Transformational Grammar and the Teaching
of English

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I.   Introduction

Is the concept of deep structures useful to
teach English as a foreign language at junior high
schools or senior high schools? There seems a large
gap between the principle of transformational grammar
and the pedagogical grammar. Even now, modern school
grammars are based almost exclusively upon the models
of the 18th century English grammarians. They are
largely prescriptive, and their explanations are
based upon an intuitive perception of the structure
of English. Furthermore, they also ignore lots
of important linguistic facts.

Linguits who study transformational grammar
seem to hope to specify a scientific grammar which
offers a logical explanation. The work is easy
to know by looking at two sentences which Chomsky
has frequently used:

Sentence (1) John is easy to please.

Sentence (2) John is eager to please.

These two sentences have the same surface structures,
but we try to rearrange the sentences, the difference

becomes very clear. We can say <u>It was easy for us</u>
<u>to please John</u>. But we cannot say <u>It was eager</u>
<u>for us to please John</u>. But we can say <u>He was eager</u>
<u>to please us</u>, but we cannot say <u>He was easy to please</u>
<u>us</u>.

There are many cases in English. According to
the school grammars, the difference of the underlying
structures cannot be explained exactly. In this
respect, the concept of deep structures seem to play
an important role to teach the grammar of English
exactly. At Japanese junior or senior high schools,
the teaching of English is apt to let the five patterns
memorize and expand them. To know five patterns is
the elementary way of practicing the verb pattern
and basic sentence patterns.

But the concept of deep structures will be useful
to teach English grammar exactly. I want to claim
the concept of deep structures is very available to
teach English logically.
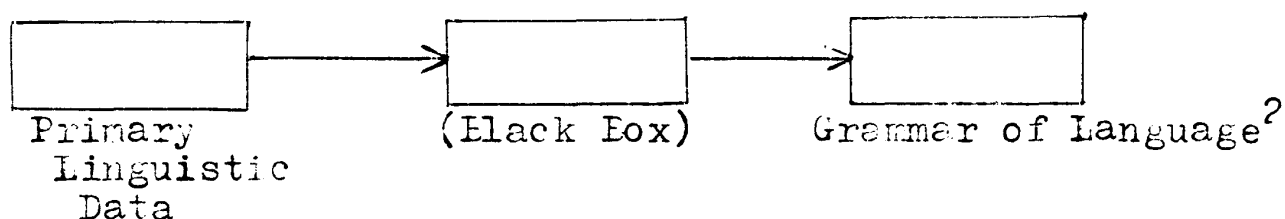

II. The Effect of Transformational Concept

What is the inherent capacity of human beings
to master his native language? Every child can learn
how to speak his mother tongue, not so long as he is

deaf and dumb. No book has mentioned the problem

what the inherent capacity of languages every child

has in his own head. But every child seems to have

something like a mechanism of his own language in

his own head; namely, he has a finite set of grammar.

About the language aquisition, I have collected

few materials. Every child hears many sentences

spoken during the first five years of his life.

> Eventually he begins experimenting with
> sentences he tries to speak. He learns to
> associate objects and actions with specific
> words, and he learns to combine these words
> with one another to produce larger, meaningful
> structures.[1]

Thus every child has an inherent capacity to learn

the finite set of structures, from which he produces

many unknown infinite sentences spoken. The following

figure will well show the process.

Primary
Linguistic
Data
(Black Box)
Grammar of Language[2]

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[1]Bruce L. Liles, An Introductory Transformational Grammar, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971, p. 75.

[2]Minoru Nakau, Lecture on the Outline of Transformational Generative Grammar at Tokyo University of Arts and Sciences, Dec.2, 1972.

The black box is the language aquisition device of children, that is to say the general linguistic theory.

How is the capacity used to consider the transformational grammar? If there are some ways to discover the form of rules in a person's mind, the task of describing the language would be easy. The linguist must be satisfying with trying to describe the regular patterns that he observes. The description is expressed in the forms of rules, and we call the collection of the linguist "grammar." Therefore, grammar has two meanings. The first is the rules which unable a person to understand and to create sentences in his language. The second is a theory about these rules and an artificial way of expressing them. It tries to describe the native speaker's knowledge of his language. Therefore, the capacity of human beings to learn the mother tongue is deeply considered when we research the transformational grammar.

Before the time of transformational grammar, structural linguistics was at his best. The weakest point of the structural linguistics was that it dealt only with surface structures. If the immediate constituent analysis is completely the same, there are many ambiguous sentences. Furthermore, the structural linguists felt the ideal way to collect

data for their reseach about language was to gather
large samples of speech, preferably recorded without
the speaker's knowledge, and to analize them. The
structural linguists paid much attention to the
speaker's performance, but no attention to the speaker's
competence—the inherent capacity to learn the language.

The greatest merit of the transformational
approach is that the competence of the native speaker
is assumed. The transformational approach is con-
cerened with potential utterances as it is with those
actually spoken at a given time. It tries to state
the problem that a structure which has not actually
been observed is possible or not. The transformational
approach insists in the speaker's competence, the
grammar that he has developed. But the speaker's
performance, or the application of the grammar must
be studied, but it is merely as a means of approaching
the underlying system of the sentences. Furthermore,
the good point is that the linguist of transformational
grammar makes use of the speaker's competence about
his language, while realizing that these competences
may be inaccurate. Then, the discovery of the trans-
formational approach has produced new phases remark-
ably, and must be applied to the education from now
on.

III. Grammatical Theory and the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

Structural linguists was the first to face the problem of developing the method of scientific teaching of English. But the presentation of transformational grammars will be much helpful to teach English as a foreign language.

Leonard Newmark says:

> The whole question of the utility of grammatical analysis for language teaching needs to be reopened.

He concluded with three facts that support his position:

(1) Systematic attention to grammatical form is neither necessary nor sufficient for succesful language learning;
(2) Teaching language in meaningful and usable contexts is both sufficient and necessary for succesful language learning;
(3) The formal properties of sentences do not reflect "relationships of meaningful use," and consequently, teaching formal relation is "incompatible with the only necessary and sufficient method" we know has succeeded for every speaker of a language.[3]

Hence, transformational grammar is the best response in this point.

> A great contribution of linguists to the teaching of foreign language was made by the "liberal" nineteenth—and twentieth—century

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[3] Mark Lester, Readings in Applied Transformational Grammar: Leonard Newmark, Grammatical Theory and the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970, p.211.

grammarians like Otto Jespersen who taught
us to view natural languages freshly as
worthy objects of teaching.[4]

It is indeed true that nineteenth—and twentieth

century grammarians regarded natural language as

the worthy objects of teaching, but they tried too

much to form a rule and how to explain exceptional

cases.

> In an important sense transformational
> grammar is the most promising response we have
> to our common desire for descriptions that
> explain rather than merely display language
> data. For example, the transformationalist's
> derivation of imperative sentences from under-
> lying strings with _you_ as subject and _will_ as
> the modal auxiliary makes possible an expla-
> nation of many things—from the traditional
> intuition about the understood _you_ in imperatives
> to the fact (unexplained by orthodox structural
> linguists) that the "interrogative tags" on
> the imperative are _won't you_ or _will you_.
> In general the transformationalist's analysis
> of verb phrase constructions, beginning with
> Chomsky's simple C (M) (have-en) (be-ing) V
> formula, brings startling simplicity and
> clarity to our understanding of the grammatical
> structure of a number of discontinuous and
> elliptical verb constructions; transformationalist
> seems to offer suggestions neatly and precisely
> for what a program for teaching English verb
> structure would have to include.[5]

There is no grammar to explain the verb constructions

neatly and precisely except transformational grammar.

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[4] _Ibid._, p.212.

[5] _Ibid._, p.213.

Therefore, when we teach English to an elementary pupil, this concept is very useful to understand the sentence constructions precisely and logically.

Three particular ordering characteristics of present transformational grammars have especial appeal for English language teachers:

a. The position of transformational rules after phrase-structure rules in the grammar suggests the possibility of teaching a finite manageable set of elementary constructions first, then teaching the ways in which modification and combination of these elementary constructions can add the finite set of possible sentences that any speaker of a language has at his disposal.

b. Since lexical vocabulary is introduced in a transformational grammar by phrase structure rules only, an apparent theoretical justification seems to be offered for teaching new vocabulary in simple kernal sentences, without complicating the teaching of vocabulary by teaching new sentence patterns at the same time, and vice versa. The grammatical and semantic properties (e.g. mass vs count nouns) of vocabulary, then, might be introduced economically at one time, and only for the simplest constructions.

c. The fact that the detailed phonological rules come late in the grammar suggests that attention to the details of pronunciation might be left until relatively late in a foreign language teaching program. Note that such delay in "a good accent" is at sharp variance with the attitude of most applied linguists today, but is in good agreement with our common sense feeling that it is more important to be able to speak a language fluently and to say a lot of things in it than

> to have marvelous pronunciati n but not
> know what to say. The relative lateness
> of phonological rules in a transformational
> grammar helps account for the fact that we
> can often understand a foreign speaker even
> when he lacks most of the phonological habits
> of English; if we attempt to follow the order
> of grammatical rules in teaching simple
> before complex sentences, by the same token
> we should teach meaningful sentences before
> we worry much about teaching their proper
> pronunciation.[6]

It is a good idea that the new vocabulary is taught

in the simple kernal sentences. In the transformational

grammar, phonological rules are not considered very

much. After we learn the syntax, we should learn

phonology.

Transformational grammar is not directly employed

in teaching English, but in some areas, it offers a

description of English which is a genuine explanation.

Therefore language teachers should employ these areas

in their teaching. Besides, there is a great advantage

in constructing contrastive grammars to explain the

differences and similarities between the first and

second languages when we employ the transformational

grammar, for transformational grammar can deal with

more than surface structure. It is the best way to

consider the structure of a transformational grammar

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[6]*Ibid.*, p.215.

as a model for the organization of the language

course.

> The language teacher tempted to use
> transformational grammar because its psychological
> and pedagogical implications seem desirable.
> Newmark gives three instances:
> a. transformational drills are easy to write
>   and easy to use in the classroom;
> b. transformational grammar does not place
>   such great emphasis on the sound system
>   per se. In particular, this allows the
>   language teacher to re-empasize the role
>   of suprasegmental features; and
> c. the transformational grammar is interested
>   in the same thing that the language teacher
>   is—"the intuitive ability of the speakers
>   of a language to generate new sentences."
>   Furthermore, the rules of a transformational
>   grammar are dynamic and prescriptive, in
>   a sense acceptable to language teachers.[7]

I think it the best way to employ transformational

grammar to understand pupils what the property of

language is like. Transformational grammar offers

the best account to specify the formal properties

of sentences.

IV. The Value of Transformational Grammar in
    Teaching Composition

Is there any relation between the ability to

write and the common knowledge of transformational

grammar? Transformational grammar seems to be a

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[7] _Ibid._, p.211.

deductive approach to language. Mark Lester says:

> There simply appears to be no correlation
> between a writer's conscious study of grammar
> and his ability to write. If we accept this
> view, with the study of transformational
> grammar succeed in improving writing where
> earlier theories of grammar have failed?
> Lester answers that it will not for several
> reasons:
> (1) The entry price for transformational
>   grammar is high. In order to apply
>   transformational grammar to the problems
>   of style, the student must first learn
>   the grammar. On the college level, at
>   least, there is simply not enough time
>   to teach both the fundamental theory of
>   transformational grammar and also its
>   application to writing within the compass
>   of the usual freshman English course.
> (2) The theory of transformational grammar
>   itself suggests that the conscious study
>   of language may have only a remote con-
>   nection with language behavior.[8]

Therefore, we cannot directly emply the transformation-

al grammar in teaching composition. If one has·

lots of knowledge about transformational grammar

and lots of ability to analize sentences logically,

it is not necessary to write a good sentence and

write a good novel. Structural linguistics was

an inductive approach to language, but, on the

contrary, transformational grammar is a deductive

approach to language.

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[8]Mark Lester, Readings in Applied Transformational
Grammar: The Value of Transformational Grammar in
Teaching Composition, New York, Holt, Rinehart and
Winston, Inc., 1970, p. 201.

In the following excerpt, Ohmann summarizes the basic idea of his approach:

A generative grammar with a transformational component provides apparatus for breaking down a sentence in a stretch of discourse into underlying kernel sentences (or strings, strictly speaking) and for specifying the grammatical operations that have been performed upon them. It also permit the analyst to construct, from the same set of kernel sentences, other non-kernel sentences. These may reasonably be thought of as alternatives to the original sentence, in that they are simply different constructs out of the identical elementary grammatical units. Thus the idea of alternative phrasings, which is crucial to the notion of style, has a clear analogue within the framework of a transformational grammar.[9]

Richard Ohmann says that transformational grammar promises exciting things in the stylistic analysis. Generally better writing means better stylistically. So the concept of transformational grammar is available to compose a good sentence, but there leaves much difficult question in teaching English.

Does the application of transformational grammar to stylistic analysis justify the study of grammar in the composition class? I think that the answer must be No. Last year I was allowed to construct an experimantal class of first semester Freshman English using transformational grammar. At the end of the semester, I reluctantly reported that the experiment should not be repeated because, while in some ways the operation was a succes, the patient has died.[10]

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[9] Ibid., p. 205.

[10] Ibid., p. 205.

This is well showing the trouble in teaching

transformational grammar. At first, it needs lots

of efforts to understand mechanical rules, so that

there leaves little time to teach how to read and

write English sentences. Indeed the concept of

transformational grammar is essential, but we must

seek the best way to employ the concept of trans-

formational grammar in teaching English, particularly

as a foreign language. But properly applied, pupils

will gain lots of knowledge from transformational

grammar in the understanding of language. Otherwise

they will not get a chance to understand what a

property of language is like.

> Before commiting ourselves to a massive
> retraing program of all English teachers.
> I think it is important to examine more care-
> fully:
> (1) what the basic concepts of transformational
>   grammar are and
> (2) what implication these concepts have for
>   the pedagogical application of trans-
>   formational grammar in general.[11]

Transformational grammar plays an important

role to explain ambiguous sentences and paraphrase

in teaching English.

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[11]_Ibid._, pp. 205-206.

The great value of transformational grammar, it seems to me, is not for the student, but for the teacher of composition. Every decision the teacher makes is a reflection of an assumption that the teacher has tacitly made about the nature of language. The more the teacher is made aware of these assumptions and their consequences the better he can assess their validity. Without the assessment, the teacher is condemned to a treadmill existence: forever changing texts and techniques, but never getting anywhere.[12]

Transformational grammar can be quickly understood

by pupils, but when we teach English grammar, it

is very useful to understand the structure of English

by using the concept of deep structures. In treating

composition, it is very available to know correct

sentences from incorrect ones.

V.   Sentence Patterns

In elementary courses of the English grammar,

we cannot avoid sentence patterns, namely five patterns.

In Japan, "five patterns" is almost the fixed idea,

but it is interesting to know where the idea of

five patterns is derived from. It is not very clear

where the idea of five patterns comes from.

Hornby suggested twenty five patterns of verbs,

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while Onions suggested five forms of the predicate.

It seems proper to identify the five forms of the

predicate Onions proposed.

Onions suggested this classification:

1. Subject + Predicate
2. Subject + Predicate
   Predicate — Verb + Predicate
   Adjective or Predicate
   Noun or Predicate
   Pronoun
3. Subject + Predicate
   Predicate — Verb + Object
4. Subject + Predicate
   Predicate — Verb + two Objects
5. Subject + Predicate
   Predicate — Verb + Object +
   Predicate Adjective
   or Predicate Noun[13]

Generally, in teaching English, sentence patterns

are considered as follows:

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  I... S + V
 II... S + V + C
III... S + V +
 IV... S + V + IO + DO
  V... S + V + O + C      [14]
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Comparing this classification with five patterns,

we can easily find that (1) corresponds I sentence

pattern, (2) corresponds II, (3) corresponds III,

[13]Minoru Yasui, Eigo Kyoiku no naka no Eigogaku
(English Linguistics in the Teaching of English),
Tokyo, Taishukan, 1973, p. 181.

[14]Shintaro Nakanishi, The New Union English
Grammar & Composition 1 (textbook of the senior
high school), Tokyo, Chuotosho, 1973, p. 24.

(4) corresponds IV, (5) corresponds V. I want to
say that the concept of transformational grammar
is necessary to learn five patterns logically and
clearly. If we don't employ the concept of trans-
formational grammar, we will not explain lots of
sentences only by surface structures.

In the first place, the sentence pattern of
S + V is the easiest pattern. But, looking into
these sentences, we can find how necessary the
concept of transformational grammar is.

Sentence (1) The birds sing.

Sentence (2) The birds may have been singing.
These two sentences seem to belong to the same
pattern, but we cannot explain why they belong to
the same pattern. But, when we draw the deep
structures of these sentences, we can easily know
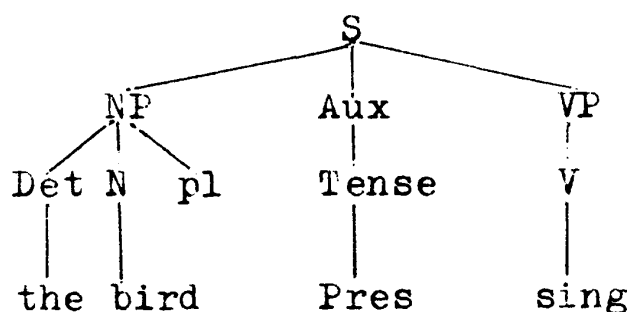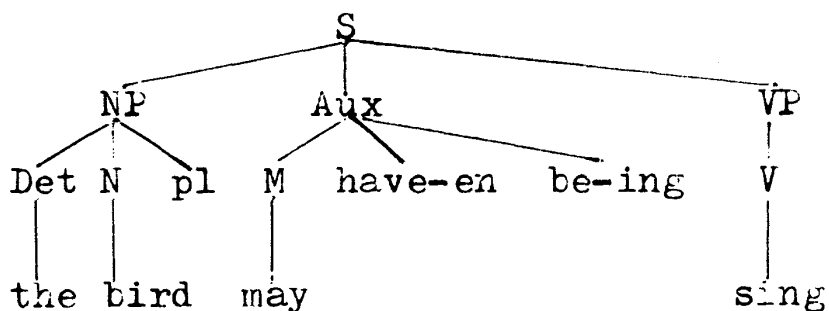these sentences share the same deep structure.

Diagram 1

Diagram 2

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                          S
           ┌──────────────┼──────────────────┐
          NP            Aux                   VP
         ╱  ╲         ╱   │   ╲                │
      Det  N  pl    M  have-en  be-ing        V
       │   │        │                         │
      the bird     may                       sing
```

These two diagrams show that Sentence (1) and (2)

have the same pattern — S + V. Furthermore,

      Sentence (3) The bird was singing sweetly

                  in the cage yesterday.

has the same sentence pattern, which can also

explained by just drawing the deep structure.

I want to quote the sentences that belong to the

first sentence pattern in the textbooks for senior

high school pupils.

      Sentence (4) He will succeed in the examination.
      Sentence (5) The door opened.
      Sentence (6) It rained heavily last night.[15]

These two sentences have the same sentence pattern

— S + V.

    Then, consider the second sentence pattern —

S + V + C. The verb used in the second sentence

pattern is called "incomplete intransitive verb"

which needs complement.

      Sentence (7) His father is a lawyer.

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[15]Ibid., p. 25.

Sentence (8) I became very happy.[16]

These two sentences are the models of the second

sentence pattern — S + V + C. Consider the

following sentences:

Sentence (9) The air _feels_ cold.

Sentence (10) I _feel_ cold.

According to the classification of five patterns,

these two sentences look completely the same. In

Sentence (9), the subject is _the air_ in the surface

structure, but the verb _feel_ is a sense verb such

as _taste_, _smell_, and so on.

Sentence (11) _I_ taste the meat.

Sentence (12) _I_ smell the milk.

These two sentences well show that sense verbs

ought to have the subject of Sentence (9) is _the_

air. Can _the air_ feel cold as human beings?

How can this contradiction be explained logically

according to the concept of transformational grammar?

We can say such a sentence as follows:

Sentence (13) The air feels cold _to me_.

In Sentence (13), the underlying subject seems

_to me_. Sentence (9) seems to have the deep structure

as follows:

Diagram (3) I feel $\left[\begin{array}{c}[\text{the air}]_{NP} \end{array}[\text{the air be cold}]_{S}\right]_{NP}$

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[16]_Ibid._, p. 25.

Identical NP deletion is performed, so that Diagram

(3) is I feel the air to be cold. Then to-be

deletion transformation is applied, the sentence

becomes I feel the air cold. Then subject-object

inversion is applied to topicalize the air, so that

the sentence becomes The air feels cold. Therefore,

Sentence (9) and (10) are completely different in

the underlying structures though these two sentences

belong to the same sentence pattern — S + V + C.

Now, I want to consider the third sentence

pattern — S + V + O.

Sentence (14) I like apples very much.

Sentence (15) I will see you again.

Sentence (16) He likes to read English novels.[17]

The verbs of these sentences are called "complete

transitive verb." It is not necessary to classify

the verb into the intransitive verb and the transitive

verb if we apply such a notion as follows:

(17) VP → V (NP)

If VP is expanded into V, the verb is intransitive.

On the contrary, if VP is expanded into V and NP,

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[17]Ibid., p. 26.

the verb is transitive. Furthermore, it is interesting to know that the sentences derived from the same deep structure belong to the different sentence patterns.

Sentence (18) My uncle painted this picture.

Sentence (19) This picture was painted by

my uncle.

Sentence (19) is generated from Sentence (18) by the passive transformation. But Sentence (18) belongs to the third sentence pattern, while Sentence (19) belongs to the second sentence pattern.

The fourth sentence pattern in the textbook is as follows:

Sentence (20) Please lend Tom your pencil.

Sentence (21) Father bought me a new camera.[18]

These two sentences have the different two objects — indirect object and direct object. But we can consider these sentences as the third sentence pattern. It is obvious to know if we paraphrase these sentences.

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[18]*Ibid*., p. 27.

Sentence (22)   Please lend your pencil to Tom.

Sentence (23)   Father bought a new camera for

me.

Sentence (22) and (23) have the structure as follows:

(24)   VP → V (NP) (Cmp)

To Tom and for me in Sentence (22) and (23) are

considered complements.   Therefore, the fourth

sentence pattern can be involved in the third

sentence pattern.

Then, I will consider the fifth sentence pattern

— S + V + O + C.

Sentence (25)   We elected Yamada captain of
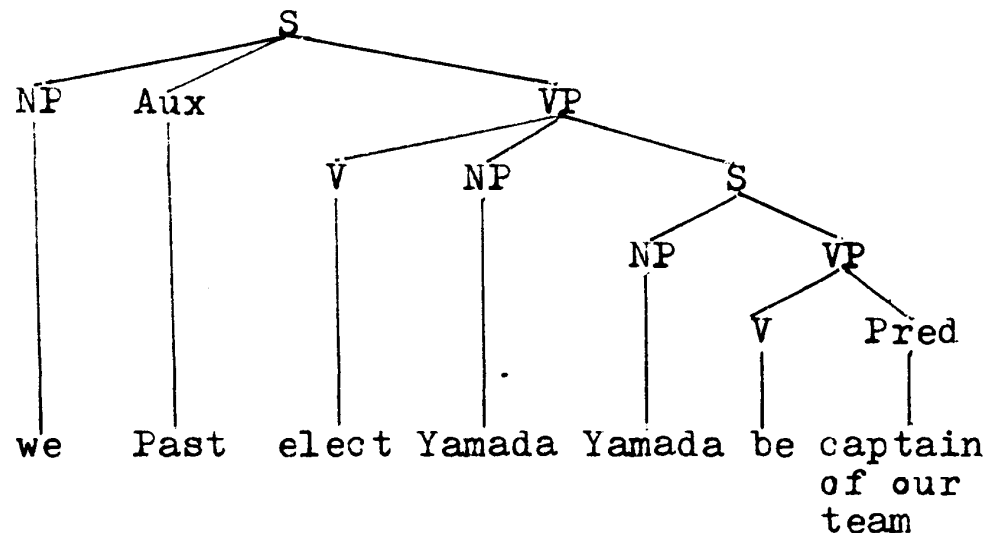
our team.

Sentence (26)   He always keeps his own room

clean.

Sentence (27)   We call this flower "Asagao."[19]

These three sentences have the incomplete transitive

verbs, such as elect, keep, and call.   From the

surface structure, it is hard to understand the

relation between O and C.   In the school grammar,

C is called "objective complement."   Thanks to the

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[19]Ibid., p. 29.

deep structure, the relation between C and O

becomes obvious.

Diagram 4

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                          S
        ┌─────────┬──────────────┴────────┐
        NP       Aux                      VP
        │         │        ┌───────┬───────┴──────┐
        │         │        V      NP              S
        │         │        │       │      ┌───────┴──────┐
        │         │        │       │      NP             VP
        │         │        │       │      │        ┌─────┴─────┐
        │         │        │       │      │        V        Pred
        │         │        │       .      │        │          │
        we       Past    elect  Yamada  Yamada    be      captain
                                                            of our
                                                            team
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This diagram well shows the relation between O and

C. There is a sentence in VP.

Thus, the concept of deep structures is very

available to teach sentence patterns. When teachers

make much effort to understand sentence patterns

by applying the concept of deep structures if

necessary, pupils can understand sentence patterns

much logically.

VI. Conclusion

Chomsky has not claimed eagerly that the theory

of transformational grammar is available to teach

English, he stood on a pessimistic view because

the theory of transformational grammar is too

abstract to apply to the practical teaching of

English. But, from now on, the theory of trans-

formational grammar should be applied properly

in teaching English. Thanks to the concept of

deep structures, we have come to be able to account

for grammatical similarities or grammatical

differences which could not be explained by

traditicnal grammars. But it is an important

question to be considered how we should apply

the concept of deep structures in teaching English.

If we come upon the difficult condition cnly by

traditional grammars, it is the best way to apply

the concept of deep structures properly to teach

English structures much logically and much excitely.

To teach the whole mechanism of transformatinal

grammar is hard in the practical teaching of

English. It means loss of time. We cannot say

that to teach transformational grammar is to teach

English. But it is a good way to explain the nature

of language. The educational implementation of a

transformational grammar of English structures will

introduce the student to the live tradition cf

scholarship in linguistics.

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