

COMMENTS ON PETR SGALL'S "ON THE USEFULNESS OF MOVEMENT RULES"

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Abstract: Prof. Sgall makes a persuasive case for the usefulness of movement rules in dependency grammar. However, his paper does not directly address the question of their necessity. Introducing movement rules brings with it the same problems that have robbed transformational grammars of empirical content, in this case the implementation of linguistically unmotivated underlying representations and the loss of important language-internal and cross-linguistic generalizations. A monostratal alternative to Sgall's tectogrammatic approach is able to accommodate the same observations without adding to expressive power and losing generalizations.

Keywords: dependency grammar, constraints, tectogrammatics, underlying representations, movement, transformations

1. SUMMARY OF THE PAPER

The Pragian approach to dependency-based description, especially work by Petr Sgall and Eva Hajičová, has continued to be the primary contributor to the study of the relation between word order and meaning. The current version of this approach does not require many kinds of movement rules, but some of them are claimed to be useful. To explain the data, the analysis is designed to contain all the grammatical oppositions relevant to semantico-pragmatic interpretation. This includes the distinctions signaled by differences in intonation and word order in for example topicalized versus untopicalized sentences, or in stranded preposition constructions versus pied-piped ones.

To account for such differences, Sgall finds it useful to distinguish 'underlying' word order from 'surface order'. The underlying order corresponds to a kind of basic ordering of valency slots defined by the grammar and present in the valency frames (grids) of lexical entries. The surface order provides for topics to occur in the first part of the sentence and 'focused' elements to come at the end. An element which comes last in the basic order can be interpreted as being in focus, but something which has an underlying non-final position may have to move to the end of the sentence to get focus. As an example, 'They moved from a village to an industrial center' has the two Directionals in its focus part on one of its readings, while in the secondary 'They moved to an industrial center from a village', 'from a village' has moved from its basic position to the marked sentence-final position, where it is necessarily focused.

1. PERCEIVED PROBLEMS WITH THIS ANALYSIS

1.1 Are movement rules desirable?

Movement rules require the establishment of two levels of structure, and the more abstract level is inevitably farther removed from confrontation with the data, and much more devoid of empirical content and susceptible to capricious tinkering. Work by Sgall, Hajíčová, and their colleagues has clearly identified many interesting questions of clausal 'information structure', and provided solutions to most of them, and as Sgall has pointed out in his paper, this has been done with the aid of movement rules. Was this desirable? Doctors used to use arsenic, a deadly poison, to cure syphilis, a horrible disease, and this was desirable, because that is the only way they knew to do the job. So, transformations and underlying representations are desirable if there is no other way to do what needs to be done.

1.2 Are movement rules necessary?

According to Occam's Razor, theoretical entities are not to be multiplied unnecessarily. Underlying representations and movement rules are theoretical entities, and I believe that they are unnecessary ones. As I demonstrated in my contribution to Prof. Sgall's felicitation volume (Starosta 1993), the same result can be achieved in a monostratal framework by having predicates open leftmost topic and rightmost focus slots along with the lexical valency slots. Any given constituent may then, subject to language-specific constraints, be generated either in its own unmarked position or in the marked topic or focus position. An interpretive co-indexing rule then links elements in their marked position with their home slots in the predicate's valency grid. If this works, and as far as I know no one has as yet tried to show that it does not, then the effect of movement rules is achieved without the debilitating side effects of movement rules and underlying representations.

2. PERNICIOUS SIDE EFFECTS OF A MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

The hidden agenda for the "Constraining Dependency Grammar" Round Table was to remind dependency grammar colleagues that more constrained theories are better theories. A really good theory will allow one and only one solution to a given problem, and that solution will be the best one. An unconstrained theory will allow many alternative solutions, and most of

them will be bad. Not only that, the bad solutions may be the most attractive and tempting because they are so easy to formulate and so difficult to disprove. Unfortunately, I think Sgall's analysis of function words, and especially auxiliary verbs, illustrates this trap perfectly.

Sgall's tectogrammatical level has been purged of function words; we find nothing there but pukka 'autosemantic lexical items'. However, I have yet to find any statement in Sgall's work about why this purification is linguistically desirable, that is, about how it helps to capture language-specific or cross-linguistic generalizations. This practice seems to be motivated by nothing more than the widespread prejudice against words which are subjectively perceived as insignificant, and it is sanctioned by an overly powerful multistratal framework. To cite a specific example, auxiliary verbs are not present in the underlying representation. 'Their correlates on TL are just indices within the complex labels of autosemantic lexical units' (Sgall 1997). Because of the lack of explicitness that always seems to accompany excessive abstractness, it isn't clear by what formal mechanism these indices are extruded into surface words in this scheme. If and when this gets formalized, I predict that the result will turn out to lose crucial morphological and syntactic generalizations. As has been shown repeatedly in modern syntax, starting in the generative tradition with Ross's 'Auxiliaries as main verbs' (1969) and in the dependency paradigm with Hudson's 'Word grammar' (1984) and followed by articles by Starosta (1991; to appear), auxiliary verbs are full-fledged verbs that participate in exactly the same syntactic control patterns and many of the same morphological ones as their more highly regarded 'autosemantic' cousins. A really constrained and explicit monostratal framework won't let you miss that, but in a transformational analysis such important observations can get lost, as they seem to have been in Sgall's approach and certainly have been in the Chomskyan analysis that inspired it.

2. SALUTORY POTENTIAL OF A MONOSTRATAL ANALYSIS

Interestingly, the kind of monostratal non-movement 'movement' analysis proposed in Starosta 1992 is already present in the nascent state in tectogrammatics:

'(v) not only 'static' syntax, but also the 'dynamic' opposition of topic and focus ('given' and 'new', more precisely: contextually bound and non-bound items) is represented on TL (being expressed in the surface by word order, stress and morphemic means such as the topic particles in Japanese, Tagalog and other languages).' (Sgall 1997)

I see no reason that this information, now assigned to the Tectogrammatical level, could not equally well be assigned to the surface level, apportioned to the real 'surface' syntactic words that encode and effect it and leaving the unnecessary theoretical entities to the purveyors of less worthy grammatical frameworks.

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