

# LINGUISTICS

## ORDER AND TELL IN A TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH<sup>1</sup>

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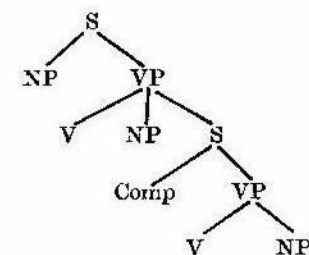
One of the main advantages of a transformational approach to syntax is that it enables us, in many cases of superficial similarity of structure, to exhibit differences in underlying structure corresponding to differences in evaluation and interpretation by native speakers. For instance, Rosenbaum (1967 : 59 - 61) considers sentences of the following type:

(1) *I persuaded the doctor to examine Bill.*

(2) *I believe John to have convinced Bill.*

At a superficial syntactic level, both sentences have the same structure: subject noun phrase, plus main verb, plus direct object noun phrase, plus an embedded infinitive sentence as second object to the verb; the infinitive sentence consists itself of a verb in the infinitive plus a direct object; i.e., ignoring certain irrelevant details, like the internal structure of noun phrases and infinitives:

(3)



Once we start playing around with (1) and (2), however, differences in their behaviour arise that are not explicable on the basis of this similarity of structure. For instance, (2) can be paraphrased as

<sup>1</sup> This article is a slightly revised and expanded version of part of the introduction (64 - 71) to my Ph. D. thesis *Aspects of sentence complementation in Russian* (Cambridge, 1971). I am grateful to P. A. M. Seuren and P. H. Matthews for comments on the earlier version.

(4) *I believe Bill to have been convinced by John.*

which is synonymous with (2), or at least as synonymous as any active and equivalent passive. Applying the same structural modification to (1) we get

(5) *I persuaded Bill to be examined by the doctor.*

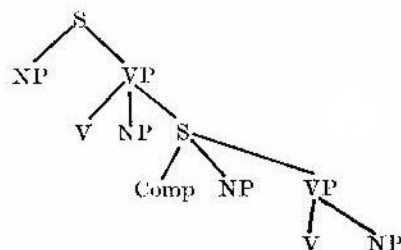
Most emphatically, (1) and (5) are not cognitively synonymous. In (1), I am telling the doctor of the advisability of some course of action; in (5), it is Bill at the receiving end of my advice. Both (1) and (2) have paraphrases with *that*-clauses rather than the infinitive<sup>2</sup>:

(6) *I persuaded the doctor that he should examine Bill.*

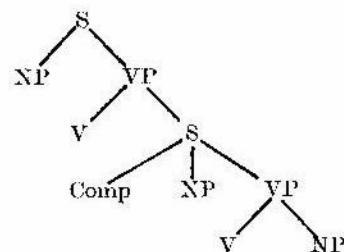
(7) *I believe that John has convinced Bill.*

Now, (6) and (7) are different in structure, even in surface structure, in that (6) has an object noun phrase in addition to the object clause of the main verb, whereas (7) has only the object clause, i.e. respectively

(8)



(9)



If we relate (1) and (2) to structures like (8) and (9), not only will we have an explanation for the paraphrase relations between (1) and (6), (2) and (7), but also for the fact that (1) and (5) are non-synonymous — they differ in meaning in the same way as (6) differs from

<sup>2</sup> Not all infinitive constructions have equivalent *that*-clauses, so this particular line of argument will not always be applicable (though this does not affect the validity of other arguments). This is true, for instance, of Rosenbaum's original example *I compelled the doctor to examine Bill* (*\*I compelled the doctor that he (should) examine Bill*). There is some dialectal variation in the range of possibilities allowed, and a certain degree of confusion — not always easy to avoid, and perhaps not always relevant — between *should* as an auxiliary and *should* in the sense of *ought to*.

(10) *I persuaded Bill that he should be examined by the doctor.* i.e., in (1) and (5) the superficial object of the main verb is interpreted both as object of the main verb and as subject of the infinitive; while in (2) and (4) the superficial object of the main verb is interpreted only as subject of the infinitive. We may assume, then, that (1) derives from the underlying structure (8), and (2) from the underlying<sup>3</sup> structure (9).

The transformational mechanism necessary for relating these underlying and surface structures is discussed in detail by Rosenbaum (1967), and elsewhere. In the derivation of (1), a transformation of *Equi-NP deletion* (also known as *Identity erasure*) deletes the subject of the infinitive, under identity to the object of the main verb; using partial labelled bracketings in place of tree diagrams, this derivation is

(11)  $s_1$ [I persuaded the doctor  $s_2$ [the doctor to examine Bill]]  
 $s_1$ [I persuaded the doctor  $s_2$  to examine Bill]]

The derivation of (5), involving the passive transformation, would be

(12)  $s_1$ [I persuaded Bill  $s_2$ [the doctor to examine Bill]]  
 $s_1$ [I persuaded Bill  $s_2$ [Bill to be examined by the doctor]]  
 $s_1$ [I persuaded Bill  $s_2$  to be examined by the doctor]]

In the derivation of (2), the subject of the infinitive is moved out of the embedded sentence into the position of object of the matrix sentence, by *Subject-raising* (also called, in the earlier literature, *It-replacement*, *Pronoun-replacement*)<sup>4</sup>

(13)  $s_1$ [I believe S[John to have convinced Bill]]  
 $s_1$ [I believe John S[to have convinced Bill]]

and similarly, with the passive

(14)  $s_1$ [I believe  $s_2$ [John to have convinced Bill]]  
 $s_1$ [I believe  $s_2$ [Bill to have been convinced by John]]  
 $s_1$ [I believe Bill  $s_2$ [to have been convinced by John]]

<sup>3</sup> (8) and (9) are not, necessarily, deep structures; they are as abstract a syntactic level as is necessary for the present discussion.

<sup>4</sup> Recently, Chomsky (1970) has argued against the existence of Subject-raising, and for a derived structure for sentences like (2) in which *John* would remain as subject of the infinitive. Under this revision, (1) and (2) would not, strictly, have the same basic surface structures, although the alleged difference in surface structure does not seem to manifest itself phonetically — cp. the discussion of constructional homonyms like *old men and women* in the literature on immediate constituent analysis —, and the difficulties which abstract syntax is called upon to resolve are still there. I shall not be treating Chomsky's proposal in more detail here.

Passivization is also possible on the second cycle, i.e. on the matrix sentence, giving respectively

- (15) *The doctor was persuaded by me to examine Bill.*  
 (16) *Bill was persuaded by me to be examined by the doctor.*  
 (17) *John is believed to have convinced Bill.*  
 (18) *Bill is believed to have been convinced by John.*

although the more complex possibilities are stylistically weak.

So far, I have reviewed briefly the descriptive apparatus of Equi-NP deletion and Subject-raising as it exists in the literature to date. For the rest of this article, I want to apply this analysis to two particular English verbs, *order* and *tell*<sup>5</sup>, both of which take infinitive constructions, e.g.

- (19) *The general told the soldiers to shoot the prisoners.*  
 (20) *The general ordered the soldiers to shoot the prisoners.*

Not only do (19) and (20) have the same basic superficial syntactic structure, they are virtually synonymous — apart, that is, from the greater strength of tone associated with *order*, as against *tell*. It would perhaps be surprising to assign these sentences to different underlying structures, although this is precisely the analysis for which I intend arguing. Postal (1970 : 495) treats both *order* and *tell* sentences as instances of Equi-NP deletion, but without noting the data discussed below.

Applying the passive to the embedded sentence of (19), we get

- (21) *The general told the prisoners to be shot by the soldiers.*

which is rather odd sentence, on pragmatic grounds, since it states that the general gave a certain order, namely *Go get yourselves shot by the soldiers*, to the prisoners. In any case, (21) and (29) are not synonymous, differing in precisely the same way as did (1) and (5). In other words, (19) seems to be an instance of Equi-NP deletion. If we do the same to (20) we get

- (22) *The general ordered the prisoners to be shot by the soldiers.*

Surprisingly, this does not participate in the same shift in meaning as did (21); (22) does not imply that the general gave some order to the prisoners, i.e., the surface structure object noun phrase is not interpreted as underlying object noun phrase — precisely the same situation as with (2). Sentence (20) seems, rather, to be an example of Subject-raising. This accounts equally for the cognitive synonymy of (20) and (22). The proposed derivations are, in order:

- (23)  $s$ [The general told the soldiers  $s$ [the soldiers to shoot the prisoners]]  
 $s$ [The general told the soldiers  $s$ [to shoot the prisoners]]  
 (24)  $s$ [The general ordered  $s$ [the soldiers to shoot the prisoners]]

<sup>5</sup> *Order* and *tell* are to be taken in the sense of *command*, rather than *order of to order a meal*, or *tell as a simple verb of saying*, although the latter distinction is rather less tangible (cp. the remarks on *should* in footnote 2).

- $s$ [The general ordered the soldiers  $s$ [to shoot the prisoners]]  
 (25)  $s$ [The general told the prisoners  $s$ [the soldiers to shoot the prisoners]]  
 $s$ [The general told the prisoners  $s$ [the prisoners to be shot by the soldiers]]  
 $s$ [The general told the prisoners  $s$ [to be shot by the soldiers]]  
 (26)  $s$ [The general ordered  $s$ [the soldiers to shoot the prisoners]]  
 $s$ [The general ordered  $s$ [the prisoners to be shot by the soldiers]]  
 $s$ [The general ordered the prisoners  $s$ [to be shot by the soldiers]]

In many cases, the subject of the embedded sentence will be a noun phrase that cannot, on pragmatic grounds, be interpreted as object of the matrix verb. With *order*, sentences like the following are possible:

- (27) *The general ordered the proclamation to be read.*  
 (28) *The general ordered recourse to be had to the lancers.*  
 (29) *The general ordered life to be made impossible for slackers.*

The equivalent sentences with *tell* are all odd, since the surface object must also be interpreted as underlying object, as if the general were issuing orders to the proclamation, recourse, and life, respectively (i.e. the syntax forces this interpretation, however unlikely the state of affairs envisaged thereby). This arises in an even grosser form where the embedded sentence has a dummy subject, like *it* or *there*:

- (30) *The general ordered (\*told) it to be made an offence to walk the streets after curfew.*  
 (31) *The general ordered (\*told) there to be no more merry-making in public.*

All of these facts about English follow automatically if we accept that *tell*, as a matrix verb with the infinitive, requires Equi-NP deletion, whereas *order* requires Subject-raising.

Under our analysis, (19) and (20) are not, strictly speaking, synonymous (even allowing for the difference in tone between *tell* and *order*), since the underlying structure of (19) [cp. (23)] states explicitly that the soldiers are recipients of the general's command, whereas that of (20) [cp. (24)] makes no reference to the recipient of the order, leaving this to be inferred pragmatically. In fact, the most natural contextual interpretation of (19) is with the soldiers as recipients of the order, but I think the greater naturalness of this interpretation is due to pragmatic, rather than syntactic-semantic, considerations<sup>6</sup>.

*That*-clauses after *order* are very unnatural (at least in most dialects), but certainly (32) is much better than (33)

- (32) ?*The general ordered that the soldiers (should) shoot the prisoners.*

<sup>6</sup> Some people have questioned this conclusion, though have not indicated how they would build their suggestion into the general theory. Incidentally, I do not believe that it should necessarily be easy always to distinguish operationally (including by intro-

(33) \**The general ordered the soldiers that they (should) shoot the prisoners.*  
*Tell* with a *that*-clause requires an overt matrix object, though the difficulties outlined in footnotes 2 and 5 must be borne in mind

(34) *The general told the soldiers that they should shoot the prisoners.*

(35) \**The general told that the soldiers should shoot the prisoners.*

This provides at least some further evidence in favour of the distinction between Subject-raising and Equi-Np deletion. *Order* may take, in place of the object clause, a direct object (abstract) noun phrase, but the possibility of another noun phrase to express the recipient of the order is still excluded:

(36) *The general ordered the advance.*

(37) \**The general ordered* { *the soldiers the advance.* }  
                                   { *the advance to the soldiers.* }

If we assume that *tell* with the infinitive requires an object noun phrase expressing the recipient of the order, and Equi-NP deletion, whereas *tell* requires Subject-raising, but cannot have such a recipient object noun phrase — despite their semantic and superficial syntactic similarity —, a number of apparently aberrant facets of their behaviour fall neatly into place, including, incidentally, some of the ways in which English *order* differs in syntactic behaviour from the nearest translations in many other European languages.

#### REFERENCES

- Chomsky, N. 1971. *Constraints on transformations*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Linguistic Club.  
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 Rosenbaum, P. S. 1967. *The grammar of English predicate complement constructions*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

spection) between interpretations that are preferred on internal syntactic grounds, and those that are preferred on pragmatic grounds — this has always been a difficulty in informant work of this type. Some evidence that may be provided by the (final cycle) passives of sentences with *order*:

(i) *The soldiers were ordered to shoot the prisoners.*

(ii) ?*The proclamation was ordered to be read.*

(iii) ??*It was ordered to be made an offence to walk the streets after curfew.*

I find (i) quite acceptable, as acceptable as

(iv) *The soldiers were told to shoot the prisoners*, whereas (ii) is less acceptable, (iii) very marginal. It is known, though no rationale has to my knowledge been given, that some (not all) matrix verbs with Subject-raising do not allow the passive, e.g.

(v) *Bill wants John to go.*

(vi) \**John is wanted to go by Bill.*

so perhaps *order* with Subject-raising falls into this class. We should have to distinguish two syntactic constructions with *order*, Equi-NP deletion and Subject-raising. The basic point of this paper would remain unaffected, but in view of our lack of understanding of the data touched on in this footnote, I prefer to leave these suggestions open.