

Benjamin Elson and Velma Pickett, *An Introduction to Morphology and Syntax*, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Box 1960, Santa Ana, California, 1962, 167 pp.

The aim of this book is to provide beginning students with a practical guide for the grammatical analysis of languages on the basis of data obtained mainly from native informants, and subsequently for the presentation of the results of the analysis in the form of a tagmemic description. Although the book is based on several previous experimental versions, it is nevertheless qualified in the preface as still "tentative and experimental". It must be regarded as the sediment of a gradually developed practice of instruction, by which prospective adepts are introduced to tagmemic linguistics. After World War II a group of tagmemically trained linguists has grown around Kenneth L. Pike. This group has been active in describing a good many (mostly American aboriginal) hitherto undescribed languages according to tagmemic principles. These principles imply that constructions found at different levels are represented in syntagmemes, i.e. in serial orders of functional places, or tagmemes, such as, e.g., *modifier-head*, or *relater-axis*, or *verb-subject-object*.¹

The book is divided into five parts. Part I, *Morphemics*, is analytic, and gives an account of the techniques and strategies generally used to arrive at a more or less tentative establishment of morphemes, their allomorphs, and morphophonemes. It is an excellent and most adequate introduction to a part of grammatical analysis which ever since Bloomfield has belonged to the traditional lore of linguistic science.

Tagmemic influences become more apparent in the parts that follow, dealing with all sorts of constructions. In Part II, *Tagmemes and Constructions*, the notions 'tagmeme', 'level', 'construction' and 'constituent' are explained in Chapter 6. In Chapters 7–11, constructions at the levels of clause, phrase and word, and at the sentence level, are introduced. The student is taught how to analyze, to file, and finally to represent the constructions at the various levels. Interrelationships of levels and of morphemes are dealt with in Chapters 12 and 13.

Part III gives a survey of the different construction types the analyst may come upon in various languages. Here, too, the construction types are distinguished according to the levels of stem, word, phrase, clause and sentence (Chapters 14–18). Attention is also paid to possible levels above the sentence, such as paragraph, utterance, discourse (Chapter 19). Pike's

¹ The techniques of tagmemic descriptions rest on the ideas developed in Pike's *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Glendale, Cal., 3 parts: 1954, 1955, 1960.

notion of behavioreme seems to lurk behind this chapter. His scheme to account for material above the level of sentence is cited (p. 127).

Part IV, *Emic Units*, returns to subjects already dealt with in the previous parts. In Chapter 20 Pike's well-known distinction between etic and emic units is brought to the reader's notice, and the authors explain how the analyst should determine them. In this connection the application of this distinction amounts to a last overall checking of the relevance and simplicity of the tagmemes and constructions already tentatively established. To apply here Pike's etic-emic distinction, and to introduce the term *tagma* for the supposed etic counterpart of the emic tagmeme does not seem entirely justified.

Chapter 21 enlarges upon the notion of class. Quite traditionally, classes are distinguished on the basis of distribution, or, in tagmemic terms, of tagmemic slot-filling capacity. Within the rougher distribution classes, co-occurrence classes are distinguished. Co-occurrence classes are distinguished not only by the capacity of their members to fill one tagmemic slot, or set of slots, but also on the basis of the restrictions imposed by the co-occurrence of given members of other classes as fillers of corresponding slots of the same construction. One notices that these co-occurrence classes comprise classes determined by what are often called selective restrictions in modern linguistic literature. The problem of these selective restrictions is, in fact, touched upon twice in this chapter. On page 140: "Items filling the subject of intransitive slot and items filling the subject of transitive slot (if these are recognized as different slots) are different filler classes. Items filling subject slot and items filling object slot are different filler classes." And on page 142: "Co-occurrence classes can also be based on the occurrence of items with an individual morpheme. Thus, *fresh, ripe, green, fuzzy, rosy, big, little, expensive, cling, freestone*, etc., constitute a class whose members co-occur with *peach*. It is obvious that a great many such classes could be set up, but they would be considered etic subclasses. If they could be shown to be important at various places in the grammar, they could then be considered to have emic status in the grammar." Here again, the distinction of etic and emic classes seems rather out of place. Nor do the authors seem to have grasped the problem of selective restriction classes in its full complexity. On close analysis one finds, e.g., that it is impossible to speak of "items filling subject slot and items filling object slot" as of different classes, unless the subject and object slots are defined with respect to an individual verb (or a very restricted class of verbs). All selective restrictions are bound up with "individual morphemes", and their description is one of the puzzling problems of the theory of grammar.

The book closes with Part V, *Suggestions for Field Work*. Its two chapters

contain a number of practical directives for a fruitful co-operation with informants or some native community, and for a suitable recording of data and preparation of the manuscript that is to be presented.

Some incidental critical remarks remain to be made. There is some unclarity as to the relationship between grammar and meaning, and consequently concerning the concept of grammar. At the beginning of Chapter 2, *Meanings*, we read (p. 18/9): "Along with the emphasis on distribution in recent American linguistics (see Introduction p. 3), has come an emphasis on form almost to the exclusion of meaning as such. Chomsky states that 'semantic notions are really quite irrelevant to the problem of describing formal structure.'² Harris has stated that it is impossible to work out a structure of meanings.³ From our point of view these two facets must be viewed as a unit, as a 'form-meaning composite.'⁴ The fact that language is a formal system is undeniable. But language is also communication – 'a communicating system with form-meaning relationships at its heart.'⁵ Although a systematic, scientific analysis of the semantic (meaning) system of a language is far from a simple matter (we still lack procedures for complete semantic analysis), we cannot afford to let this fact lead us to ignore meaning, since there seems to be no other way to gain an understanding of the structure."

It looks as if Elson and Pickett do not keep sufficiently apart here *language* and *grammar*. No linguist, not even Harris or Chomsky, will deny that language implies communication, and that form-meaning relationships are essentially involved. The question is, however, how a grammatical description will be made. Should a semantic description form a part of a grammatical description, or should a grammar consist only of a distributional description, the semantic description constituting a different part of an overall description of a language? The answer depends, I think, on the definition one gives of 'grammar'.

A grammar, in Elson and Pickett's words, "is the description of the distribution and the function of the lexical units" (p. 3). If the authors have a form-meaning grammar in mind (which is suggested on p. 2, where they say, speaking of discovery procedures, that a grammarian is interested not only in discovering patterns and classes, but also "in discovering the meanings of the patterns themselves"), then the description of the functions is

² Elson and Pickett cite N. Chomsky, 'Semantic Considerations in Grammar', in: *Report of the Sixth Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Teaching*, Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C., 1955, p. 141.

³ Here they cite Z. S. Harris, 'Yokuts Structure and Newman's Grammar', *International Journal of American Linguistics* 10 (1944) 202.

⁴ Elson and Pickett refer here to Pike's *Language* etc. (see note 1), Part I, 1954, p. 24.

⁵ Pike's *Language* etc., Part III, 1960, p. 78, is quoted here.

probably meant to represent the semantic part of the grammatical description. The functions, it is understood, are embodied in the tagmemes of the constructions, such as, at the clause level, *subject*, *object*, *predicate*. It is nowhere demonstrated, however, how the meanings of these functions are to be described in a (grammatical) description. They are only indicated by the names of the tagmemic slots. On the other hand, it is said (p. 3) that tagmemics “emphasizes the function of members of classes in relation to each other in utterances. It posits a unit of grammar called the tagmeme and studies the significant groupings of tagmemes in constructions”. Here it seems that constructions of tagmemes (and their corresponding functions) are meant to serve as frames for the description of the distribution of lexical units.⁶ This being unclear, we are left in doubt as to how, in the opinion of the authors, a semantic description should be related to a distributional description in the grammar of a language.

The Chapter on *Meanings* does not enlarge upon the question ‘what is meaning?’ – a wise policy for the instruction of beginning students. But if morphemes are defined as “the smallest individually meaningful elements in the utterances of a language” (p. 7, 18), then it becomes at least doubtful how the ‘meaning’ of gender affixes is to be described. The authors merely mention “the arbitrariness of gender classification” (p. 23) without further comment.

As regards the definition of *word*, the authors adopt Bloomfield’s “minimum free form” (p. 7, 75–6), although they admit its inadequacy: “This definition of word is so convenient and so useful that it would be unwise to abandon it, even though there are problems with its application in many languages.” (p. 76) Indeed, its application to English seems to be problematic to the authors, since on p. 91 *back seat* and *seat back* are treated as phrases, whereas e.g. *rosebud* and *textbook* are considered words on page 95. Or are the authors simply led by English spelling conventions?

On page 47–8 so-called replacive morphemes are introduced to account for irregular plurals such as *foot–feet*. Nida’s solution is taken over here, who proposes the replacive morpheme: $iy \leftarrow u$ (read: *iy* replaces *u*). A replacive morpheme is said to be “dynamic”, but this term is left without further explanation. The suggestion naturally presents itself to take “dynamic morpheme” as “generative rule”, the more so since the authors consider a tagmemic description to be of generative character (cf. the generative formula of English verb constructions given on page 107, with the comment: “Horizontal lines in the formula indicate that in generating the phrase either what is above or below the line is chosen.”). Generative

⁶ Bloomfield’s definition of *function* is purely distributional. Cf. L. Bloomfield, *Language*, New York, 1933, p. 185.

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solutions being acceptable, a more uniform description of irregular plurals would be obtained by adopting the distributionalists':

foot + sg → /fut/
foot + pl → /fiyt/.

This would also be more in keeping with the description proposed on p. 51 for portmanteau morphs, such as the French *au*, a fusion of *à* and *le*: "here again perhaps the best solution is a statement in terms of process: Base forms *a* plus *le* result in /o/."

In spite of these slight imperfections this book is a most valuable contribution to linguistic literature. It presents in a simple and straightforward way tagmemic notions and techniques to a wider audience. These notions and techniques are important enough to be profitable also for those linguists who are not professed tagmemicists.

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