

1 Introduction

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What is pedagogical grammar?

Although it could cover more areas, the term *pedagogical grammar* usually denotes the types of grammatical analysis and instruction designed for the needs of second language students. The unique character of this analysis and instruction may be difficult to see without also seeing how pedagogical grammar is related to other conceptions of grammar. Numerous conceptions have been proposed, as the article by Westney in this volume shows. However, a fourfold distinction can illuminate contrasts especially important for an understanding of the place of pedagogical grammar: grammar as prescription, grammar as description, grammar as an internalized system, and grammar as an axiomatic system.

Grammar as prescription

To most people, the term *grammar* suggests dos and don'ts. "Make sure that your verbs agree with their subjects." "Never use *me* as the subject of a sentence." These and other rules codify many of the distinctions between standard and nonstandard varieties of a language, and such rules often influence people in choosing between "good" and "bad" grammatical forms. Much of the time, though not always, decisions about what is good and bad are essentially arbitrary and do not often reflect any crucial principle of language or thought. Some of the clearest evidence for such arbitrariness comes from the history of languages: When a language changes, rules that a prescriptivist sees as crucial often fall by the way. In English pronouns, for example, standard usage no longer distinguishes between second person singular and plural references. Sentences in isolation such as *You should be ready* are thus ambiguous since the addressee may be either one or more than one person. In contrast, the pronoun system of Old English distinguished singular and plural: The forms corresponding to modern *you* were reserved for plural reference while forms corresponding to *thou* were used for the singular. This system more or less continued into Middle English, albeit with some important sociolinguistic changes. By the period of Early

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Modern English (1500–1700), *thou* was disappearing in standard speech, with *you* serving the functions it has today (cf. Baugh and Cable 1978; Leith 1983). This change did not sit well with some grammarians, however, as seen in the following denunciation from one George Fox:

Do not they speak false English, false Latine, false Greek . . . and false to the other Tongues . . . that doth not speak *thou* to *one*, what ever he be, Father, Mother, King, or Judge; is he not a Novice and Unmannerly, and an Ideot and a Fool, that speaks *You* to *one*, which is not to be spoken to a *singular*, but to *many*?

O Vulgar Professors and Teachers, that speaks Plural when they should Singular . . . Come you Priests and Professors, have you not learnt your Accidence? (Fox 1660/1968: 2–3)

The howl of indignation in this passage sounds remarkably like the strains of some latter-day prescriptivists (e.g., Newman 1976) who inveigh against other common practices such as the use of *data* as a singular noun.¹

Yet even though many rules are arbitrary and liable to change, prescriptivism merits a more serious consideration than it has received from linguists, who have often depicted the history of prescriptivism as little more than an exercise in incompetence, oppression, or both (e.g., Leith 1983; Sledd 1988; Crowley 1989). Unquestionably, prescriptive tracts have often shown biased and amateurish views of language, and some tracts have been successful enough to engender superstitions (e.g., the taboo against split infinitives in English). Nevertheless, prescription makes possible the standardization of languages, which makes communication easier between highly different dialect regions, as some linguists have noted (e.g., Hughes and Trudgill 1987). Having a target language codified (even if imperfectly) simplifies both the teaching and learning of second languages. If there were no limit to the variation permissible, the speech (or writing) of learners would inevitably diverge much more from the target language. Constraining the divergence through prescription can help to make ways of speaking or writing mutually intelligible when learners modify their language toward a single standard, or at least toward a narrower range of standards (e.g., American, British).² While it is true that standard varieties are often associated with the richer and more powerful members of a society, education can – and should – make

1 Fox would no doubt feel discouraged to learn that *thou* has not been revived, though it is still used in a few nonstandard dialects in rural England. He would also be flustered to know that some of his capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and number agreement patterns would cause the red ink to flow from the pens of twentieth-century English teachers.

2 Space does not permit an extended discussion of the issue of how many “legitimate” varieties of English there are (cf. Kachru 1990; Quirk 1990). I will simply note here that most of the current pedagogical materials available now (and in the near future) are written in either British or American English.

the standard accessible to all. Pretending that language teaching does not entail prescription will hardly serve learners. One linguist well aware of the limitations of prescriptivism writes:

If you want to create a truly elitist society, one in which a very few (a priesthood, if you will) control everything, the best way to do so is to deny substantive education to the masses. Inevitably, however much we try to keep it from happening, there will be those intelligent enough to learn on their own, ambitious enough to do so, and ruthless enough to use what they know for their own advancement at the expense of the hapless, undereducated majority. Substantive education must include the development of knowledge about language and skill in using it, and there seems no way to do justice to these twin aims without prescriptivism of a sort. (Kac 1988: 84)

Grammar as description

Descriptive grammars provide a much more detailed look at languages than most prescriptive grammars do. For linguists, a “descriptive grammar of a language” consists of accounts of not only syntax and morphology but also phonetics and phonology, as well as semantics and/or lexis (i.e., vocabulary). Even when they restrict their descriptions to morphology and syntax, descriptive grammarians consider many structures that prescriptive grammarians either ignore or only briefly discuss: For example, Curme (1931) devotes almost ninety pages to adverbial clauses. Descriptive grammars sometimes provide a detailed look at both contemporary usage and earlier patterns in the language, as seen in Jespersen’s seven-volume *Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* (1922–42). In contrast to prescriptivists, descriptive grammarians often focus on nonstandard dialects. Thus Henry (1957) examines many patterns found in a dialect of Irish English, including patterns rarely if ever used elsewhere in the English-speaking world (e.g., the unusual construction involving a gerund in *I found it horrid sour in the drinkin’ o’it* = I found it sour to drink).

For second language teachers, the boundary between prescription and description is not always so straightforward as it often seems for teachers working with native speakers of a language. A teacher in a composition class for native speakers of English would probably not spend much time on adverbial clauses apart from attention to a few matters such as dangling participles (e.g., *Bursting at the seams, the sailors repaired the hull*). The reason for only a cursory glance is clear: Native speakers have little difficulty in using most types of adverbial clauses in English. Teachers of English as a second language, on the other hand, cannot assume that their students are able to use a wide range.³ Not surprisingly, textbooks

³ In the interest of brevity, I have chosen to use *ESL* as a cover term for both English as a second language and English as a foreign language. Distinguishing between the two in practice is often difficult.

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and reference grammars for ESL students discuss many types of adverbial clauses, and examples they provide would often seem self-evident to native speakers (e.g., Leech and Svartvik 1975; Azar 1989). For example, native speakers have few problems in choosing the verb tense in an adverbial clause such as that seen in *Before Louis finishes work, he will give us a call*. In contrast, ESL textbook writers commonly inform students (with good reason) that present, not future, tense is normal in *Before Louis finishes work*. In effect, such descriptive information functions as a prescription to forestall deviations from the target such as **Before Louis will finish work, he will give us a call*.⁴

Grammar as internalized system

While descriptive grammars provide information about the wide range of structures in a language, they say little or nothing about the mind, which is the source of grammatical patterning. Views on the psychology of language have shifted drastically in the second half of the twentieth century, but scholars have long recognized that grammatical patterning reflects, however indirectly, a complex neurological system defined by the capacities and limitations of the human brain. The time still seems remote when neurolinguists might provide a convincing account of the physical correlates of such common grammatical properties as coordination and subordination. Nevertheless, there is little question that the capacity for language which any normal child possesses is an organized system that psychologists as well as linguists may profitably study.

What linguists find interesting about the relation between language and mind is not always the same as what psychologists find interesting. To some extent, the difference in interests is reflected in the frequently cited distinction of Chomsky (1965: 4) between *competence*, “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language,” and *performance*, “the actual use of language in concrete situations.” While psychologists tend to be more concerned with the performance mechanisms in speech production and comprehension, linguists tend to focus on the more abstract knowledge that makes production and comprehension possible. The competence that speakers have is evident in the grammatical patterning of any language, even though much of the patterning is not easily accessible to consciousness. For example, most speakers of English would be hard-pressed to see the similarities and differences in syntactic behavior in the following pairs of verbs: *want/need*, *avoid/imagine*, and *try/continue*. The following sentences show that each pair follows different rules for *complementation*,

4 The asterisk is a widely used convention to indicate ungrammatical sentences. I am aware of claims that English has no future tense; however, I find Comrie’s analysis of tense (1985) to be sufficient theoretical grounds for viewing *will* as a future-tense marker in the sentences I have cited.

which here are restrictions on whether an infinitive or progressive verb form can follow the main verb:

- Melissa wants to look for a job.
- Melissa needs to look for a job.
- *Melissa avoids to look for a job.
- *Melissa imagines to look for a job.

- Melissa avoids looking for a job.
- Melissa imagines looking for a job.
- *Melissa wants looking for a job.
- *Melissa needs looking for a job.

- Melissa tries to look for a job.
- Melissa tries looking for a job.
- Melissa continues to look for a job.
- Melissa continues looking for a job.

In their everyday conversations, speakers demonstrate that they unconsciously distinguish between the three types of verbs, even though few could precisely characterize the distinctions. Although some psychologists have taken an interest in the distinctions above, far more linguists have studied the properties of complementation. The fact that speakers know different complementation patterns has many consequences for theories of syntactic structure, regardless of the psychological mechanisms that speakers rely on to make such distinctions (cf. Gregg 1989).

Children learning their native language usually come to make the same distinctions that adults do, and the competence they acquire can be viewed as an internalized system, that is, mental structures that guide everyday linguistic behavior. Although some linguists have (lately) avoided using terms such as *grammar* and *competence* in discussions of internalized systems, the notion of competence is still important in work on both first and second language acquisition. In studies of second language acquisition, Selinker's (1972) term *interlanguage* is frequently used to describe the developing competence of learners. Although interlanguage remains controversial in many ways, there is plenty of evidence that it is systematic, however much the system varies either from the developing competence in first language acquisition or from the competence of adult native speakers (cf. Bley-Vroman 1989).

Without some notion of competence, linguists would find it difficult to account for the systematicity of grammatical knowledge. Not everything that speakers say should be viewed as a part of the grammatical system. For example, adult native speakers have been known to use forms such as **specialating in* rather than *specializing in*. Although such a form could represent either an innovation or the competence of a language learner (child or adult), such forms also can crop up in the speech of adults who normally say *specializing in* (Clark and Clark

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1977). The fact that adults will frequently correct their own speech errors is among the most important evidence that performance factors can affect what speakers actually do say. The notion of performance enables linguists to exclude **specialating in* from a descriptive grammar and to ignore other mishaps in speech production.

While the performance/competence distinction is useful, it can create misconceptions. One unwarranted assumption sometimes evident in work on syntax is that linguists interested in competence have direct access to it (e.g., Baker 1978). The most frequently used approach in modern syntactic research has been introspective; that is, linguists often use their own reactions to sentences to decide, for example, whether a sentence is grammatical or not, whether two sentences have the same meaning, and so forth. Although such research often succeeds in providing new insights, it sometimes leads to dubious judgments, as my article in this volume indicates. Judgments about grammaticality as well as other introspective methods are subject to many performance factors and thus are never “pure” competence data. Similarly, judgments elicited from second language learners can provide oblique indicators of developing interlanguage competence, but sorting out the performance factors that affect such judgments is not at all easy (Birdsong 1989; Ellis 1990a).

Performance and competence can interact in many ways, and some of these interactions have motivated a great deal of contemporary work on grammar which is often labeled *functionalist*. Functionalists see many “design features” in any language – and in human language generally – as reflections of performance factors. A simple example will show some common concerns in functionalist analyses. In English a conditional clause (often termed the *protasis*) can come either before or after the main clause (or *apodosis*), as in the following examples:

If we cross the river here, we may lose our food.
 We may lose our food if we cross the river here.

Many languages do not allow such flexibility, however; in Turkish, for example, the protasis must always precede the apodosis (Comrie 1986). Conversely, no language appears to allow *only* the order apodosis-protasis (as in *We may lose our food if we cross the river here*). Thus there seems to be a widespread preference for the order protasis-apodosis, which Greenberg (1963: 84) claimed to be one of the universals of grammar: “In conditional statements, the conditional clause precedes the conclusion as the normal order in all languages.” Even if this claim ever turns out to be too strong, Greenberg certainly noted a recurring regularity in human languages, one which may well have its roots in performance factors. The protasis-apodosis order often coincides with the order of events in the world. In such cases, the linguistic order complies with what Clark and Clark (1977) call the Order of Mention

Contract, which they see as a common heuristic in language comprehension. By this contract, the speaker agrees to mention “two events in the order in which they occurred” (1977: 129). Predictable speaker behavior will encourage listeners to develop a similar strategy: “Look for the first of two clauses to describe the first of two events, and the second clause the second event, unless they are marked otherwise” (1977: 78). Clark and Clark find considerable psycholinguistic evidence for such behavior by speakers and listeners, including evidence that the Order of Mention Contract facilitates child language acquisition. There is, moreover, evidence that the same principle has subtle effects in second language acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig 1992).

The “internalized system” in functionalist terms thus includes both competence and performance. This wider view of grammar and mind has benefited not only psycholinguistics but also other areas, including discourse analysis and historical linguistics (e.g., Tomlin 1987; Heine, Claudi, and Hünemeyer 1991). Although these interdisciplinary connections may seem novel and even suspect in the eyes of some linguists, such investigations simply embody the spirit of linguistic inquiry advocated by Jespersen (1929: 3) in his *Philosophy of Grammar*:

The essence of language is human activity – activity on the part of one individual to make himself understood, and activity on the part of that other to understand what was in the mind of the first. These two individuals, the producer and the recipient of language, or as we may more conveniently call them, the speaker and the hearer, should never be lost sight of if we want to understand the nature of language.

Grammar as an axiomatic system

The study of grammar has its roots in several traditions in the ancient world. One is the religious traditions of India, which encouraged the systematic study of Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hinduism (Deshpande 1986). Still another is the study of secular languages such as Greek: Dionysius Thrax of Alexandria compiled a pedagogical grammar that served as a model for subsequent grammars of Latin and, still later, the vernacular languages of Western Europe and other regions. The grammar of Dionysius Thrax is sometimes seen as the first codification of part-of-speech distinctions, but it benefited from a long tradition of study of logic and language by philosophers (Robins 1966). Although logic and grammar are now seen as different fields, philosophers have long been interested in both, and the development of symbolic logic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has led to a new conception of grammar, one that attempts to apply the rigor of mathematics to the peculiar regularities of human language.

Some characteristics of human language lend themselves readily to a

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highly formalized analysis. For example, prepositional phrases can be concatenated in English to produce unusual but quite possible sentences: for example, *We took a walk in the park on the edge of the new suburbs of one of the cities on our itinerary*. Editors or teachers might find such a chain of six prepositional phrases questionable for stylistic reasons, but a thorough descriptive grammar of English would surely have to include such sentences. Moreover, anyone trying to formulate a viable generalization about prepositional phrases in English could not easily specify the upper limit on such phrases. It would be risky to conclude that six or ten or even a hundred prepositional phrases constituted the limit on concatenations. Among other reasons, some poet or novelist might willfully write a sentence with seven, eleven, or a hundred and one prepositional phrases just to flaunt the artificial limit.⁵ It appears that the only viable way to generalize about prepositional phrase chains in English is to allow for an indefinitely long chain, as the following rule does:

PP → P NP (PP)

This rule defines a prepositional phrase (PP) as a preposition (P) and noun phrase (NP), which may in turn be followed by another prepositional phrase (with the parentheses in the rule indicating that the enclosed phrase is optional). Any of the following concatenations are thus possible:

P NP
 P NP P NP
 P NP P NP P NP
 P NP P NP P NP P NP
 P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP
 P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP

The last chain corresponds to the concatenation in *We took a walk in the park on the edge of the new suburbs of one of the cities on our itinerary*. Moreover, the rule allows much longer concatenations:

P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP
 P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP
 P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP P NP
 etc.

In fact, the rule provides for an infinitely long chain of prepositional phrases. Obviously, the length of chains specified by this rule will often exceed what anyone could actually say. The rule nevertheless captures very concisely what seems to be an essential property of prepositional

⁵ Some readers will be aware of other types of structures used to illustrate recursivity. I have deliberately chosen prepositional phrases over, for example, self-embedded clauses because the former will probably seem less counterintuitive to readers unfamiliar with generative theories.

phrases in English, *recursivity*. Any recursive rule has the following abstract form:

$$A \rightarrow B C (A)$$

That is, a recursive rule contains the same variable (here represented as A) on both sides of the arrow, which is simply a convention meaning that the rule constitutes a definition. The rule $PP \rightarrow P NP (PP)$ is thus just one instance of a recursive rule.

It has proved possible to use axioms and other conventions of symbolic logic to state in a most rigorous way the form of recursive rules along with other rules describing not only prepositional phrases but many other grammatical structures (cf. Wall 1972). Grammars are only one type of axiomatic system (many others being of interest only to mathematicians or logicians), and not all formal grammars are developed to study human language. A great deal of work in artificial intelligence involves formal systems which resemble the grammars of human languages but which serve the needs of computer scientists and philosophers concerned with diverse symbolic relations (e.g., Hofstadter 1979). Even so, the generative grammars developed to study human languages are one of the most important benefits of work on axiomatic systems.

At a minimum, generative grammars aim to achieve the comprehensiveness of an ideal descriptive grammar along with the systematicity of an axiomatic system. The challenges posed by English and by languages less studied are immense, and generative grammarians usually acknowledge that their best efforts have fallen short of the ideal. Nevertheless, generative work has encouraged more systematic approaches to the study of language as well as greater interest in language acquisition. Although not all generative grammarians agree with him, Chomsky believes that work in formal grammar has important consequences for understanding how children acquire language (cf. Chomsky 1972; Piattelli-Palmarini 1980). In the Chomskyan framework, Universal Grammar (UG) underlies the structural regularities found in all human languages, and UG principles can account for the wide variation in morphology and syntax in the languages of the world. While acquiring language, children putatively have unconscious access to UG, and this access guides them in the development of their internalized language systems. For Chomsky and other UG theorists, the access that children have is a biological inheritance. The specific linguistic competence that any child acquires (e.g., Japanese or Apache or English) results from an interaction of nature and nurture: that is, while children acquire different languages (and concomitant behaviors) through experience, their ability to acquire language is a natural inheritance reflecting (however indirectly) crucial adaptations of the human brain in evolutionary history (cf. Bickerton 1990). If Universal Grammar is accessible in first language acquisition, it may also be accessible to

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adult language learners. In fact a great deal of recent research has made just that argument (cf. Rutherford 1986, 1987; Rutherford and Sharwood Smith 1988).

Work in generative linguistics has thus greatly renewed interest in the relation between mind and language and in old philosophical questions such as the problem of innate ideas. Not all generative work, however, concurs with the philosophical agenda of Chomsky and others, nor does all of it concur with Chomskyan formulations of generative systems. Hubbard's article in this volume will present examples of work in some alternative approaches, including Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar, a generative system that diverges in many ways from the formalisms normally found in Chomskyan approaches. Yet along with controversies concerning the best formulation of a generative grammar, a crucial question for work in second language acquisition is the *psychological reality* of generative grammar. Here again, not all generative grammarians concur with Chomsky, as seen in the following observation:

We feel it is possible, and arguably proper, for a linguist (*qua* linguist) to ignore matters of psychology . . . it seems to us that virtually all the work needed to redeem the promissory notes linguistics has issued to psychology over the past 25 years remains to be done. If linguistics is truly a branch of psychology (or even biology), as is often unilaterally asserted by linguists, it is so far the branch with the greatest pretensions and the fewest reliable results. (Gazdar et al. 1985: 5)

Although the position taken by these and other grammarians probably reflects a minority viewpoint in generative grammar, the fact remains that it is possible to approach grammar as an axiomatic system yet not have much interest or confidence in the psychological or philosophical implications of Universal Grammar.

The hybrid nature of pedagogical grammar

Each of the four conceptions of grammar just discussed has implications for language teaching, and none of them alone satisfactorily covers the concerns of practitioners of pedagogical grammar (cf. Noblitt 1972). Without question, teaching grammar in a second language setting involves prescription, yet the range of structures important to consider resembles a descriptive grammar much more than a prescriptive grammar for native speakers. Moreover, teachers concerned about how their students succeed in learning any grammar will naturally be curious about the psychological constructs that underlie interlanguage competence and performance. Even though the extreme rigor of axiomatic systems is usually not found – or needed – in teaching materials in pedagogical grammar, the development of such materials has certainly profited from the discoveries made through formal analysis. Furthermore,