

Grammar Debate after the Emergence of Modern Linguistics

Abstract

This paper highlights the grammar debate at philosophical level after the emergence of modern linguistics. The Nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of new revolutionary ideas and philosophies that brought in a change in the very perspective of grammar studies. Languages and then grammatical rules started to be freshly defined and categorized. Though by the Nineteenth century many, books pertaining to grammar had been developed, Ferdinand de Saussure came up with his new concepts about language and its structure. His concepts of 'langue' and 'parole', 'synchornic' and 'diachronic' and 'syntagmatic' and 'paradigmatic' introduced a new outlook to grammar studies and attracted many followers. The idea of 'structuralism' propounded by de Saussure was later extended by Bloomfield and Chomsky. Though they followed the structural school, they also came up with their original and philosophical points of views about language and grammar.

Keywords: Modern Linguistics, Nineteen Century, Philosophic Grammar, Structuralism, Psyche, Competence and Performance, Neo-Grammarians, Communicative Grammar.

Introduction

The origin of Modern Grammar linguistics has its deep root into the long western tradition of grammar studies, starting with the Greek and later expanding over the Roman and European countries. That is, it was the Greek language which was first attempted to be described to decipher its rules; following this tradition the Romans analyzed the Latin language which was later applied to other European languages. Philosophically/conceptually it was mainly the Greek thoughts which were extended/ continued all through. It was only in the 18th – 19th century that the old Greek – Latin tradition was remoulded in the light of the discovery of the Indian tradition and the trends of comparative and historical linguistics of the 19th century.

The emergence of the Neo-grammarians, who gave the scientific basis to historical linguistics premised on more and more data collection from actual languages, besides a series of historical events and previous trends in grammar studies that were carried over to the 20th century. What we call modern grammar is the gift of philosophy propounded by such great masters of the 1st half of the 20th century as De Saussure, Edward Sapir, Trubetzkoy, Bloomfield and Jakobson.

The most important change that was brought by these linguists was the introduction of descriptive linguistics as opposed to historical linguistics. The most significant figure who provided the philosophical change in the outlook from the 19th to the 20th century was Ferdinand De Saussure. The lecture notes collected and published by his students in 1916 as *Cours de-Linguistique Generale* revolutionized the whole scenario. Some of the basic concepts that De Saussure has put forth are as follows:

Aim of the Study

In this paper an attempt has been made to track the major shifts in grammar over the centuries at the philosophical level. It was observed that the grammarians, rhetoricians and the philosophers in the initial phase of grammar studies in the ancient Greece argued, discussed and debated on the issues pertaining to origin of language and its scope. The Greeks looked at language as a part of logic and philosophy and mainly propagated to maintain the sanctity and purity of the language. The Nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of new revolutionary ideas and philosophies that brought in a change in the very perspective of grammar studies. Languages and then grammatical rules started to be freshly defined and categorized. Though by the Nineteenth century many, books pertaining to grammar had been developed.

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The Synchronic and Diachronic Study of Language

The synchronic study of language means the study of linguistic system in a particular state, at a point of time whereas diachronic study of language refers to the evolution of language over a period of time. Robins (1997:224) elaborates synchronic linguistics by considering language as a self-contained system of communication at any particular time; and diachronic in which the changes to which languages are subject in the course of time are treated historically. The above dichotomy provides "Particularly accurate information about language in its current usage"¹ (Wilkins, 1985:24)

Synchronic linguistics, therefore, enables us to study how a language behaves at a given time regardless of its past history. This has also been called "Descriptive Linguistics". However, Hockett (1958:303) claims:

Descriptive and historical linguistics as two separate compartments, each bit of information belonging exclusively in the one or in the other. There are certain matters at a given time and also in connection with linguistics change.²

Langue and Parole

Langue refers to the knowledge of the code of the language or the ability that one possesses at the mental level to express in speech and writing. It is in a way institutionalized, community's collective consciousness that every member of the community shares. It is because of this, that the majority of the members share the common properties of speech. Wilkins (1985: 33) says that

Langue by definition, is stable and systematic, society conveys the regulations of *langue*, to the child so that he becomes able to function as a member of the speech community.³

Langue thus is the general capacity that distinguishes man from the animals. It in a way refers to the language structure which consists of vocabulary, grammar, idioms, rules of pronunciation, etc.

Parole, by contrast, refers, to the actual use of the knowledge of the code of the language. That means parole is active and denotes the actual speech behaviour of the individual, not collective, momentary, not stable, and heterogeneous speech behaviour. That means parole refers to the language, both speaking and writing used in context. This distinction by de Saussure provides a paradigm for the structuralist model of linguistics.

Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic

On the lines of opposing pairings like synchronic-diachronic and langue-parole, de Saussure has put forward the concept of Syntagmatic and paradigmatic. These terms refer to the sign system or the structural relationship between the signs.

The word 'syntagm' means to form a word or group of words with the help of morphemes. For example, 're' + 'charge' → 'recharge'. While forming a

phrase, a clause and a sentence too, we need to combine the series of words.

For example, The + bus + is + moving + now.

Words form a sentence, because they are linked together so we say that this is a Syntagmatic relationship. It is a linear arrangement of words, in the sentence "The bus is moving now." It has many segments and each has its own importance, a relationship. 'The' is correlated with 'bus' and 'bus' with the word 'moving' is correlated with the time 'now'. The helping verb 'is' joined two words like 'the bus' and 'moving now'.

The relationship between phoneme as well as words are restricted to certain orders. So, "moving now"; is not a sentence.

Saussure (1959:123) Claims:

In the syntagm a term acquires its value because it stands in opposition to everything that precedes or follows it, or to both.⁴

In the sentence 'the bus is moving now' each word has its own place and relation with the anaphoric and cataphoric relation. For example 'the' is not what 'bus' is, 'is' is not what 'moving' is, not what 'now' is. Each of these words differ from all others. De Saussure (1959:123) distinguishes 'paradigmatic' and its relationship.

The paradigmatic relationships are contrastive or choice relationships. Words that have something in common, are associated in the memory, resulting in groups marked by diverse relations. For example, the English word **Learning** will unconsciously call to mind a host of other words – study, knowledge, discipline, etc. all these words are, related in some way. This kind of relationship is called associative or paradigmatic relationship. Here the co-ordinations are outside discourse, and are not supported by linearity. They are relations in absentia and are vertical type relations. Their seat is in the brain; they are the part of the inner storehouse that makes up language of each speaker.⁵

The above discussed concepts in general as propounded by De Saussure and his statement of the structural approach to the language in particular underlies the very concept of modern linguistics. With De Saussure's concept linguistics emerged as an independent science and a chain of linguists like Sir William Jones, Henry Sweet, Daniel Jones, Trubetzkoy and Prague School applied de Saussure's theories regarding phonemes. The American linguists like Franz Boas, Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield mainly followed Saussure's concept of descriptive linguistics in the first half of the 20th century. This was mainly under the spell of de Saussure's concepts of descriptive linguistics premised on the idea of structuralism in language as propounded by de Saussure.

The second half of the 20th century is popularly known as the era of Transformational-Generative Grammar, which is supposed to have started with the publication of Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* in the year 1957. Some historical linguists considered the year 1959 as the turning point when, Chomsky declared the behaviouristic approach of the Bloomfieldian school as unacceptable. Chomsky actually had refuted the whole philosophical basis of the Bloomfieldian theory. Therefore, Chomsky introduced the concept of Transformational – Generative Grammar. This concept emerged as oppose to Bloomfield concept of Immediate Constituent as a model of Analysis of human language. He branded ICs (Immediate Constituent Analysis) as an ineffective means for the grammatical description of sentence structures. Here in order to understand the grammar debate at philosophical level in the 20th century, it becomes crucial to discuss the philosophies/concepts pertaining to structuralism as propounded by Noam Chomsky and his predecessors, especially Bloomfield.

Structuralism basically refers to an approach to the study of language which considers a language to be primarily the system of relations, i.e., the place of every element in language (speech sound, words etc.) is defined by the way it relates to other elements in the language. (IGNOU, 2002:23, MEG-4, Block -1)

Bernar Block, Robert A. Hall, Harris and others of the *Yale School* of American linguist worked under the influence of Bloomfield. The Bloomfieldian linguists practiced I.C. Analysis as a tool for understanding the syntactic structure.

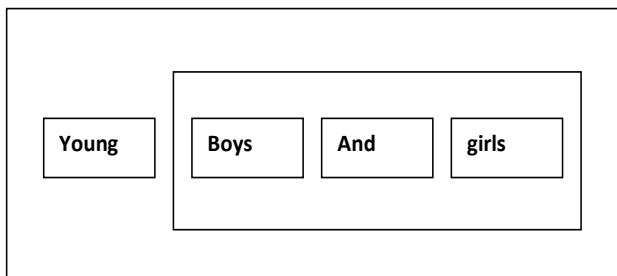
Immediate Constituent Analysis

In order to find out the structure of linguistic units one can apply the scheme of IC analysis, where an utterance is repeatedly divided and subdivided into two parts until one arrives at the minimal elements. Thus, one arrives at the Immediate Constituents of the utterance, but one does not label them. The phrase 'young boys and girls' can be represented as follows:

“Young boys and girls”

I.C. Analysis (1st Meaning: Young boys and young girls)

Fig. 1. I.C. Analysis (1st Meaning: Young Boys and Young Girls)



IGNOU, 2002: 24, Block-1, *Aspects of Language*) 6
In view of the above limitations, Chomsky gave the concept of Phrase Structure Rules (P.S. Rules). He believed that I.C. Analysis is confined to the analysis of the sentences at surface level only.

Hence in order to meet the challenges at deeper level, he initiated the Phrase Structure.

Phrase Structure Rules

Ramjiwale (1999:190) defines it as: Phrase structure rules or grammar considers sentence as linear sequence of elements. The aim is to identify these elements for their functions and class them appropriately. This is, therefore, better viewed as an alternative system to the IC analysis⁷

Noam Chomsky, an American linguist brought a revolution in the field of grammar as well as in Modern Linguistics. Chomsky rejected the earlier theories/concepts mainly

Because it could not explain the speaker's ability to produce and understand new utterances. This kind of descriptions, which phrase structure grammars provided, were identical to the Post-Bloomfieldian's procedures (resembling IC analysis).⁸

(IGNOU-MEG-4, Aspects of Language, Block-1: 28)

In *Syntactic Structures* (1957) Chomsky presented three models of grammar, such as Finite State Grammar, Phrase Structure Rules/Grammar, and Generative Grammar. The Finite State Grammar is the most basic and elementary and is full of inadequacies, the Phrase Structure Grammar/Rules takes us a long way in removing these shortcomings. The Generative Model is an extension of the PSG with an addition of more complex types of rules". 9 (Ramjiwale, 1999:190).

The phrase structure grammar as developed by Chomsky includes the following rules:

Symbol: S = sentence, NP = Noun Phrase, VG = Verb Gerund

This new concept of transformation encourages all the formal approaches such as Transformational-Generative Grammar.

Transformational-Generative Grammar

This term, propounded by Chomsky, is best explained by Gleason (1965:58):

The key word here is "generate". Because of this one common designation for the approach is "Generative Grammar". It is also referred to as "Transformational Grammar". Neither is entirely satisfactory. It is easily possible to prepare grammars which used transformations, but which are not all generative. Moreover, grammars can be generative without the use of transformations. The best term, therefore, for a grammar of the kind advocated by Chomsky is "transformational-generative grammar."¹⁰

Transformational-Generative Grammar replaced the old concept as propagated by its predecessors and presented a device to use for the analysis of a language and its grammatical systems.

Chomsky who did not reject all the previous methods and the structuralist's view, but he pointed out the weaknesses of the ICs as well as other rules to analyse language. Transformational-Generative Grammar has mentioned the Phrase Structure Rules and others which offered transformational rules, Transformational-Generative Grammar is the combination of two theoretical aspects: one is 'transformational' and the other is 'generative'.

The term 'generative grammar' points out the set of rules which state different types of language systems.

(Lyons J. 2002:125-126) states as:

The term 'generate' in the definition, is to be understood in exactly the sense in which it is used in Mathematics....The important point that 'generate', in this, does not relate to any process of sentence-production in real time by speakers (or machines). A generative grammar is a mathematically precise specification of the grammatical structure of the sentences that it generates.¹¹

The main motto behind the formulation of the rules step by step is to provide an easiest way to form many sentences. This kind of generative notion helped those who are not perfect in the language; the

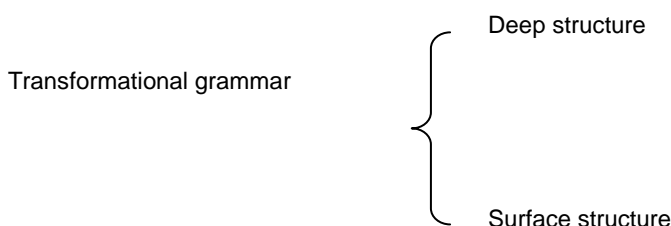
grammar which was concerned with the possible sentences not possible with all actual users of sentences. This was only concerned with the finite set of sentences. Later on this kind of notion gave birth to the 'recursion' that helped too much to form the infinite set of sentences whenever it has finite number of rules.

This refers to another important concept as propounded by Chomsky.

Deep structure and surface structure

Chomsky stressed on (cited in Ramjiwale, 1999:204)

The notion that a sentence has a *deep structure* and a *surface structure*. There was no need now for considering the difference between obligatory and optional transformations. We rather see that transformations map the deep structures on the surface structures. Syntax is thus seen as the creative aspect of language, has two broad parts – the rules of the based and the transformations. The deep structure, which is concerned with meaning, is produced by the base 'component' while the transformational component converts it into surface structures.¹²



C
O
M
P
O
N
E
N
T
S

Deep Structure

Denotes meaning

Surface Structure

Shows order of the word and has indirect relations of grammar.

Competence and Performance

On the lines of de Sassure who gave the concept of 'langue' and 'parole', Chomsky looked at language as constituted of 'competence' and 'performance'

He believes that "competence" is Native speaker's knowledge of the language which he/she has in his/her mind, while on the other hand "performance" is the application of the knowledge of the rules in the actual language use. So the native speakers special knowledge of structure and rules of language is known as 'linguistic competence' and the style of the speakers in different situation is called 'linguistic performance'.

Competence is the specialization of speakers while whatever he/she performs in different real life contexts is his performance.

Communicative Grammar

The emergence of sociolinguistics along with the theories of functions and notions of language and the concept of communicative competence (Dell Hymes) collaborated to shape new approach to grammar, which is popularly known as communicative grammar. Those who believed in communicative grammar has a fresh definition and approach to language. Language for centuries has been perceived as "A set of rules", "A system of systems", oppose to this the linguists came to believe that language is a means of communication. Hence they refused to believed that language is constituted of grammar items only. As a consequence such aspects of language as authentic language use appropriacy, acceptability, intelligibility, notions, intentions, and functions became more valid and replaced the aspect of correctibility/incorrectibility by acceptability and unacceptability. Language is looked at a social behaviour where both linguistic and para-linguistic features are to be taken care of communicative grammar, therefore was developed for the ultimate goal of communication with native speakers of the second language, centering on speaking and listening

skills, on writing for specific purposes and on authentic reading texts.

The most guiding philosophy behind the above change in approach to language was the concept of communicative competence as propounded by Dell Hymes (1967, 1972), a sociolinguistics who believed that Chomsky's notion of linguistics of competence "was too limited" (Brown 1987:198). States:

In the 1970s research on communicative competence distinguished between *linguistic* and *communicative* competence (Hymes 1967, Paulston 1974) to highlight the difference between knowledge "about" language rules and forms and knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively.¹³

(Brown 1987:199).

Even James Conings (1979, 1980) propose a distinction between cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS). Here while CALP refers to the formal aspect of language, BICS focuses on the communicative capacity that one needs to communicate for everyday interpersonal exchanges. Canal and Swain (1980) identified four components that constitute the construct of communicative competence, where as the first two reflect the use of the linguistics system, the other two defined the more functional aspects of communication.

The above discussion on the concept of communicative grammar and its off-shoots in the form of discourse analysis and pragmatics is sufficient enough to suggest that approach to language/grammar in the second half of the 20th century witnessed a major shift in the place, scope, role, attitude, and output of grammar at the philosophical level

Conclusion

In this paper an attempt has been made to track the major shifts in grammar over the centuries at the philosophical level. It was observed that the grammarians, rhetoricians and the philosophers in the initial phase of grammar studies in the ancient Greece argued, discussed and debated on the issues pertaining to origin of language and its scope. The Greeks looked at language as a part of logic and philosophy and mainly propagated to maintain the sanctity and purity of the language. This was tools of all the classical languages. The aspect of irregularity in language came only later. They also debated for long on language being a part of nature or as an entity governed by conventions. The Greeks are known for deciphering the grammatical rules of their language on the basis of the rhetorician text of their time.

The philosophies, concepts, propositions and the grammar rules of their language were continued to be discussed and debated by the Romans. The grammar studies were formalized by the Romans for their practical purposes specially teaching of the Latin language. With due course of the time grammar was considered to the part of rhetoric and was on timed

until the end of the medieval age of Europe when renaissance arrived and various vernacular language of Europe started emerging as at local levels. But Latin dominated the European countries for centuries as the language of the Church. By 17th and 18th century Britain emerged as imperial with the expansion of the English language power with its great literary tradition, over its glories for various Administrative and business purposes. Looking these historical perspectives one can easily realized that the development of grammar studies of the vernacular languages of Europe, including English, was developed under the influence of the Latin models. The concepts of IC, Analysis, Phrase Structure and Transformational-Generative Grammar are some major contributions.

Then, there came the group of linguistics and grammarian who did not look at language merely as a set of rules rather than they came to believe that languages has to perform certain roles, function in the society. Hence the concept of linguistic competence as propounded by Chomsky was extended by Dell Hymes in the name of communicative competence which was supported and strengthened by the list of language functions provided by Halliday and such other theories as Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics.

The Nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of new revolutionary ideas and philosophies that brought in a change in the very perspective of grammar studies. Languages and then grammatical rules started to be freshly defined and categorized. Though by the Nineteenth century many, books pertaining to grammar had been developed, Ferdinand de saussure came up with his new concepts about language and its structure. His concepts of 'langue' and 'parole', 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' and 'syntagmatic' and 'paradigmatic' introduced a new outlook to grammar studies and attracted many followers. The idea of 'structuralism' propounded by de Saussure was later extended by Bloomfield and Chomsky. Though they followed the structural school, they also came up with their original and philosophical points of views about language and grammar.

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