

Part II: A Structural Comparison of English and Tongan

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Tongan uses a prepositional phrase in many cases where English uses a clause. Even though he went is expressed in Tongan by neongo ene 'alu "despite his going" (neongo "despite," 'ena "his", and 'alu "going"). Another example, because he failed is rendered in Tongan as koe'uhi ko 'eda to'o "because of his failing" (koe'uhi "because of," ko substantive predicative, 'ene "his," and to'o "failing"). The extent to which Tongan prepositional phrases are used in contexts where English uses a subordinate clause is a prominent difference between Tongan and English.

Tense Markers

Tongan uses function words to mark tense. 'Alu "go" > ne'e 'alu "went" > 'oku alu "goes or is going" > 'e alu "will go", etc. On the other hand, English uses inflection of verbs in the present and past tenses and function words in the progressive, perfect and future tense forms. In imitation of the Tongan verb pattern, a Tongan will say or write John was take instead of John took. When he does this, the Tongan is attempting to use was as the equivalent of the Tongan past tense marker na'e, which is used in an analogous way to the English verb was in the sentence Na'e 'ita ia "He was angry" (Na'e past tense marker, 'ita "to be angry" and ia "he"). In this example, as in many other examples that may be cited, the tense marker may be translated as was (Na'e 'ita ia, literally Was angry he). The Tongan is aware of this similarity and is often tempted to use was in English as though it were a tense marker.

Thus the present and past tense forms of the verb "be," since they carry the inflections for tense, are often used by Tongans as substitutes for the past or present tense markers. Since English uses the function word will to mark the future, there is no problem for a Tongan in the use of the future tense in English. Sometimes a Tongan, conscious of the need for inflecting English verbs in the past tense, will even use was or were with a past tense form of the verb such as in John was took instead of John took. Verbs are perhaps the hardest part of English for a Tongan to master.

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In Tongan, there are three numbers: singular, dual and plural with the plural indicating three or more. The latter two numbers are marked by specific function words or number markers. On the other hand, English uses the inflectional suffix -s or -es in forming the plural of most nouns. In Tongan, ongo is a function word marking the dual number of all nouns, as: fale "house" > ongo fale "houses". In the plural, kau is used to mark the plural number of nouns referring to persons: tangata "man" > kau tangata "men"; fanga is used with nouns referring to animals, insects or birds: pato "duck" > fanga pato "ducks"; and ngaahi is used with nouns referring to things: hala "road" > nagaahi hala "roads". Since English marks plural nouns by inflection, it is easy for a Tongan to omit the -s (or -es) suffix and to say or write all the box instead of all the boxes. In English, there is agreement between subjects and verbs in certain tenses, whereas in Tongan there

is no such agreement. Consequently, a Tongan will often drop the -s from the third person, singular, present tense and will say or write He speak English rather than say He speaks English. A Tongan also has trouble with has and have and the various forms of be in the matter of agreement. He has difficulty in correlating am, is, are, was and were as well as has and have with the corresponding subject. Not only is the problem one of agreement of subject and verb but the tendency to use all such auxiliary verbs as though they were tense markers also confuses the situation. Since all auxiliary verbs in English show the tense inflection, they tend to seem like tense markers to the Tongan student of English. Consequently, a great deal of drill on verbs is necessary to overcome these problems.

Noun-Genitive Case

The possessive or genitive case of nouns also gives some trouble. Nouns are not inflected for genitive case in Tongan although there is one suffix which carries the same meaning as the English possessive form of. Note mata'i hele in which mata means "blade", i means "of" and hele means "knife". A mata'i hele is a knife blade. Since the suffix 'i "of" merely makes a modifier of the noun to which it is attached, it cannot, however, be classed as a genitive form despite the resemblances. It is rather a device showing modification.

Instead of using an inflected form such as John's in John's book to indicate the possessive case, Tongan uses a prepositional phrase consisting of the possessive preposition 'a "of" and a substantive, as in tohi 'a Sione "book of John". Thus, 'o "of" with its allomorphic form of 'a "of" is used in Tongan in a structure similar to the English prepositional phrase introduced by of: fale 'o Sione "house of John" etc. Tongans readily use the English possessive phrase with of, but must learn to use such possessive forms as John's coat, Mary's dress, etc. Some mistakes result in the use of English possessives.

Since much less difficulty is encountered by the language student in reducing multiple forms to a single form than is encountered in expanding one form to many, Tongans readily learn the use of English possessive pronouns when the latter parallel the former in their usage. For example, 'eku, hoku, si'eku, and si'oku, all meaning "my", are readily reduced to their single English counterpart my. Moreover, both the Tongan and English possessive pronouns are used in a position before nouns, so no difficulty is experienced in their use with regard to position. But there are uses of possessive pronouns which cause problems. One difficulty with regard to the use of possessive pronouns is one which concerns the difference between the -o group possessives and the -e group when used with verbs. In finding an equivalent English expression for 'enetaki "his leading" vs. honetaki "his being led," 'ene tukuaki'i "his accusing" vs. honotukuaki'i "his being accused," a Tongan sometimes has difficulty in differentiating active and passive in the English expression used. The greatest difficulty in use of possessive pronouns, however, is encountered with use of the indefinite possessives. Note the example: 'E fefe ha'aku 'alu? ('E "will", fefe "be how", ha'aku "a my", 'alu "going"). It is difficult for a Tongan to arrive at the English sentence "How could I go?" or "How could I possibly go?" from this Tongan sentence.

In view of the fact that English, as has been indicated, makes use of function words as well as inflection for marking comparison of adjectives and adverbs, and since Tongan uses function words exclusively, there is some difficulty for Tongans learning to use English inflected adjective and adverb forms such as bigger, biggest, smaller, smallest, faster, fastest, farther, farthest, better, best, etc. The difficulty is greatest with regard to the use of the irregular forms, both adjective and adverb.

The differences between Tongan and English in formation of the com-

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parative and superlative of adjectives and adverbs is apparent from the following examples: big, bigger, biggest (inflection) and lahi "big" lahi ange "bigger" lahi taha "biggest" (use of function words); bad > worse > worst (inflection) and kovi "bad" kovi ange "worse" kovi taha "worst".

English makes use of four function words to indicate comparison: more, most, less and least. On the other hand, Tongan uses three function words to mark the comparative degree and only one to mark the superlative. These are ange, hake and hifo, marking the comparative degree and taha used to mark the superlative. Note the examples: lahi "big" lahi ange "bigger" or lahi hake "bigger"; si'i "small" si'i ange "smaller" or si'i hifo "smaller"; beautiful > more beautiful > most beautiful or less beautiful > least beautiful. Since the use of function words in Tongan parallels the use of function words in English in forming such comparisons, Tongans readily take the transfer to the English constructions with no difficulty. As has been stated, the main difficulty to the Tongan is in the use of the inflected comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs.

Adjective Position

The normal adjective position in English is before the noun that the adjective modifies as in big house: In Tongan, this order is reversed for most limiting adjectives: fale lahi (fale "house" lahi "big"), tamasii angalelei "well-behaved boy" (tamasii "boy" angalelei "well-behaved"). Problems sometimes arise for Tongans in the placement of English adjectives, but there are not so many problems of this sort as in the placement of adverbs.

The greater number of problems with adverbs result mainly from the

wide variety of adverb positions that are possible in the English sentence. Only is an example of an adverb with extreme flexibility of use in English. Note the following examples: Only he wanted to go early. He only wanted to go early. He wanted only to go early. He wanted to go only early. He wanted to only go early. The combination He wanted to go early only is not likely. Such a variety of positions for adverb confuses a Tongan, as Tongan has very few adverbs that may occur in positions other than a position next to the verb. Fakamolemole "please" and na'a "perhaps" are among the few adverbs that may occur elsewhere than next to the verb and even they are not moveable as many English adverbs are.

Adverb Position

Most Tongan adverbs follow, and a few precede, the verb or adjective they modify. Some meanings that are expressed with an adverb in English are expressed in Tongan with verbs accompanied by a tense sign, as: Na'e tuai 'ene lele "His running was slow" (Na'e past tense marker, tuai "slow", ene "his", and lele "running"). An example of this usage is the following: Na'e 'ikai te ne 'alu "He didn't go" (Na'e past tense marker, 'ikai "not", te an allomorph of the so-called conjunction ke which is a function word used with verbs in noun clauses, ne "he", 'alu "go"). In this example, 'ikai "not" appears in the verb slot following a tense marker and hence must be classified as a verbal.

Tongan adverbs modifying adjectives usually follow the word they modify as lahi 'aupito "very large" (lahi "large" and 'aupito "very"). Some Tongan adverbs modify adjectives, however, precede the adjective as fu'u lahi "exceedingly large".

'i he 'ene ha'u is also equivalent in meaning to the English clause when he comes referring to future action.

As is common, more or less, with most languages, a number of Tongan prepositional phrases beginning with 'i "in or at" or ki "to" are equivalent syntactically to a direct object or goal in English. The same is true of some English prepositional phrases and Tongan direct objects or goals. For example, in English we say I saw the man but in Tongan a person says Na'a ku mamata ki he tangata, literally "I saw to the man" (Na'a past tense marker, ku "I", mamata "see", ki "to", he "the" and tangata "man"). Other similar Tongan verbs requiring prepositional phrase following them are tokoni "help", sio "see", 'ofa "love" and manako "like". Each of these verbs is normally followed by a prepositional phrase beginning with ki or 'i that is equivalent in meaning to the corresponding English verb followed by a direct object or goal. Note the sentence He helped me which is equivalent to the Tongan Na'a ne tokoni kiate au (Na'a past tense marker, ne "he", tokoni "help", kiate an inflected form of ki meaning "to" and au "me"). The reverse situation is true of the verbs which in Tongan are transitive, taking a direct object, but in English the same idea is expressed by a verb plus a prepositional phrase. For example, the Tongan sentence Na'a nau katai'ia "They laughed at him" (Na'a past tense marker, nau "they", katai'ia "laughed at", ia "him") may influence a Tongan to say "They laughed him", leaving out the preposition at.

Syntax Comparison

The syntactic constructions of English are much more complex than Tongan. Tongan does not have as many complex sentences, especially those containing several subordinate clauses. This complexity of English syntax creates many problems for a Tongan learning English. However, because of limited space, it will not be possible in the present article to treat all of the problems of English syntax met by a Tongan learning English.