on forms, tagmemics integrates the form and the function of a linguistic form together into a linguistic entity.

In Tagmemic, stresses are given to the hierarchical ordering of grammatical units into ranks of levels consisting of morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and discourses. In the process of grammatical analysis, tagmemic always goes in favor of string constituent analysis, and have many cuts. It is different from Immediate Constituent analysis in which grammarians apply binary cuts in their grammatical analysis. Unlike a structural analysis, tagmemic requires identification of functions and categories and not merely their naming. It can be stated that it is a "slot and filler grammar". A slot is a position in a construction string. Meanwhile a filler class is similar with part of speech in traditional grammar like nouns, verbs, adverbs that can fill a slot. But neither the slot nor the filler itself is important, it is the tagmeme which is significant. The slot is the function such as subject, predicate, object, etc. and filler being the category such as nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, etc. A tagmeme, therefore, is the corelation of a slot and the filler class that fills in that slot.

Elements of Tagmeme

Tagmemic theory is based on the concept of tagmeme which is part of a grammatical construction consisting of four different signifying elements i.e. slots, categories, roles, and cohesions:

1.Slot is one of the four tagmeme elements in the form of a position in a grammatical construction frame that must be filled by a function tagmeme element. In the clause construction for example, the function tagmeme elements consist of subject, predicate, object, and adjunct. In other lower levels of grammatical construction frame, the function tagmeme usually consists of nucleus and margin. Slot, therefore, answers the questions of "where does the linguistic unit go in the construction frame?"

2.Category is the manifesting item of a slot which is in the form of linguistic units such as morphems, words, phrases, clauses, aleneas, monologs, dialogues, and discourses. Categories can be further divided into smaller units or sub-categories. Phrases can be divided into noun phrase, and verb phrase and clauses can be classified into transitive, intransitive, and equative clauses. To make it easy, category answers the question of "what kind of linguistic unit is it?"

3.Role is one of the four features of tagmeme which signifies the role of a linguistic unit such as "actor" / "doer" and "undergoer". It answers the questions of "Why is this unit here?", "What is its function?"

4.Cohesion is the last feature of tagmeme which controls inter-tagmeme relation. Cohesion usually deals with transitivity of verbs, case marking, subject verb agreement, and existence (obligatory or optional). It answers the question of "How does this linguistic unit relate to other units and wider context?"

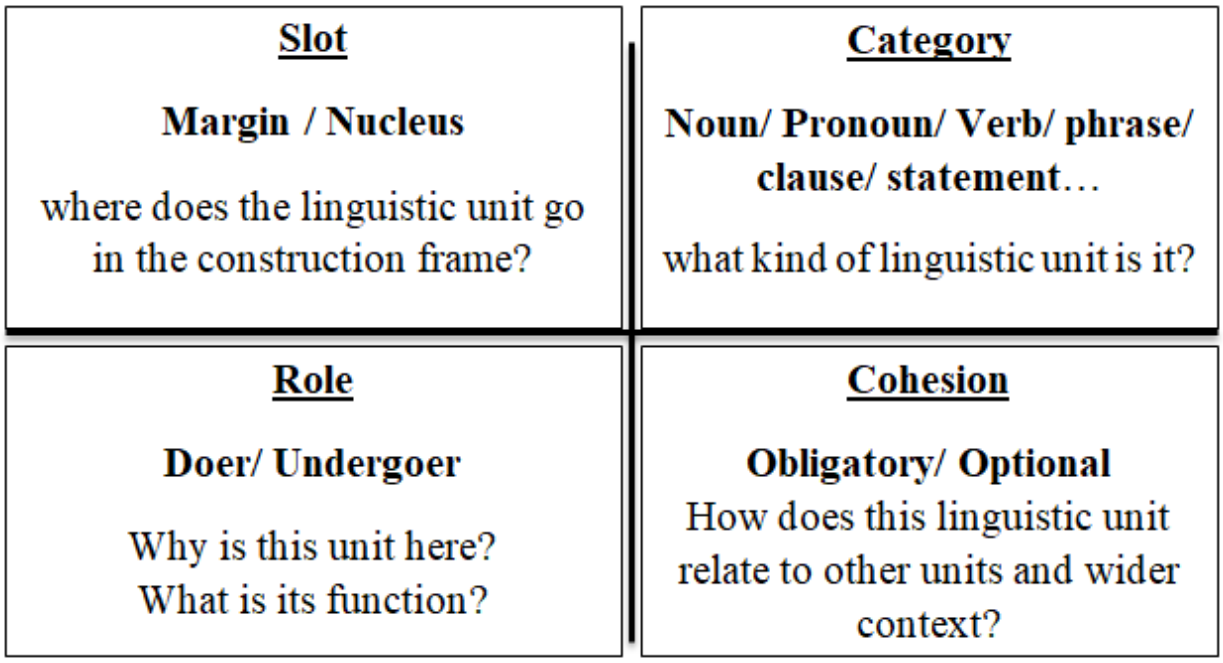

Figure (2) Elements of Tagmeme

Tagmemic Analysis

As tagmemic analysis deals with all levels of grammatical hierarchies, the analysis may result in sentence level tagmemes, clause level tagmemes, phrase level tagmemes, word level tagmemes and morpheme level tagmemes. Cook (1969) summarized the system of tagmemic grammatical levels as clearly shown in the following chart.

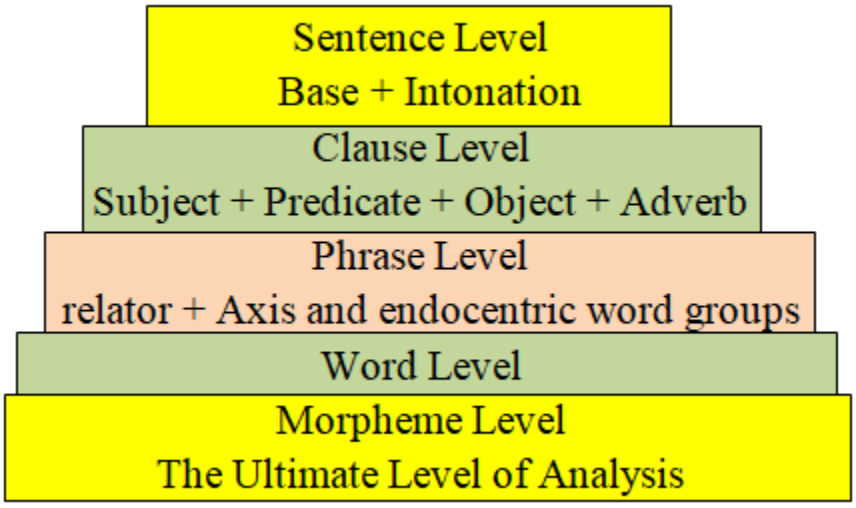

Figure (3) The System of Grammatical Level

In tagmemic analysis, a clause is considered as a syntactic construction built by some tagmas supra-segmental or final intonation contour elements. A tagma is defined as the correlation of function and form. It is also called a tentative tagmeme. Actually tagmas are not only understood as the correlation of function and form but also of semantic filler or role and cohesion. These four features can be clearly seen in the Tagmemic analysis by using a four-celled array in which the first cell is filled by a function, the second one is filled by a category, the third one is filled by a role and the fourth cell is filled by cohesion.

In the first approximation, the analyst cuts the clause according to the slot-class and role correlative or tagmas, and the tagmas are considered as invariant units. Every tagma is thought as if a tagmeme, so every tagmeme has only one allotagma. Tagmas are then grouped as an etic unit of grammar. After initial investigation tagmas that are the same are grouped as allotagmas of one tagmeme and those that are different are grouped into other tagmemes.

These are three rules to decide whether the tagmas are allotagmas of one tagmeme or not:

(1)Tagmas which are different in form but have the same functional meaning or role and the same position in the string are grouped as allotagmas of the same tagmeme. They are listed as the alternate fillers in tagmemic slots, for example:

She writes a letter.

He writes a letter.

John writes a letter.

She, He, and **John** have different forms from each other but they have the same role and position. So they are considered as the allotagmas of one tagmeme i.e. subject tagmeme.

(2) Tagmas that are only different in role or meaning belong to the same tagmeme, although the structural meaning of a tagmeme is the principle identifying feature. Unless the meaning difference is correlated with parallel difference in filler class or position in the string, the tagmemes are grouped as allotagmas of the same tagmeme, examples:

Ali gives a nice present to Ahmed.

Abas is given a nice present by Ahmed.

Huda seems to be happy.

Ali, Abas, and **Huda**, have different roles from each other but they are the same filler class which is mutually substitutable and they have the same position.

Therefore, they can be grouped as the allotagmas of the same tagmeme, which is subject tagmeme.

(3) Tagmas differing in position alone may belong to the same tagmeme, and would then merely positional variants of the same unit. Unless the change of position is correlated with the change of form, the tagmas are considered as variants of one tagmeme, for examples:

You will begin to work next week.

Will you begin to work next week?

You in the first and in the second clause have different positions, but they have the same forms and the same roles. So they can be grouped as the allotagmas of the subject tagmeme.

The correlation of tagmas and allotagmas to tagmemes is similar to that of morphs and allomorphs to morphemes, also with that of phones to allophones and phonemes. In order words, it can be stated that a tagma is preliminary form of a tagmeme, whereas an allotagma is a member of the same tagmeme after the initial investigation. In tagmemic analysis, tagmeme is the smallest unit of grammar.

Constraints, universals, and acquisition

One of the greatest linguists of all time, Noam Chomsky asserts that language is innate . He wrote his famous book , "Language and Mind " in 1972, in which he proposed his famous theories on language acquisition . in this book Chomsky wrote, "when we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the " human essence " the distinctive qualities of mind that are , so far we know , unique to man. According to Chomsky, language is one characteristic that is unique to humans among all other living beings . Chomsky's theories have made it easier to understand the evolution and development of the languages .

Chomsky's theories on language are based upon the importance of linguistics in modern sciences. According to him , to study languages , it is important study human nature that lies in human mind.

1- Level of adequacy

A grammar is a model of the grammatical competence of the native of a language . It comprises a finite system of rules which generate (i.e. specify how to form ,interpret , and pronounce) the infinite set of well form sentence-structures in the

language . Accordingly ,the task of the linguist devising a particular grammar is to formulate a finite system of Rules of sentence formation , interpretation , and pronunciation that will generate the infinite set of well-formed sentences in the language .

One theoretical question is how to know whether the grammar we propose for a particular language is adequate or not .Chomsky has proposed a number of ***criteria of adequacy*** for grammars (and for the linguistic theories associated with them).

1.1.Observational adequacy

A grammar of a language is observation on adequate if it correctly specifies which sentences are (and are not)syntactically , semantically, morphologically and phonologically well-formed in the language .

1.2.Descriptive adequacy

A grammar of a language is observationally adequate if it correctly specifies which sentences are (and are not) syntactically , semantically , morphologically and phonologically well-formed in the language, and also properly describes the syntactic , semantic ,morphological and phonological structure of the sentences in the language in such a way as to provide a principled account of the native speaker's intuitions about this structure .

1.3.Explanatory adequacy

A linguistic theory attains explanatory adequacy just in case it provides a descriptively adequate grammar for every natural language , and does so in term of a maximally constrained set of universal principles which represent psychologically plausible natural principles of mental computation .

Criteria (conditions) used to judge the adequacy of a linguistic theory.

1-Universality

The theory should provide us with a powerful enough theoretical apparatus to enable us to describe the grammar of any natural language adequately.

2-Maximally constrained

The theory should provide us with technical devices which are so restricted in their expressive power that they can only be used to describe human languages , and are

not appropriate for the description of other communication system .Any such a constrained (i.e. restricted) theory would then enable us to characterize the very essence of human language

3-Psychological reality

We recall Chomsky's claim that our reason for studying language is that language is a mirror of the mind , so that by analyzing language we hope to learn something about the way the mind produces and processes language .

Thus, to attain explanatory adequacy a theory must in effect be ***universally valid***, ***psychologically real*** , and ***maximally constrained*** .

2-Constraining Grammar

We have seen that for a linguistic theory to achieve explanatory adequacy it must be maximally constrained . But what does it mean for a linguistic Theory to be constrained ? And why should a theory have to be constrained in any case?

To understand this, let's look at the problems associated with the alternative – namely, a totally unconstrained theory . In such a theory, where no constraints are put on what could be a possible syntactic rules of some grammar of some language ,there would be no reason to expect to find some language whose grammar contained a syntactic rule along the lines of :

(1) invert any word beginning with /p/ with any word meaning tree or car on Sundays after 6p.m. in a leap year .

And yet no linguistic describing any language has ever proposed any syntactic rule even remotely resembling the rule above. And in fact all of us would agree that we would want to rule out this rule as an impossible rule in any grammar of any language .But this amounts to saying that we want to **constrain** our theory in such a way as to ban rules like this role as universally impossible.

But what's wrong with this rule – i.e. how can you constrain our theory so as to ban such rules ? One obvious thing that seems to be wrong with this rule is that here we have a syntactic rule whose application depends on pragmatic information (in this case information about date and time when a sentence is uttered) . So one way of banning rules like this would be to build into our linguistic theory the following constraint :

(2) no syntactic rules can make reference to pragmatic information However, condition (2) is not strong enough , since it would not preclude absurd rules like:

(3) invert any word beginning with /p/ with any word meaning three or car How can we rule out (3) ? One possibility would be to suggest a constraint along the lines of :

(4)no syntactic rule can make reference to phonological information but even (4) would fail to rule out intuitively implausible rules like :

(5) invert any word meaning tree with any word meaning car

How can we ban (5) as an impossible rule? One answer would be in terms of a constraint along the lines of :

(6) no syntactic rule can make reference to semantic information

Conflating the three constrains (2),(4), and (6)gives us :

AUTONOMOUS SYNTAX PRINCIPLE

(7) no syntactic rule can make reference to semantic information

And this returns us by another route to Chomsky's affirmation of the mutual autonomy (i.e. independence) of syntax , pragmatics ,phonology, and semantics .

3-Constraints ,universals, and acquisition:

Even if the idea of constraining and family also is relatively easy to understand , we might still ask why is it important to do so. Chomsky's answer is that only a maximally constrained theory of language can lead to the development of an adequate theory of **language acquisition** .That is, he argues that we can only explain the phenomenon of languages acquisition in children if we assume that grammars contain a highly constrained set of principles , and that the child is born with "language faculty" which innately endows him the knowledge of what these principles are which innately endows him with the knowledge of what these principles are which determines the nature of "possible " "impossible " linguistic rules and structures .

So how does the child devise an appropriate set of rules ? Chomsky's answer is that the child must have genetic help in the sense that he is born (i.e. genetically endowed) with some Language Acquisition Device (LAD) or Language Faculty which provides an abstract specification of the range of possible and impossible rules and structures in natural language .

But if humans are genetically pre-programmed with a Language Faculty which provides some blueprint of the range of possible grammars of natural languages , how can we determine just what kind of linguistic information might be contained

in that "genetic blueprint " ? Chomsky argues that the key to this question lies in the study of Universal Grammar (UG) i.e. in the search for linguistic universal . For , if there are genetic constrains on the form of grammars of natural languages, then we should expect that all languages will share certain universal properties in common – properties determined by these genetic constrains . Hence ,if we discover abstract universal properties of language which cannot plausibly be accounted for in other terms , it seems reasonable (in Chomsky's view) to conclude that these universals must be part of the innate , biologically endowed language acquisition device that the child is born with . But if the child is born with an innate knowledge of universals, then clearly those properties of language which are universal (and hence innate)do not have to be acquired by the child , the child's acquisition task is reduced to that of mastering the idiosyncratic , language –particular properties of the target language, on the basis of his linguistic experience (i.e. on the basis of the speech he hears around him).Thus the answer to the question of how language is acquired.

"is given by the specification of UG along with an account of the ways in which its principles interact with experience to yield a particular language: UG is a theory of the "initial state" of the language faculty, prior to handling experience"

(Chomsky, knowledge (1986),pp.3-4)

This position of the child has an innate knowledge of Universal Grammar (UG) is popularly known as the Innateness Hypothesis. Chomsky's belief in this hypothesis) and in an internet connection between UG and the biologically endowed (LAD) has been consistently reaffirmed over the years, as the following quotation illustrates:

"UG may be regarded as a characterization of the genetically determined Language Faculty" One may think of this faculty as a language acquisition device, an innate component of the human mind that yields a particular language through interaction with presented experience, a device that converts experience into a system of knowledge attained: knowledge of one or other language "

(Chomsky, knowledge (1986, p.3)

To summarize: on the basis of a detailed study of particular grammars, the linguist hypothesizes a set of linguistic universals which forms the basis of his proposed theory of language. This theory of language in term constitutes an essential subpart of the theory of language acquisition that Chomsky seeks to develop . Universals provide the key to understanding language acquisition since – Chomsky's view –

only if we hypothesize that the child has innate knowledge of these universals can we account for the rapidity of language acquisition .Universals also provide the key to explanation since (according to Chomsky) explanation can only proceed from universal (and hence hypothesized –to-be innate) principles .

3.1. Types of Universals

Chomsky distinguishes two types of universal:

1-absolute universals

(sometimes referred to as non-statistical universals) An absolute universal is a property which all languages share without an exception : for example , Chomsky would claim that the structure dependence principle is an absolute universal.

2- relative universals

(sometimes referred to as statistical universals) By contrast, a relative universal represent a general tendency in language , but one which has some exceptions, for example :

Consistent serialization principle :

Languages tend to place modifying elements either consistently before or consistently after modified elements (or heads)

(note :serialization means ordering of "words and phrases ")

However, although the Consistent Serialization Principle represents a general word order tendency in natural languages ,it has numerous exceptions: there are some mixed languages which position some modifiers before and others after their head Noun . Hence ,it is clear that this principle cannot be an absolute universal, but rather (at best)a relative universal .

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