

ON GENERATIVITY

CAN GRAMMARS GENERATE THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY¹

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The present course of the development of generative grammar calls for reconsidering certain basic assumptions ascribed to generative linguistics when it came to existence. Chomsky's theory is based on two important axioms:

A. the linguistic reality predictable by a set of formal rules is a set of *sentences*,

B. the grammatical rules generate only *fully grammatical sentences*.

A short comment is needed with reference to Chomsky's view on grammaticality, which did not remain unchanged through his successively proposed models. The position of 1965, which has been most influential and which is my specific point of departure, is that a grammar not only distinguishes between grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, but it also identifies various intermediate degrees of grammaticality. The sentences which lie relatively low on the scale of grammaticalness, though they do not violate any major syntactic or categorial rules, are characterized by the grammar as disobeying so called subcategorial cooccurrence restrictions. Since according to Chomsky (1965), all cooccurrence restrictions are syntactic in nature, the grammar cannot directly generate the sentences which violate them, except for pointing where, in the derivation the deviation has occurred. What it amounts to is that a large class of utterances is left outside the direct generative capacity of the grammar.

It seems that either of the above assumptions, i.e. A and B, is in disagreement with mentalistic conception of language which is acclaimed of genera-

¹ The content of the paper is identical with the talk delivered at the 10th SLE Meeting, 28—30 August, 1976, Salzburg.

tive linguistics. Linguistic competence as understood in the light of A and B can hardly be defended, first of all on... psychological grounds. A substantial amount of evidence has been presented in recent linguistic literature justifying:

- A. *text grammars* over sentence grammars, and
- B. *well-formedness relative to presupposition* over subcategorical cooccurrence restrictions.

As a result, however, we are faced with a number of serious methodological questions, the most important of which refers to the very notion of generativity.

The difficulties do not constitute a novelty in linguistics. They have always emerged from attempts to integrate the semantic and stylistic descriptions with the syntactic and phonological ones. Formal grammars would in most cases restrict the object of description to the syntacto-phonological well-formedness and referential literariness. Thus, for Chomsky, axioms A and B seem to constrain natural language in the only possible way for the grammar to be able to generate it. If we reject Chomsky's assumptions on empirical grounds, is there any chance to uphold a formal, generative grammar of such an "ill-defined" object as a set of texts with unconstrained lexical insertion? The apparent incongruity between the notion of generativity and the desired object of description is so striking that any attempt to search for a compromise requires strong justification. Thus, in the first place we need arguments supporting the view that the given conception of language is not only intuitively more correct but also scientifically accessible. I mean here full recognition of the linguistic knowledge, whether it has prepared bases for a formal description of the desired object. Only then may we try to work out details of the "compromise", which will unavoidably consist of discovering new ways of constraining natural language.

As was mentioned above, generative linguistics itself is contradictory with reference to certain issues under discussion. First, the theory of language acquisition on which generative grammar is supposed to be based, cannot disregard the arguments provided by psychology in favour of textual rather than sentential competence. Secondly, the theory of speech acts worked out by functional linguistics and philosophers of language has contributed significantly to the first formalizations of textual descriptions. Ross's (1968) performative analysis of declarative sentences is in my opinion the first fragmentary generative text grammar. Thirdly, many European linguists have recently devoted much of their attention to the study of textual coherence. The discovered principles of communicative dynamism, such as thematic structuring, cannot any longer be viewed as mere analytic tools, but are quite correctly assigned generative power, as is evident in writings of such authors as Bellert 1971, Daneš 1974, Sgall 1973, and others.

It seems tenable to treat the performative typology and the principle of textual coherence as two major sets of rules constraining natural language. While the former has usually been adopted as a rule governing textual macrostructures in the text grammars proposed so far (cf. van Dijk 1972), the significance of the latter has not been quite appreciated. However, for the reasons which I will try to explain later, the still relatively little understood laws of coherence may turn out to be a most attractive current field of research.

We should make it explicit that the language constrained in the two above proposed ways is by definition of a functional character. This fact seems to constitute a major departure from the classical, logic-oriented theory of generative grammars. Full consequences of the accepted position are at the moment even difficult to comprehend. Authors of formal grammars have as a rule refrained from dealing with the inherent functionality of natural language, implicitly consigning the question to a study of usage. As for the theory of performance signalled in Chomsky, it is difficult to envision any chance of accounting for the multi-functional character of language within its frameworks.

Presently I propose to accept the functional perspective for the generative theory. The preliminaries of the model that follows have been adopted from Halliday 1970. The task of grammars, generative text grammars included, is to account for a set of options which represent the "meaning potential" of language. An important, perhaps the most important, subset of options pertains to the "content" of language utterances. The "content" structure is on the one hand constrained by the syntactic and morphological rules, whose nature is relatively well known, and on the other, it is dependent on the available lexicalizations of the syntagmatic frameworks. In this way we have passed to the second of the two problems opening this paper.

Chomsky's (1965) grammar constrains lexical insertion by subcategorical rules. His deviant utterances are neither ready for semantic nor for "performance" interpretation, which is unavoidable as long as the grammar remains a sentence theory. More significant, however, the very concept of utterances graded with respect to correctness, an important class of which is constituted by unconventional lexicalizations, is very weakly substantiated, not only from the point of view of language functionality but also from the viewpoint of linguistic creativity. In this way the otherwise powerful image of language understood as creativity of human mind has been in fact reduced to the uninteresting dimension of structural variability.

Unconventional lexicalizations serve metaphorical purposes (metaphor — understood in the broadest possible sense). It seems that once language theory has focussed on the creativity aspect, it would be a grievous misconception to refrain from dealing with the metaphorization process in formal terms. Moreover, a commonly held belief that it is appropriate to distinguish *a priori*

between linguistic and aesthetic metaphors is a prejudgement. Metaphor should and can be described in linguistic terms, regardless of the fact that while used in certain types of texts it can perform in addition to communicative functions also aesthetic ones.

It is not my intention to present in the paper the details of the metaphoric formula. Basically, the metaphoric process consists in activating paradigmatic relations between the lexical items, which leads to replacing, in syntagmatic collocations, the conventional presuppositions by the unconventional ones (cf. Nowakowska 1975). The knowledge of paradigmatic relations of various types, i.e. structural, semantic, phonetic, etc., constitutes an important part of linguistic competence, which fact seems to have been overlooked by most generative grammarians. The lexicon of the generative theory we are looking for should invariably contain information about this type of relations, either in the form of a set of lexical redundancy rules or by having worked out a principle of lexical fields. It is interesting to note that like in some other recently proposed models, the lexical component is increasingly gaining in importance in the grammar.

Lexical paradigmatic relations may be viewed as providing a new set of constraints that the grammar should include. Accordingly, we shall not speak any longer of unconstrained lexicalizations, but rather of the lexical insertion which is not only syntagmatically collocated but can also be justified paradigmatically.

A trivial but very important practical question refers to the actual flexibility of human mind as far as the lexical associations are concerned. The language theory may accept either of the two logical options that suggest themselves. The first one, which has been maintained by many linguists and stylisticians, is to distinguish between the language norm and... poetry. It is true that some metaphors are more readily interpretable than others, since the former rely on certain historically conditioned and highly productive patterns, or, we may say, they activate high order presuppositions; while the latter refer to very subtle associations of meaning, sound, and structure. In all probability, the former would be exclusively semantic metaphors; while the activating of the phonic, rhythmical, and the like properties of the language substance would be treated as an aesthetic factor, lying outside the linguistic norm.

The second alternative, however, is equally plausible. Apparently, its acceptance causes an undesirable effect, that the constraining power of the grammar as far as lexical insertion is concerned seems nullified. In other words, it is always possible to impose some kind of associative relationships on the terms involved in the metaphoric utterance; moreover, the interpretations can differ from speaker to speaker. The paradox will disappear, however,

when we recall that the grammar we are concerned with is to generate texts which, as was discussed earlier, are constrained by the principle of coherence. And the principle defines the information function of the generated object, not its aesthetic role. Hence, as long as unconventional lexicalization contributes to the devising of coherence and is at the same time paradigmatically justified, it is grammatical, regardless of its extralinguistic, aesthetic functions. I also believe that the informative and referential readings of thus conceived grammatical metaphors are invariable; though naturally, metaphors are as a rule multiply ambiguous and, additionally, in poetic texts they are often open to symbolic interpretations, which exceed linguistic knowledge.

Concluding, we may say that the texts directly generated by the grammar must be three way functional, i.e. using the Hallidayan terminology: interpersonally, ideationally and informatively. Does the grammar generate the language of poetry? The answer which follows from the above remarks is: *language is one*. Linguistic competence, however, is a far more complicated object than authors of formal grammars once assumed. It enables the speaker not only to talk about the outside world or his internal emotions, but also to form new worlds and emotions by means of the same linguistic devices that he has at his disposal. Sometimes this formation is meant principally to cause aesthetic effects. Then we have to do with poetry.

Can a poetic text be identified by the grammar as ungrammatical? Naturally, likewise any other text. For instance Cummings' *Anyone lived in a pretty how town* violates many syntactic rules, although its information structure as well as multiple referential readings of its metaphors are available. One can imagine a "musical" poem whose unconventional lexicalizations do not serve any other but aesthetic purposes. On the other hand, it would not be difficult to present an instance of discourse whose all syntactic structures are correct but which thanks to the lack of coherence would be marked by the grammar as ungrammatical.

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