Comparison of Traditional Grammar and Descriptive Linguistics with Verbs, Verbals, and Tenses

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1. General introduction

The traditional grammar, originated in the 18th century and made on the model of Latin grammar, was not grounded on the scientific research of phenomena of language habits, and it only intended to investigate the supposed principles or rules of language as an authority, by which one might judge every utterance as correct or incorrect and one also might think of this grammer as true propriety.

This grammar did not follow the usage of acknowledged masters of English speech and writing. Regardless of the language which is spoken among people, this grammar tried to teach what was right and wrong in accordance with its supposed principles not grounded on the phenomena of the English language.

Robert Lowth, writer of an English grammar book titled "A Short Introduction to English Grammar", established the old-fashioned, conservative patterns of his work by imitating the machinery of the Latin grammar and he provided a kind of syntax, too. He transferred the categories of Latin grammar to English grammar without any consideration of modification, therefore his grammar was not always reasoned or reasonable.

The old grammars provided a set of terms and distinctions on the ground of semantics or function, but they have continued to ignore phonology, the fundamental study of the sounds of speech, and often have not distinguished speech from writing. Since the old grammars have persisted in accepting ready-made logical and psychological categories as absolute, it has not given any attention to the real forms of English.

For instance, according to the rules of the old grammars, we should say, "It's I," but actually people say, "It's me." In this case, if we persist in preserving the old forms, it is very ridiculous. The old grammars have not cared about how people actually speak or write. Moreover, they have tried to correct the expressions only according to their grammatical rules. Therefore, they have not been able to meet true standards and only given some diachronic information.

Their rules have been different from the usage which has been written and spoken by people. In America, the term "standard speech" describes the socially acceptable patterns of speech as used by the educated people of the community. It is not reasonable that standard speech should be much different from the old grammars which is being taught at school. Also, the traditional grammars have not been described systematically and they have tried to deal with bits and pieces of the English language. They are defective because they do not recognize that a language is a structure and it should not be dealt with by bits and pieces.

As a result, students had to memorize complicated rules of grammar about "shall and will" and "me and I." Actually the distinction between shall and will is not only meaningless but also useless. As a matter of fact, shall and will can be replaced by "be going to" without any confusion. On the contrary, they have not knowledge concerning the sound pattern of their own speech, the formation of words, and selection and ordering of their words in phrases and sentenses. From the grammatical point of view, a language is various, alive and changing constantly, so the attitudes of the old grammars, which try to preserve their old methods, are very unreasonable.

Now, I want to explain the situation in which structural grammar was born. In American schools, they still are teaching unreasonable, 18th-century-originated traditional grammars and demanding the students to memorize the complicated rules of grammars. People, however, are beginning to recognize many inconsistant rules in the old grammars. Second, people can not help appreciating the surprising development of modern linguistics, which is based on reasonable, scientific methods of analyzing the language which is being used by people. At the same time, people want to have a new method of grammar which can give them a precise knowledge of how they actually do speak and write, and a reasonable justification for statements of how people should speak and write. Then a new grammar was born on the ground of scientific research of linguistics. In the process new grammarians tried to work out the rules inductively and to describe each language in and for itself, to distinguish speech from writing, and to avoid rash judgment and random speculation. They tried to analyze the structure and laid their emphasis on synchronic materials. Also, they applied descriptive or structural linguistics to gram-

matical analysis. They succeeded in establishing the generalities or patterns in English usage instead of preserving authoritative rules of the old-fashioned grammar. They believed that a language is a system, a structure, a set of patterns, therefore, it should not be dealt in pieces. Also, they tried to define the parts of speech with two classes, morphological ones and syntactic ones, not with semantic or functional ones. They studied phonology with descriptive concepts and techniques.

They set up a clear principle that every language must be described as it is, not as if it were Latin, and not as the old grammarians might think it should be, in accordance with the supposed rules, which were not scientific or reasoned. Since new grammarians made a description of language through its forms, they objected to semantic definitions of grammatical classes, because there were a lot of contradictions in them. They are confident in their theory that meanings are communicated only by the forms that bear them, so that the only access to the meanings is through the forms.

At last, they summed up the work of American linguistics in short and highly systematic description by expressing the inflectional and positional systems and making some suggestions concerning methods of analyzing syntax. For the above-mentioned reasons, the new grammarians laid their emphasis on the speech sounds of English which were not dealt with in the old grammars.

2. Detailed comparison and contrast of methods and procedures of dealing with verbs, verbals and tenses

a. Verbs

Curme defines a verb functionally and he says that the verb is that part of speech by means of which we make an assertion or ask a question, and there are three classes-transitive, intransitive and linking. He adds, "A transitive verb denotes an action which passes over from the doer of the action to the object of it; an intransitive verb denotes a state or simple action without any reference to an object;a linking verb merely links the predicate to the subject. But he defines a compound verb in semantic ways.

Sledd says that a verb is any word belonging to an inflectional series which marks the difference between present and past tense and whose members will fit into a pattern like sing, sings, sang, sung, singing or play, plays, played, playing. For instance, there is the verb "be,"which has eight forms instead of five like "sing". Several other important verbs have not more but less than five forms; for instance, can, could; may, might; shall, should; will, would. All these can be considered verbs since they are inflected for tenses. The verbs,

however, include words only and not phrases.

b. verbals

The traditional grammars usually applies the term "verbal" to the participles, to the so-called gerund, and to some infinitives, but Curme uses the term "the infinitive forms of the verb" instead of the term "verbal." He, however, uses the term "verbal" in this way; the present participle in connection with a copula in the progressive form of verbs. In this kind of sentence, Curme says that the participle now for the most part has more verbal force than formerly. Also, he says that the infinitive forms of the verb—the participle, the infinitive and the gerund—are forms which partake of the nature of verbs and have in addition the function of adjectives or nouns. Then he explains the functions of participles in the following ways.

1. as an adjective

a. attributively

the risen sun, cooking apple
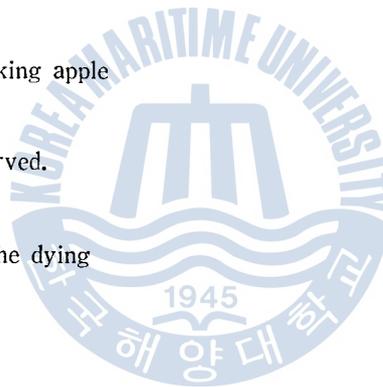
b. predicatively

He is always reserved.

c. as a noun

the wounded and the dying

d. as an adverb

boiling hot

piercing cold

He also draws the distinction between gerund and participle. But Sledd does not use the term "gerund." The form ing in dining-car (i. e. a car for dining), and ironing-board (i. e. board for ironing) is the gerund, but the form ing in cooking apple (i. e. an apple that can be cooked), and breech-loading gun (i. e. a gun that is loaded at the breech) is a present participle with passive force.

2. with more verbal force

a. progressive form

The present participle forms the progressive form in connection with a copula.

b. passive voice

The house is painted.

c. predicate appositive

In this function in older English gradually they assumed more the character of verbs, so that they now have tenses and voice like verbs. They have not yet developed forms for mood and have not as many tenses as verbs have, but on the other hand they are terser forms

of expression and often much more convenient. They are adjectives, and hence without the formality of framing a full clause with a norminative subject and finite verb as predicate they are adjectves in relation of a predicate appositive and need only to be placed alongside of their governing noun to explain it and at the same time they serve as adverbs indicating some adverbial relation, such as time, cause, manner, condition, and concession etc. ;

Going down town, I met a friend.

   (While I was going down town, I met a friend.)

Having finished my task, I went to bed.

   (After I had finished my task, I went to bed.)

Curme explains the functions of the infinitive in the following ways.

   as a subject:

      To error is human.

   as predicate, always with to:

      To do good is to be happy.

      He was made to shut the door.

   after linking verb with modal force:

      This story is not to be repeated.

   as object predicate:

      I have much to do.

   after linking verbs to express purpose:

      I have been down town to buy a new hat.

   as object:

      I do not know what to do.

 Also Curme defines the gerund as follows:

   The gerund was originally a verbal noun in-<u>ing</u>, thus differing from the participle in-<u>ing</u>, which was originally an adjective. The gerund is itself often a simple noun without any of the characteristics of a verb except its verbal meaning. The noun gerund usually preserves its original active form even where it has strong passive force and is usually formally distinguished by a preceding abjective, descriptive or limiting, and often also by a following genitive object:

The gerund is used as follows:

   as subject;

      <u>Seeing</u> is believing.

as predicate;

Seeing is <u>believing</u>.

as object;

I like <u>getting</u> up early.

He became near <u>being</u> drowned.

as an attributive element;

the fear of <u>losing</u> friendship

Though the attributive genitive gerund is very common, it cannot be used at all when the idea, wish, demand, intention or modality is present, in which cases the prepositional infinitive is usually used.

In comparison with above-mentioned Curme's definition, Sledd's definition is by far different from them. Sledd says as follows. The term "verbal" will be related to the term "verb" much as nominal is related to nouns. We have defined a verbal as a word or phrase which occupies a position typically occupied by verbs. Then he gives us the three frames as sequences of positional classes.

1. Determiner. nominal. (　　　　　). adjectival.

2. Determiner. nominal. (　　　　　). determiner. nominal

3. Determiner. nominal. (　　　　　). adverbial.

The name form of a verb and its present and past tenses are always verbals. A sequence of verb forms as sequence can replace a simple verb in the present or past tense in a verbal phrase, and every word in it, including <u>must</u> and <u>ought</u>. Sledd defines a participle in the different ways and sometimes he includes the "gerund" in the traditional grammars as a participle. For instance:

Participle as verbal: He's walking away.

Participle as adjectival: He's a walking encyclopedia.

Participle as nominal: Walking is not much exercise.

In the last sentence, walking is a gerund in the rules of traditional grammars. But he defines a gerund in ways different from traditional grammars.

Reading this book took time.

In this sentence, we can not replace "reading" with nouns, but other verb forms in-<u>ing</u>. Even if "reading" here stands in nominal phrases, it is not a nominal itself, but a verbal. Sledd says that the infinitive of a verb is the simple noun form, in some of its uses. It occurs both with and without "to". Also he says that unmarked infinitive is always a verbal. At the same time, a marked infinitive may be used as a nominal or as a sentence adverbial or to expand a

nominal, a verbal, or an adjectival. Other important uses of the marked include the followings.

 1. After a"question word" in certain nominal phrases.

 2. With a preceding nominals to form the complement of certain verbs.

 3. In a number of distinctive verbal phrases.

 4. In a sentence with "expletive" it.

Curme's grammar has given six tenses: present tense, past tense, future tense, present perfect tense, past perfect tense, future perfect tense, by translating the Latin forms, but Sledd has given the name "tense" only to the present and past, because only they are marked by inflection in English, and English has originally two tenses: the present and past tense. He has not given the name "tense" to verbal phrases like "will drink", "had drunk", "will have drunk". We have found some quotations from structural linguists to the effect that the passive voice, the future tense, the perfect tense, the progressive tense, the subjunctive mood and the imperative mood do not exist in present-day English. The function words "will. "shall", "have", "be", which form the tenses, have various meanings; therefore, the phrasal combinations of these function words and other bound morphemes are not unmistakable formal signals. It is not by the forms but by the context that we can know the meaning. For instance, in the tense catagory in English, forms like "go", "will go", "have been" grouped together to enter the tense paradigm of a verb. Also, the form "will go" has been identified as a variation of a single form by virtue of the fact that it behaves exactly the same in the same position.

3. Conclusion

Traditional grammars represented by Curme has been studied in connection with ancient languages known only through the medium of writing and it has ignored the fact that understanding of the essential nature of languages can be obtained by means of direct observation of living speech and only secondary use of written documents. But we should preserve some reasonable semantic or functional definitions and modify them on the ground of linguistics. Furthermore, we should overlook the complicated rules of auxiliaries, especially "will" and "shall" and the systems which are not so useful in present-day English. Sledd's grammar is based on the modern linguistics and emphasized that the spoken and heard words are the primary forms of languages, and of far greater importance than the secondary forms used in the writing and reading. It is clearly true that mankind had a language before they had invented the art of writing. Most people speak infinitely more than they write. I should say that writing is only a substitute for speaking. For instance, we recognize only one word "there" in written language, but we must distinguish two, both as to sound and significance. in spoken language, as in the following sentence:

There are many people there.

Quality, stress and intonation play a very important role in the spoken language. Therefore, we are convinced that grammar should deal with sounds and secondarily with letters, as they are dealt with in Sledd's grammar. It is very reasonable that the parts of speech are defined by inflection and position in dealing with verbs and verbals.

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