USING LINGUISTICS TO HELP STUDENTS READ OLD ENGLISH

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This paper will present an applied linguistic model through which students with a minimal or basic knowledge of Old English could improve and develop their reading comprehension skills in that language. This language decoding model is a simplification, adaptation and synthesis of aspects of Deep Structure Case Grammar (Fillmore 1968, 1969) and the notion of "Systems of Participation" (Diver 1964, Zubin 1972), and does not represent a theoretical analysis of case for either of these theoretical approaches.

Most undergraduate and graduate students have difficulty reading texts in Old English. The notion of "case" may be especially unfamiliar to native speakers of modern English, a language whose case system has generally been minimized to nominative-objective-genitive pronominal forms such as I-me-my, he-him-his, etc.

The traditional and textbook definitions of case and case functions (Quirk and Wrenn 1958 or Davis 1953) may very often be confusing. The following "explanations" of case taken from Quirk and Wrenn may not be terribly illuminating to the novice student:

"The nominative may be loosely defined as the case of *activity*" (p. 59);

"In direct antithesis... the accusative might be called the *passive* case" (p. 60);

"The genitive is a case of very complex functions in Old English and none of the many attempts to classify these functions has been wholly successful" (p. 61);

"The functions of the Old English dative, like those of the genitive, are very complex" (p. 64).

Prepositional case government as presented by Davis (1953) may also appear to be rather arbitrary to the student:

"Some prepositions govern the accusative" (p. 56), "Some govern the

the traditional and the transformational treatment of case and prepositions. Form Content analysts such as Diver (1964) and Zubin (1972) set up grammatical systems involving noun-like elements and explain their *relative* value relations to each other as they function as linguistic signs (composed of a *signifiant* and a *signifié*) in an event signalled by a verb.

The semantic substance which the meanings (*signifiés*) of the linguistic signs in the Participation System exhaustively classify is: "the relative degree of contribution (e.g., high, mid, low) a participant makes to the precipitation of the action named by the verb", 'or, in short, relative degree of contribution to an event.

Modern English has a Participation System which differs from the Latin and German systems developed by Diver and Zubin, who used some of the surface structure case morphology of these languages in their theoretical analyses. The modern English Participation System would also differ from the possible Participation System which might be developed along similar surface structure case lines for Old English.

In modern English, unlike in case languages, word order, or the sequence of forms, is the signal (*signifiant*) of the system. The Participation System for modern English can be described in the following way: In an utterance containing two (or more) contributors to an action, the position of a participant preceding the verb signals HIGHER contribution and the position of the participant(s) following the verb signals LOWER (or LOWEST) contribution. The system can be schematized in the following way for two participants:
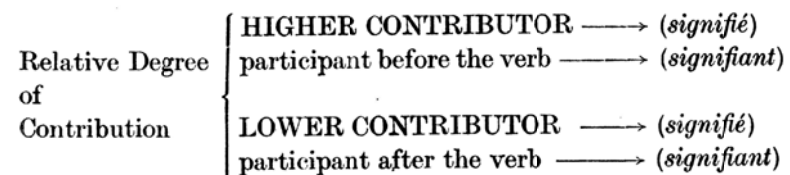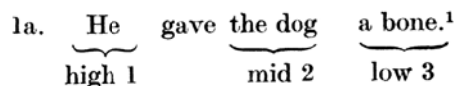
Relative Degree of Contribution
$\begin{cases} \text{HIGHER CONTRIBUTOR} \longrightarrow (signifié) \\ \text{participant before the verb} \longrightarrow (signifiant) \\ \\ \text{LOWER CONTRIBUTOR} \longrightarrow (signifié) \\ \text{participant after the verb} \longrightarrow (signifiant) \end{cases}$

Figure 3

The three-fold opposition (high, mid, low) is the one reserved for sentences containing three participants:

1a.   He   gave   the dog   a bone.[1]
     $\underbrace{\text{high 1}}$ $\underbrace{\text{mid 2}}$ $\underbrace{\text{low 3}}$

[1] Prepositional paraphrases of this sentence, e. g., He gave a bone *to the dog*; as well as the passive forms: The dog was given a bone (*by him*); or, A bone was given *to the dog* (*by him*) are *not* instances of the optimal or three-participant system. They are instances of one or two-participant sentences with an additional prepositional phrase or phrases. In the Form Content analysis of the English Participation System preposi-

The system functions, however, for both two participant and single participant sentences as well:

1. The dog   ate   a bone.
  $\underbrace{\text{high 1}}$ $\underbrace{\text{low 2}}$

1c. The dog ate.
   $\underbrace{\text{high 1}}$

The Participation System as analyzed for German (Zubin 1972) provides an example of such a system as it is applied to a language possessing overt case morphology and might be borrowed in a similar way (hypothetically, only as a pedagogical device) for Old English. Such a system would be schematized as follows:
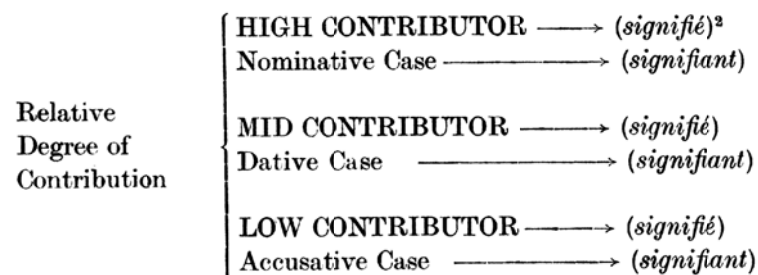
Relative Degree of Contribution
$\begin{cases} \text{HIGH CONTRIBUTOR} \longrightarrow (signifié)^2 \\ \text{Nominative Case} \longrightarrow (signifiant) \\ \\ \text{MID CONTRIBUTOR} \longrightarrow (signifié) \\ \text{Dative Case} \longrightarrow (signifiant) \\ \\ \text{LOW CONTRIBUTOR} \longrightarrow (signifié) \\ \text{Accusative Case} \longrightarrow (signifiant) \end{cases}$

Figure 4

The traditional grammarians, textbooks, and Deep Structure Case Grammar analyses of case have difficulty defining case meanings and roles because they are too *specific*, which may make them less suitable as a pedagogical tool for decoding sentences. The Form Content analyses, on the other hand, view these same semantic phenomena in relation to their *relative* value to each other, which might make them more suitable for language teaching.

It should also be noted that unlike the analyses of case presented in traditional textbooks or by Fillmore, the notion of case *per se* is not a theoretical category for Form Content Analysis. This might also be useful or beneficial to teaching. The Genitive case (in German) as well as, hypothetically at least, the Instrumental case in Old English may not form part of the Participation

tional phrases are *not* considered to be part of the system, but peripheral to, or out of system. A discussion of Form Content Analysis and why three-participant systems are most usually the optimal ones (as opposed to four or more Participation Systems) can be found in Garcia (1975).

[2] Similar diagrams and Pronoun charts could also be designed (as pedagogical tools and not theoretical models) for other languages containing overt case morphology for Nominative, Dative, and Accusative forms.

system, and therefore, need not be learned and memorized together with the other cases by students, merely because they all share a grammatical label called "case."

By adopting this notion of Participation Systems and adapting it to the Deep Structure Case Grammar diagram, we now have a new pedagogical tool to help students decode sentences, particularly in the field of reading comprehension. Each theory contributes in its own way to solving some of the problems students may have decoding sentences.

A simplified version of Fillmore's Deep Structure Case Grammar branching-tree diagram provides a succinct and direct notational system which allows the student to isolate the crucial elements of a sentence from a running text. Literary texts, both graded and ungraded, very often employ varied word orders for emphasis or style, which may confuse the English speaking students who intuitively rely on word order (S-V-O) as a primary cue for meaning. By isolating verb and noun phrases in a transformational-generative notation, we can exploit the theory and allow the students to transform these elements into a new sentence in a second diagram with the word order most familiar to them. In addition, by providing the students with two diagrams, they can analyze complex and compound sentences using each diagram for a "deep structure" simple sentence.

Form Content Analysis, on the other hand, provides a scale or hierarchy on noun phrases or participants (presented here hypothetically as a pedagogical device for Old English) based on their meanings (signifiés) as they function in a system whose semantic substance is "relative degree of contribution to an event", signalled by a verb. In other words, after having isolated the verb and noun-like elements from a sentence of running text, the student can then arrange these crucial elements according to their overt case morphology, not as an exercise or test of memory, but as they actually function as linguistic signs.

By following certain rules and using the diagrams provided, the student has isolated the verb and noun-like elements in this selective way and may infer who is doing what to whom, thereby "cracking the code" of a sentence he may have had trouble understanding while reading. He can either continue reading, or, if he chooses, look up the other words in the sentence. He will not, however, approach the text by looking up every word he does not know in the linear order in which these words appear in a given text.

An actual reading program for students of Old English using this applied linguistic method might entail presenting them with notebooks especially prepared with the appropriate diagrams heading each page, followed by step by step instructions to fill out the diagrams. The student would then do his reading assignments or outside reading of his own choice. Each time he comes across a sentence he is unable to comprehend, he is to apply it to the **diagram** according

to the instructions. If, by following the instructions, he succeeds in understanding the sentence, the system will be working.

The use of the diagram may also point out the student's need to improve his technique of using the dictionary, his lack of reliance on context, or need for improvement in the mastery of salient points of grammar (e.g., the morphology related to conjugated verbs and case morphology such as tense, number, gender, person, etc.). Students may fail to comprehend sentences using the diagram. This may indicate to both the student and the teacher particular weaknesses which are affecting the process of reading or other decoding processes.

The diagram for Old English as well as a chart containing the pronoun paradigms specifically designed for this method would appear as follows:
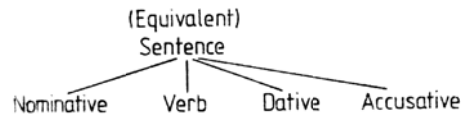
For Old English
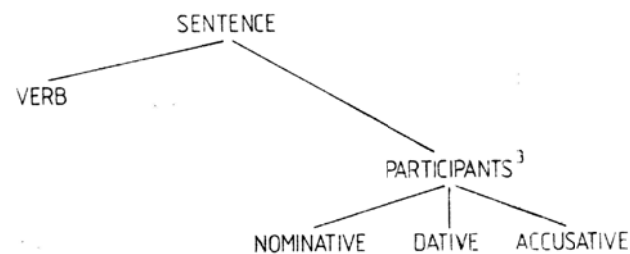
SENTENCE:

Instructions

If you come across a sentence in your reading that you do not understand do the following:

1. Copy the sentence under the diagram.

2. Isolate the *conjugated verb* and fill it in the diagram under the heading *verb*, noting any grammatical information the verb ending indicates such as:

    a. number: singular, dual or plural

    b. person: first, second, third

    c. tense:

3. Isolate the nouns and pronouns: First those in the Nominative, then those in the Dative and then those in the Accusative, placing them on the diagram under the appropriate heading.

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[3] The word Participants here is being used as a general term and does not imply a theoretical construct of Form Content Analysis.

4. Now read the sentence placing the nominative before the verb as shown in the diagram below. (If there is no nominative, do the same with the dative first, etc.).

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              (Equivalent)
               Sentence
          ┌──────┬─────┬──────────┐
     Nominative  Verb  Dative  Accusative
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Old English Pronouns

Sentence

Verb
Number: singular/dual/plural   Participants
Person: 1st, 2nd, 3rd

Gender: masculine, feminine, neuter	Nominative	Dative	Accusative
1st person:			
singular:	iċ	mē	mē
dual:	wit	unc	unc
plural:	wē	ūs	ūs
2nd person:			
singular:	þū	þē	þē
dual:	ġit	inc	inc
plural:	ġē	ēow	ēow
3rd person:			
singular:			
masculine:	hē	him	hine
feminine:	hēo	hi(e)re	hīe
neuter:	hit	him	hit
plural:			
masculine:			
feminine:	hīe	him	hīe
neuter:			

(Equivalent)
Sentence

Nominative   Verb   Dative   Accusative

The interrelationship between theoretical and applied linguistics, particularly language teaching, is often times rather tenuous. Theoretical linguists generally theorize to and for each other and language teachers studiously ignore the latest discoveries which theoretical linguists might have to offer.

Language teachers are creating pedagogical grammars for the classroom, while theoretical linguists work within established theoretical paradigms which define their goals and methods of solving particular problems. They must create and present teaching materials which are efficient and effective and may be eclectic in their choice of theory or approach. Language instructors can combine various aspects of diverse and even opposing theories, alter and experiment with them, thus removing them considerably from their original purpose and form. This paper has been one such attempt to adapt theoretical linguistic concepts to form a decoding model based on the surface structure case forms of Old English.

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