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Sentence Analysis from the Perspective of Traditional and Structural Grammar

At the current level of scientific development, the analysis of a sentence faces an active discussion on the matter of the most appropriate approach and perspective. While some argue that traditional grammar is the most essential and therefore, the most applicable one, others reject its practical meaning, arguing that only structuralism allows reflecting the realistic picture of language. In this context, these two approaches are highly different at particularly every point of analysis, whether it is their theoretical foundations, practical meanings, perspective on sentence structures, or terminology.

The first thing to remember when comparing traditional and structural approaches to the analysis of a sentence is that they are based on different perspectives on grammar as a whole. According to its definition, traditional grammar is the approach that values the old language model, emphasizing written language and neglecting oral language (Xia 549). On the other side, according to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, structuralism is an approach to linguistics that stresses the importance of language as a system and investigates the place that linguistic units, such as sounds, words, and sentences have within this system (Richards). Therefore, it is clear they are different based on their foundations.

Moreover, both approaches demonstrate different practical meanings. Suggs in her research raises the question about the knowledge of structural grammar in the context of its contribution in practice, pointing out that it is a more realistic and logical concept of language (Suggs 174). Also, structural grammar seems both more inclusive and easily applied than traditional grammar (Hatfield 570). It includes more truth, explains more of the working of language, than traditional grammar (Hatfield 570). As it is also highlighted by Hatfield, the practical superiority of structural grammar over traditional grammar seems to lie in greater concreteness, ease of inductive presentation, and the inclusion of voice signals and structural words, which seem to be aids in punctuation, oral and appreciative reading, and listening (572).

Considering the differences between both approaches more closely with the analysis of a sentence, a number of scholars discuss a range of specific differences. For instance, in traditional grammar, a sentence is divided into units, while structural grammar divides a sentence into patterns (Alduais, "Sentence Analysis" 214). The traditional grammarians also define a sentence as "a group of words containing a subject plus a predicate and expressing a complete thought" (LaPalombara 76, as cited in Alduais, "Sentence Analysis" 215). Structuralists, in turn, consider a sentence in terms of patterns, one that is made up of constructions; and yet constructions are made up of constituents, which in turn are made up of words (Alduais, "Sentence Analysis" 215).

Integrating the differences between the two approaches, it is worth reviewing the categorization provided by Xia. In her article, "Language Theories and Language Teaching—from Traditional Grammar to Functionalism," this scholar provides six major differences between the traditional and structural approaches to the analysis of a sentence. First of all, while traditional grammar views written language to be of utmost importance and spoken language as penultimate, structuralism uses an opposite idea. Secondly, Xia shares the vision of Thornbury,

who, in his book, describes traditional grammar as prescriptive and structural grammar as descriptive. Thirdly, according to the traditional approach, a sentence can be classified according to its closeness to Latin, which is denied by structuralists (Xia 560). Fourthly, the difference between the two approaches also refers to time frames, because while traditionalism can cover languages of different times, while structuralism considers a sentence only from the perspective of the current time. Fifthly, traditional grammar is involved in studying the inner parts of a sentence independently, without taking into account their close relationship, while the structuralist approach is concerned with a systematic study of all the layers (Xia 560). Finally, the two approaches produce different final conclusions about the analysis in terms of their objectivity and subjectivity: traditionalism is more subjective, while structuralism provides an objective description.

Using more specific examples, it is worth stressing that while being dogmatic, traditional grammar lays down the norms of correct usage (Bourke 86). Never ending a sentence with a preposition, not beginning a sentence with “and,” not using “shall” instead of “will” or vice versa, and other similar rules are the product of the traditional approach to sentence analysis. On the other hand, there is a structural approach to analysis, which views a sentence from the perspective of a set of patterns. For instance, Hornby describes such major patterns as “S + BE + subject complement/adjunct,” “S + vi”, “S + vi + (for) + adverbial adjunct” (13). Furthermore, while analyzing a sentence, the supporters of the two approaches will use different terminology. For instance, the traditional grammarians make use of terms such as “subject, object, and complement, singular, and plural,” while structural grammarians use such terms as phonemes and morphemes (Alduais, “Main Schools of Grammar” 39).

Summing up, it is clear that nowadays, the science related to the analysis of language incorporates a range of approaches, which are different both by their nature and practical application. All in all, sentence analysis taking place with the assistance of traditional or structural approaches produces different conclusions due to varying perspectives on sentence structure, terminology, and the overall nature of grammar and language.

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