

ABSOLUTE CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

This paper is an attempt to investigate absolute constructions within the framework of generative grammar. Since transformational syntax interprets any grammatical construction (absolutes in the given case) as a transform, or in other words an invariant of a certain basic generative structure we intend to view the problem of syntactical status of absolute constructions in their interrelation with the corresponding complete syntactic structures out of which absolutes arise. Hence, syntactic synonymy as a special case of generative grammar comes forward to elucidate difficulties connected with the interpretation of absolute constructions.

Before concentrating on the analysis of absolutes in the light of generative grammar we find it convenient to focus on their formal description. The absolute construction represents a vivid example of the so-called secondary predication, a notion used to denote the incongruence between the grammatical structure and the extralinguistic reality. In other words, it may be stated that the reserves of the language, typical of a certain linguistic category, do not permit of the complete reproduction of real facts and events in all their nuances with no room for ambiguities or equivocality.

Absolute construction consists of a "subject" noun phrase combined with a non-finite predicative expression, the whole functioning as an adverbial unit subordinated to an associated main clause. Absolute constructions have an overt subject supplied for the "free" predicate. The predicative constituent of an absolute phrase may be headed by a noun, a verb, an adjective, or a prepositional phrase. The head of the predicative constituent of a verbal absolute may be a present participle, a past participle, or, infrequently, a marked infinitive. Here are the corresponding example:

1. **With the racing wind streaming past his ears**, all sound of the panting laboring steamer was drowned out behind him (Ch. J., 76).
2. **The moment having come**, she found herself fumbling helplessly, and somehow the advantage had passed from her to him (Ch. J., 88).

3. The friendships of the journey were abandoned in the business of the moment, the matter of luggage and things to attend to (Ch. J., 57).

The analysis revealed two ways of connection between the main clause and the absolute construction: *asyndetic* and *syndetic*.

4. When he emerged into the open space of the lower deck, the soldier, all smiles, was waiting for him, his money in his hand (Ch. J., 64).

5. There was a strong hint of fog in the dark, a dampness brushing his cheeks and forehead (Ch. J., 106).

6. The dining room was large, bare, unattractive, with thin pillars upholding a sagging ceiling (Ch. J., 90).

7. It had been an embarrassing evening, with several silly people spoiling what might have been good talk (Ch. J., 25).

Like any other grammatical structure, absolute constructions may be extended and unextended. It should be noted that the expansion takes place not only via attributes but through subordinate clauses as well.

8. a. Her hair set, she moved to one of the beds and half leaned, half lay alongside the footboard (Ch. J., 155).

b. He might very well be rejected, sent back to Billie as a husband, and the two of them would wind up in some little three-room flat in Bridgeport or Stamford, with Cliff settling down to an ordinary job and becoming very rapidly the kind of young man who could not have held John Grandin's interest for five minutes (Ch. J., 250).

The capacity and condensation of the given construction account for the expansion of the main clause by several absolutes. The number of absolutes in the sentence can vary from one to three. But the potential of the human memory and some other psychological factors do not allow for the excess.

9. a. His chore done, he retired to his perch and nearby and resumed his duty if scanning the sea and the surf (Ch. J., 133).

b. They gathered up their things and began the long trek back, single file through the sand, Billie leading, Grandin bringing up the rear (Ch. J., 148).

c. It showed a battle-exhausted marine lying in a burlap bunk fast asleep, his right arm (as if by habit) around a heavy Garand rifle, a packed kit of some kind resting on his chest, and his left hand relaxed and limp on his stomach (Ch. J., 55).

Having presented the structural description of absolute constructions we proceed now to their analysis in the light of Generative Grammar. This branch of one of the formal directions in Linguistics originated on the basis of Chomsky's ideas and notions and is rested on the description of language as formal models of a certain type.

Generative Grammar can be defined as a multitude of rules that have the capacity of generating an infinitely large number of structures. This system can be broken up into three main components: syntactic, phonological and semantic.

The phonological component correlates the structure, generated by the syntactic component, with the phonetically represented signal.

The semantic component correlates the structure, generated by the syntactic component, with a certain semantic representation.

Hence, the syntactic component is a groundwork upon which the overall linguistic unity is composed. It includes two levels of presentation: deep structure introduced by the semantic component and surface structure which is realized via the phonological component.

Subsequently, we intend to analyze absolute constructions according to the laws of generative grammar that interprets all the syntactic constructions proceeding from the surface to the deep structure, i.e. searching for the explanation and clarification of any linguistic problem in its very roots.

Chomsky labels this syntactic groundwork as a categorial component (Хомский 1972:116). The categorial component implies a system of basic rules of replacement regardless of lexicon. Transformational rules reflect deep structures in surface structures rearranging certain elements in this process. We come to state that it is this rearrangement that accounts for the incongruence of the linguistic with the extralinguistic.

Thus, the syntactic component consists of the basis, generating deep structures, and the transformational part, reflecting them in the surface structures. The deep structure of the sentence undergoes semantic interpretation and passes on to the phonological level of presentation. The interweaving of the two is considered to be the ultimate goal pursued by the language.

As stated by Chomsky the only and main function of transformational rules is the conversion of an abstract deep structure, which expresses the essence of the sentence, into a concrete surface structure that defines its form (Хомский 1972:127).

All the considerations above may naturally lead to the proposition that the study of deep structures of sentences should be based on the thorough study of surface structures, since the deep structure is realized formally and semantically only in the surface structure.

Of particular interest to the goals of the given paper is the fixation of links between the elements of the surface structure.

As stated above, absolute constructions are characterized by the presence of non-finite verbs. The analysis of a great number of examples indicates the fact that on the level of surface structures the connection of the subject and the predicate is very ambiguous and confusing. The immediate syntactic link between the subject and the predicate is to be found on the level of deep structures.

Below we will produce several examples of sentences with absolute constructions taken from fiction and scientific literature. Afterwards we will make an attempt to establish the links between the noun and the non-finite verb. For this purpose we will further move from the deep to the surface structure, i.e. the process of transformation is to take place during our analysis.

We will show that this process leads to the rearrangement of certain elements. However in the case of absolute constructions omission of particular components is a more frequent and common phenomenon. Consequently, it can be asserted that here we deal with the well-known and thoroughly studied linguistic notion of ellipsis

10. ...the energy E of the unperturbed motion being constant, the variation of E in a time interval equal to the period of the motion, will be an intrinsic quantity which can be determined with the help of the formula⁵⁴ (GRG, 490).

The two adequate transformations of the absolute may be:

- a. if the energy E of the unperturbed motion is constant...
- b. since the energy E of the unperturbed motion is constant...

11. Chapters 1 and 2 provide some elementary calculus and the initiation into a general differentiable manifold with the idea of a submanifold following in Chapter 3 and the concept of differentiable functions between manifolds in Chapter 4 (GRG, 1283).

The given absolute may be considered as a transform of the following subordinate clause:

...whereas the idea of a submanifold follows in Chapter 3 and the concept of differentiable functions between manifolds in Chapter 4.

12. But with Ethel away, even though he had been ignoring her for so long, he had oddly not known what to do with himself (Ch. J., 6).

If considered in its deep structure the absolute assumes the following form:

Now that Ethel was away...

The examples considered illustrate vividly the fact that two grammatical structures may express the same meaning notwithstanding definite connotations and shades of meaning. Thus, here we come to confront with the eternal question of philosophy of form and content, which gains in importance even more when applied in the sphere of language, for it is the language where these two aspects of any unity are reflected so obviously.

Consequently, a natural question concerning the grammatical meaning and the grammatical form is to be studied first and foremost.

Grammatical structure is the central aspect of a language system. And the most important feature of the language is the unification of the form and the meaning, the sound and the sense, the expression and the content. The realization of this unification is the ultimate aim of all the aspects and levels of the language. Grammar and vocabulary are the two spheres of the language system that constitute its core, representing it to the fullest degree. It should be mentioned that subsequently grammar and vocabulary will be used to denote grammatical meaning and lexical meaning which embraces realms far beyond the language proper. The intertwine of the two is marked by the highest intricacy and intreconditionality.

Grammatical meaning has the property of endowing lexical meaning with certain tints typical of the given grammatical construction solely. In terms of syntax these grammatical shades of meaning are applied not to separate words but to the sequence of words in their complicate interconnection. Of special importance is the fact that the formal clamps, fixing this unification, have a very wide range of interpretation.

We consider the interrelation of the lexical and grammatical very important for our further study. Modern linguistic trends, in contrast to transformational grammar, do not discard the role of the lexical meaning, assuming it to be peripheral with regard to the grammatical forms which are self-sufficient in isolation from the vocabulary.

Thus, in this paper we intend to apply the methods of transformational syntax, which will later lead us to the concept of syntactic synonymy, in their close connection with the lexical meaning and the extralinguistic factors. Another focal point for the subject matter is that the drastic divergence between the semantics and the grammatical realization may give rise to specific syntactic constructions. We view absolutes as an example of this phenomenon.

The theory, proceeding from the distinction and contrast of the surface and deep structures, provides an opportunity to transfer the method of distinguishing variation and functional discrepancies onto the sphere of syntax: differences between deep structures are functional, whereas differences between surface structures are considered variables of the same deep structure.

The sentences 10-12 considered above serve as an expressive illustration for this assumption. Absolutes and their adequate transformations, assuming the form of subordinate clauses, do perform the same functional task notwithstanding the fact that on the level of surface structures they are different to a significant degree.

This differentiation between the deep and surface structures of syntactic constructions provides ground for the formal statement of the ideas of syntactic synonymy and syntactic homonymy.

We can assert that absolutes and their corresponding subordinate clauses are referred to syntactic synonyms, i.e. they have the same functional objective, though on the surface level the realization of this objective is different in each case.

Having pursued the logical path from the rules of generative grammar, the method of transformation in particular, to the syntactic synonymy, we would like to concentrate on the notion of syntactic synonymy, for it is going to be focal to our subsequent research and ensuing papers. Syntactic synonymy is a direct reflection of the ambiguity and uncertainty of the extralinguistic world.

No phenomenon or event can be considered one-sidedly either on the level of extralinguistic or, consequently, linguistic analysis. Thus, synonymic constructions emerge in the language for the reproduction of objectively existing differential aspects of one and the same situation.

The problem we have fixed is to study the phenomenon of syntactic synonymy in different functional styles, to reveal the frequency of usage of this or that variant, to arrive at certain conclusions concerning the reasons for the

choice of this or that alternative on the basis of statistical analysis. All these problems constitute the practical, experimental part of the investigation, whereas for the time being we intend to concentrate on the theoretical explanation of the issue.

Subsequently we will bring several more examples of syntactic synonyms (subordinate clauses vs. absolute constructions) the detailed explanation and examination of which is to be conducted in the following articles.

The problem of stylistic peculiarities of syntactic synonyms is very important, for it is considered as the crucial concept of stylistic grammar. As is known stylistics studies linguistic phenomena under the light of their belonging to different functional styles. The demarcation line between the styles is achieved by means of various synonyms—syntactic constructions expressing the same situation, event or phenomenon, however possessing different shades of meaning and connotations.

Thus, approximately the same meaning is transferred with distinct functional, stylistic and expressive colouring.

The choice of one of the alternatives in speech is preconditioned by the specificity of the functional style where the given syntactic unit is used.

Since the examples from the scientific functional style have been presented above, below we will produce two examples of the case of syntactic synonyms from fiction.

13. With the shades half drawn, the dining room was pleasantly dark, but beneath the shades could be seen the white glare of the morning (Ch. J., 21).

Since the shades were half drawn...

14. Now, with the door about to open, it seemed to her that it would take more than she could muster in herself to face her husband—not courage, but a cold hate she was far from feeling (Ch. J., 252).

Now that the door was about to open...

Another approach to the study of syntactic constructions is within the framework of syntagmatics and paradigmatics. These are two basic types of the functioning of the language structure, of all its entities and categories. Members of one and the same paradigm are said to be variants of a certain basic structure connected by its identity and contrasted by their own differences.

Thus, we can state that the absolutes and the subordinate clauses presented in our examples are members of the same syntactic paradigm. They are selected by the speaker or the writer preconditioned by communicative tasks and goals pursued so that at the next stage of speech formation they can establish syntagmatic relations with other linguistic units.

It is to be mentioned that in the case of absolute constructions vs. subordinate clauses we have a special case of syntactic synonymy, i.e. interlevel synonymy.

It has been stated by most linguists that absolutes cannot be referred to as sentences proper, as the non-finite verb in absolutes does not perform the functions of the verb in sentences proper. Thus, subordinate clauses and absolutes are not on the same level of language structure which does not prevent them from nominating the same situation or event.

Consequently, this fact serves as ground for the assertion that interlevel syntactic synonymy does exist.

To sum up, it is to be stated that we have produced a number of sentences and their transforms exemplifying all the theses put forward in the paper. On the basis of factual material an effort was made to analyze absolutes proceeding from the methods and regularities of generative grammar which gave rise to the parallels drawn between transforms and variants of certain basic structures with syntactic synonyms.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Адмони В. Г. "Структура грамматического значения и его статус в системе языка", в кн.: Структура предложения и словосочетания в индоевропейских языках. Л., 1979.
2. Бархударов Л. С. "О поверхностной и глубинной структуре предложения". Вопр. языкозн., 1952, N 3.
3. Головин Б. Н. "К вопросу о парадигматике и синтагматике на уровнях морфологии и синтаксиса", в кн.: Единицы уровней грамматического строя языка и их взаимодействия. Москва, 1969.
4. Милых Н.Г. "Об установлении синтаксических связей в поверхностной структуре предложения", в сб.: Синтаксис предложения и СФЕ в английском языке, вып. 2, Ростов-на-Дону, 1978.
5. Орданьян Л.Д. "О некоторых особенностях употребления сложносочиненных и сложноподчиненных предложений", в сб.: Синтаксис предложения и СФЕ в английском языке, вып.2, Ростов-на-Дону, 1978.
6. Хомский Н. "Аспекты теории синтаксиса", МГУ 1972.
7. Charles Jackson "The Fall of Valor". Rinehart & Co. Inc., New York. Toronto.
8. "General Relativity and Gravitation", Volume 14, Number 5, May 1982.
9. "General Relativity and Gravitation", Volume 19, Number 12. December 1987.