

THE RATIONALIZATION OF GRAMMAR

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The activities of the Institute for Research in English Teaching during the last ten years have been varied and numerous. The Tenth Anniversary of the founding of the Institute provides a welcome opportunity for stock-taking of past achievements and for looking forward to the future. Much has been done, notably in the department of lexicological research. Much yet remains to be done. Especially in the field of grammar there is room for further exploration. What is to be the use and place of grammar in the classroom and the text-book? Tentative steps have already been taken. Those who are familiar with I.R.E.T. publications will realize the advance in technique illustrated in such text-books as the "Graded Exercises in English Composition" to accompany the Standard Readers and the "Pupils' Manuals" to accompany the Girls' Readers now being issued.

But renewed and constantly renewed efforts are still required for the rationalization of grammar. The foreign student of English (except, perhaps, when he arrives at the University stage) has no need of formal grammar and still less need of historical grammar. Yet it is precisely this formal and historical grammar that he is offered. The need for rationalized Readers has already been realized and met. But we have not yet realized, or we have only partially realized, that a system of English grammar suited to the needs or supposed needs of English students may be quite unsuited to the needs of foreign students. For the English schoolboy, the "grammar" lesson (generally the best-hated period in the school schedule) means parsing and analysis. What has the foreign student of English to do with this? His needs are quite different. Synthesis, not analysis, is his main requirement. He needs to compose, not to decompose.

What are the implications of this conclusion? Surely it means that we need and must have a rationalization of grammar and of grammatical terminology. It means a scrapping of an obsolete conception of the subject, a conception based on the classical tradition. It means, too, a scrapping of its terminology, except in so far as it can be adapted to strictly practical requirements. *Practical*—because our pupils need only so much grammar as is required for composing a series of English sentences in accord with usage. *Practical*—because it is instructions for the building of English sentences from their component parts that is required.

"DIRECTIONS FOR USE"

"Grammar" is to be interpreted (for the foreign student) as a set of "Directions for Use"—for use in building up and not for pulling apart. Our pupils need to know not *why* certain words have come to be used in certain ways (that, for example, "ought" was at one time the preterite tense of "owe"), but *how* they are used to-day. We require, that is to say, a grammar that is a catalogue of existent phenomena which have come into being in the course of natural linguistic evolution rather than a collection of problems explainable only by logic. The grammar book that tells our pupils (particularly when they are beginners) things that do not show them concretely and specifically what they need to know and crave to know should have no place either in the school or on the home book-shelf.

The traditional grammars are full of names that are really no more than labels of exhibits in the museums of antiquarian linguistics. The object of research is laws, principles, facts—not concrete things. Entomological research, for instance, does not look merely for insects but for facts about insects. So with linguistic research. We are not looking for grammatical rules or systems for their own sakes. What we want are the facts about the grammatical rules and systems. Which are of practical use to us, or rather to our pupils? Which are mere bones

without life—to be consigned to the lumber-room or left to the antiquarians?

THE 24 ANOMALOUS FINITES

A beginning has been made in the direction of reform in several papers and pamphlets published by the I.R.E.T. The ordinary grammar book, when it comes to the group of verb finites that consists of the finites of *be*, *have*, *do* and the finites *will*, *shall*, *must*, *ought*, *need*, *dare*, etc. classifies them into groups of auxiliary verbs and defective verbs and then proceeds to give elaborate explanations of their historical origin. The fact that *be*, *have* and *do* are often not auxiliary at all is usually ignored. The foreign student of English is, in short confronted by a mass of confusing and unnecessary information in place of a clear statement of how to *use* the 24 finites that form this group. He is erroneously informed that the interrogative in English is formed by means of the auxiliary verb *do* (but that there are important “exceptions”)—instead of being told clearly the rule of subject and finite inversion.

The 24 *Anomalous* Finites—this is the title chosen to describe them. And at once opposition arises. Why introduce a new name? Why not be satisfied with the traditional terminology and call them “helping verbs” or “auxiliary verbs”? Why puzzle the student with unfamiliar labels? Thus the antiquarians and all those whose conception of grammar is based on the old classical tradition. They fail completely to realize the importance and, for the foreign student of English, the necessity of grouping together these twenty-four most important finites and of finding for them a label that is both exclusive and inclusive. “Auxiliary” will not do—for it does not include *be*, *have* and *do* when these are used as verbs with full meaning. “Defective” will not do—for this, too, fails to include the verbs *be*, *have* and *do*. “Irregular” will not do—for this is already used to describe verbs such as *go* with irregular preterites and participles.

The peculiarity common to all these verbs is that they have

no compound present and preterite tenses (that *be*, for example, does not possess the forms *I do be*, *I did be*). A label is required for these finites and has been found in the word “anomalous.” That these 24 finites should be grouped together under a distinctive label and given special treatment is most important to the foreign student of English. For they have special functions in the formation of the negative, in the inversion of subject and finite, for the interrogative, for the *So can I* and *Non can I* constructions, for giving prominence to certain parts of the sentence, etc., in the Emphatic Affirmative, in the avoidance of word repetition, and in the position of certain adverbs.*

THE DETERMINATIVES

When the student comes to the study of adjectives, he is confronted by a bewildering collection of titles—the definite article, the indefinite article, the partitive articles, pronominal adjectives and adjectival pronouns, possessive adjectives and demonstrative adjectives, indefinite demonstratives and distributive demonstratives, interrogative adjectives and relative adjectives, adjectives of indefinite quantity, cardinal numerals, ordinal numerals and multiplicative numerals. The I.R.E.T. has favoured the simple title “determinative” to describe all those adjectival pronouns or pronominal adjectives which *determine* something about the noun without describing it, all adjectives which are not adjectives of *quality*. While some of the classifications noted above are useful and necessary, yet some of the sub-classifications can have little practical value to the foreign student. And, as will be shown later in connection with construction patterns, it is of immense value to have a single and inclusive title for all these different classes. The title *Determinative* is self-explanatory—what determines without describing the noun. This brings us to another grammatical category.

* A full account of these functions is given in the I.R.E.T. leaflet “The Theory of the 24 Anomalous Finites” obtainable from the I.R.E.T. price 10 sen.

The English student of grammar is accustomed to seeing nouns classified as Proper, Common, Material, Abstract and Collective. What the foreign student needs to know (particularly the Japanese student) is which nouns are capable of being used in the plural and which are not and what a change in the semantic content of a word may mean in the rule for singular and plural. For on this depends the correct use of the Determinatives and the concord of subject and verb. Sweet was one of the first English grammarians to see the importance of this distinction and he supplied the definition "nouns of continuous quantity" (for such things as *water, sand, air*) and "nouns of discontinuous quantity" (for such things as *book, tree, river*). In I.R.E.T. publications the simpler terms "Countables" and "Uncountables" (suggested by Jespersen) have been adopted.

These two classes of words, the Determinatives and the Nouns, offer all sorts of difficulties to our pupils. Here, above all, we need a rational terminology, a terminology that will enable us to present our facts clearly and yet which contains no unnecessary terms to bewilder the beginner. Let us, therefore, use ourselves, and encourage the use of by others, the terms "Countables," "Uncountables" and "Determinatives."

THE ALOGISTIC ARTICLE

It has been said above that many of the sub-classifications of the determinatives are unnecessary from the point of view of the foreign student of English. But it is, of course, impossible to go far without making use of the terms *definite* and *indefinite articles*. The I.R.E.T. publications introduce a new term—the *alogistic article*. Is this new term an unnecessary burden or is it something that will help and clarify? Those who claim to be clearing away unnecessary litter from the grammatical field must justify themselves when they introduce something new. What, then, is the justification for *alogistic*? First, a word of explanation for the name itself. *Alog* is used to indicate significant word-omission. From *alog* is derived the adjective *alogistic*.

Everyone who has taught the use of the articles in English knows that their absence or non-use is just as important as their presence or use (and that if the matter is not clearly explained and understood, the result is likely to be their mis-use). We explain that the plural of $a(n)$ (when it means "any" or "in general") is expressed by omission. "A horse is an animal." Plural—" [] Horses are [] animals." This omission, here and in I.R.E.T. text-books expressed as a parenthetic blank, is significant. In this particular example it means "any" or "all." In the example "He keeps [] horses" the blank indicates something, too—"an indefinite number" of horses, "some" horses. The parentheses indicate the omission of a determinative. But there are scores of instances in English where singular and countable nouns are used without an article. (E.g., to go to bed, to church, to business, to school; to take breath, to take fire, to take ship; to set sail; to die in battle; to be at lunch, at dinner, at table; to be at school, at college, at work; to go by train, by bus, by tram.) How are we to make the difference clear unless we have a term to distinguish significant word-omission from non-significant word-omission? For in the examples quoted directly above, there is no determinative-omission. For "to go to school" we cannot substitute "to go to *a* school" or "to go to *any* school" without changing the meaning completely. Mr. Richards, in his interesting book ("Practical Guide to the Use of the Determinatives"—Sanseido Co.) offers the explanation that these nouns lose their concrete quality in some of the expressions listed above and become abstractions. "Bed," for example, in "to go to bed," suggests laziness, sickness or resting instead of a concrete article of furniture. "Battle," in "to die in battle," does not suggest any particular or even any vague battle, but rather the manner of death. Here, then, in *alogistic article*, we have a new term that will not hinder but help, making it possible to explain differences that without it would present great difficulties.

CONSTRUCTION-PATTERNS

It is only when we have cleared away unnecessary labels and

arrived at a selection of those that are of practical utility that we can begin our constructive work—and enable our pupils to do likewise. We are able then to show them how to construct sentences according to patterns made clear by the use of strictly utilitarian terminology. Having A. F. to indicate “anomalous finite,” Det. to indicate all the determinatives, IOAB to indicate “adverb of the *In Out Away Back* type” (see the Introduction to the Second Interim Report on Collocations for an explanation of this important category), parentheses to indicate the Alogistic Article, we are able to indicate scores of patterns by means of which our pupils are taught to build up sentences of their own. We make it possible for them to construct for themselves.

It is in this direction, then, that some of the future work of the Institute must be extended. For the work that has been done so far is only a beginning.