

Transformational, Structural, and Traditional Grammars as Classifications

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Traditional, structural, and transformational are three high frequency words among students of English grammar. Many details in these grammars, nevertheless, overlap.

A brief look at some of the linguistic currents prior to the interest in English grammar tells us that the British Isles had been touched by various waves of different language speakers from continental Europe. The Norman Conquest brought a powerful French influence cultural and linguistic, and heralded a long period of relative peace during which time the middle class became prosperous, gained social prestige, and were conscious of their own language. Chaucer wrote in his native English. English, like any other language, went through various changes. Caxton's printing press helped people become aware of different pronunciations and different spellings of same words, and the lack of a systematic correlation between the two. A casual investigation into the linguistic interest of 16th and 17th century England can easily yield a large body of materials on the phonological aspects of the language.

were nightly events. Here friendly conversation mixed beautifully with the national beverage of the Friendly Islands.

The Tongan people were overwhelmed by the marked proficiency of these Americans who were speaking better and sounding more like Tongans in twelve weeks than the vast majority of palangi foreigners who had lived years in Tonga. I met many of my old friends all of whom could not help but exclaim energetically about the me'a fakaofa e poto vave 'a e Kau Ngaue 'Ofa (miracle of language learning among the Workers of Love).

While the vernacular or English steadily increased in prestige, Latin and Greek continued to be status symbols through the Middle ages. The study of the grammars of Latin and Greek led scholars to the writing of English grammar books. The 18th century is known for its English grammars, especially those of Bishop Robert Lowth (1762) and Lindley Murray (1795). Such books pegged English grammar with the rules of Latin and Greek. Writers of grammars of this nature are often referred to as traditionalists who prescribe grammar. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, continental Europeans such as Hendrik Poutsma, Etsko Kruijsing, and Otto Jespersen as well as Henry Sweet of England attempted to describe English on the basis of empirical data from English. These Scholars could be referred to as descriptive traditionalists. Gram-

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marians like Jespersen and Sweet were actually diverging from the traditional ways of establishing grammatical categories and paving the way of the structuralists.

In the New World, Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield did similar descriptive work in American Indian languages. Among structural grammarians of English, George L. Trager, Henry Lee Smith, Jr. and Archibald A. Hill could be recognized as the much more pure structuralists particularly in their commitment to starting from the phoneme and working up from there through the hierarchical classified grammatical

units. Charles C. Fries in his *Structure of English* (1952) uses function as the basis for grammatical definition and departs from traditional grammar, not because traditional grammar uses meaning, but because "the basis of their definition slides from meaning to function." The book is an outstanding example of how "structural grammar states" the grammar of a language, and it contains samples of how utterances which are not the same can have the same syntactic pattern; i.e. the words may be different from one utterance to another, but their functions and arrangements are the same. Much of this kind of work, including that of Fries, owes a great deal to the influence of predecessors. The main interest is in describing the features and relations found in empirical data and not in judging usage. However, Fries's way of describing English grammar by beginning with the entire utterance not only differed from that of many other structuralists but also actually anticipated the approach of the transformational-generative grammarians. Structural grammar is also sometimes called descriptive grammar.

Transformational Grammar

The latest mode is transformational grammar, an approach headed by Noam Chomsky. Transformationalists aim at finding out through "manipulating" specific sentences in language, i.e. surface structures, whether these sentences are derived from the same or different deep structures which are abstractions. Their interest is in the theory of language. Though they claim closer kinship to descriptive traditional grammar, evidence indicates that they also use data gathered and symbols established by structuralists. The study is very young. The Grammarians are hopefully reaching for "God's truth". For the moment, they are grasping with uncertain ease.

Perhaps it would be intellectually healthy to remember that human knowledge is less akin to Pallas Athena, born full-grown, a myth, and more to the nature of growth or the