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SOME THOUGHTS ON CLAUSES

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0. TERMINOLOGICAL NOTE

"Clause" here is a grammatical (syntactic) term only, not a semantic one as well. Whether "clause" can be given a useful definition applicable to all languages is a separate question from the choice to use it only for referring to syntactic units.

1. FUNCTION

Typically, clauses are used to express propositions. "Clause" belongs to syntax, "proposition" to semantics; so the preceding sentence embodies a hypothesis about the interrelation between units of the one component (hierarchy) of language and those of the other. The "typically" reminds us that the mapping from the one component to the other is not one-one; "typically" also claims some degree of statistical predominance for the mapping: proposition → clause.

Independent clauses are typically used to assert, question, request, suggest, express the desirability of, etc. the expressed proposition. Dependent clauses are used in these ways, but also to indicate that the speaker chooses to treat the expressed proposition as presupposed information common to him and his audience.

NOTE: These hypotheses about the typical functions of independent and dependent clauses are based largely on my intuitions as a native speaker of English. Those familiar with other languages should be able to confirm or disconfirm them as a general statement for all languages. Robert Litteral and Marshall Lawrence have cited data from New Testament Greek and Oksapmin, respectively, that suggest that the choice between independent and dependent clauses is likely to be related to the semantic dimension of prominence.

In short, clauses are for saying something about something—in contrast with phrases and lower-level grammatical units, which are typically used as labels for the items about which something is said.

2. COMPONENTS

The unit of meaning "proposition" is composed of the units of meaning "predicate" and 0 or more "arguments" (participants, props, setting). Correspondingly, the unit of grammar "clause" is composed of the units of grammar "G-predicate" and 0 or more associated grammatical functions, such as subject, object, adjunct. G-predicates are typically realized as verbal elements (including adjectives); the grammatical functions associated with G-predicates are typically

realized as nominal elements (nouns, pronouns, noun phrases, nominalized clauses). For some elements, it is their very distribution in such slots that forms the basis for calling them verbal or nominal.

3. DISTRIBUTION

As a unit of meaning above the level of proposition, let us assume a unit composed of one or more propositions plus a rhetorical predicate (as in Grimes). (If we want a name for such units, perhaps "compound proposition", a term commonly in use in logic, will do.) In the grammatical component (hierarchy), the corresponding unit above the clause can be labelled "sentence". By definition (given a hierarchical model), clauses are typically distributed in—i.e. typically realize functions of—sentences.

Since whole propositions also function as arguments of other propositions, however, clauses are also found (presumably universally) realizing functions such as subject, object etc.—hence they are called "nominalized clauses". Finally, since propositions function as descriptors of items within a complex label of an item, clauses (again I hypothesize: universally) are also found realizing grammatical "modifier" functions—e.g. relative and participial clauses ("adjectivized clauses", if you will).

4. DIMENSIONS

As Huddleston (*IJAL*, 1971) has pointed out, the notion of grammatical dimension (variable, parameter) propounded in Pike, "Dimensions of Grammatical Constructions" (*Language*, 1962), provides a useful etic grid for cataloguing various sorts of clauses.

a. proposition type ("transitivity"): the values within this dimension can be further sub-grouped according to number of arguments, and then distinguished by the respective roles of these arguments.

   0-argument clauses would be ambient.

   1-argument clauses would include stative, equative, and existential (and possibly locative?); and intransitive.

   2-argument clauses would include transitive, and very likely locative and semi-transitive (as in Hale).

   3-argument clauses would include the "giving" clauses usually conjured up by the term "bitransitive", and probably also clauses like "X put Y at location L" and "X elected/chose/appointed Y to be Z".

b. mood: the values within this dimension correspond to the notion of illocutionary force in the meaning component: declarative, wh-interrogative, yes/no-interrogative, imperative, optative,...

c. polarity: the values of this dimension are "positive" and "negative". (Various degrees of non-committal to the truth of an expressed proposition—cf. the numerous contrasting "maybe"s in Australian languages—may belong to this dimension, but I think more likely to the mood dimension.)

d. causativity: the values within this dimension include the presence or absence of a "causer" function superimposed on the other arguments. Perhaps other values, contrasting "forcing" and "permitting" as two types of causation, should be recognized here.

e. dependence: the values of this dimension include independent and various types of dependent (e.g. many languages have more than one contrasting type of dependent clause construction, all other dimensions being held constant; "co-ordinate" and "subordinate" are often useful terms in such cases.)

f. ...

(Including a dimension in the above list is not meant to imply that for some—or even most—languages that dimension will not turn out to be a contrastive dimension on some other level instead. See M. Lawrence's paper and my "Comments on Thomas' Proposed Model" in this volume.)

Approaching the topic of clauses in terms of intersecting but (at least partially) independent dimensions is useful for description as well as for analysis. For example, one can often both discover and present the relevant patterned relationships among clauses without troubling oneself over the question—too often decided arbitrarily—of which clause "types" are contrastive (see Huddleston, 1971).

5. CONTRAST AND VARIATION

As just mentioned, and as often experienced by "tagmemicists in good standing" (to borrow Austin Hale's phrase), the applicability of the whole notion of emically contrastive units, as used in phonology, to clause analysis often appears less helpful than onerous.

Hypothesis 1: While native speakers do have testable intuitions about whether most phones in their language do or do not represent contrastive units (e.g. different phonemes), they do not have similar intuitions about most pairs of clauses in their language.

Question: If one accepts Hypothesis 1, can one be called a "tagmemicist"? Can one accept Hypothesis 1 and still consistently affirm the doctrine that all linguistic units are well-defined in terms of contrast, variation and distribution?

Hypothesis 2: The set of well-formed (grammatical) clauses in a language can be described in a descriptively adequate fashion (i.e.

accounting for the observed speech data and for native speakers' intuitions) without deciding, for every pair of clause "types" described, whether they are or are not "emically contrastive". In fact, if Hypothesis 1 is true, then a description that makes such a decision for all such pairs is less adequate than one that does not, in that it represents as native intuitions notions that are not in fact native intuitions.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

On the typical communicative functions of clauses, phrases and other levels of grammatical units, see G.L. Huttar, 1973, On Distinguishing Clause and Sentence , *Linguistics* 105, pp. 69-82. Compare also the definitions of deep and surface phrase and clause in David Thomas, 1975, *Notes and Queries on Language Analysis*, (Language Data, Asian-Pacific Series, 10, Huntington Beach: S.I.L.) Appendix 4, A Proposed Model of Language, pp. 113-118 (also pp. 7-15 in this volume). Thomas's deep phrase differs from my predicates and arguments in that it includes the function of description as well as identification. This difference is logically bound to the difference between his deep clause, which refers to actions but not to states, and my proposition, which refers to all manner of predications, be they events, processes, states, or actions. In the same volume, in *Notes and Queries on Language Analysis*, Section 2, pp. 81-86, D.G. Frantz discusses the typical communicative functions of various moods.

Shirley Lyon, 1967, Tlahuitoltepec Mixe Clause Structure , *IJAL* 33.1, pp. 25-33, is an excellent example of a description of a system of clause types organized in terms of intersecting dimensions. Although the author does posit contrastive relationships among all the clause types described, the first part of the article reveals the dimensional relationships among them without reference to contrastive status—and, perhaps for that reason, much more clearly. Similarly, W.R. Merrifield and B.J. Stoudt, 1967, Molinos Mixtec Clause Structure , *Linguistics* 32, pp. 58-78, describes a basic set of clause types in terms of two dimensions, then describes other clause types by transformations performed on the basic types without positing contrastive status for the clauses thus derived.

For other etic dimensions of clauses, see R.E. Longacre, 1976, *An Anatomy of Speech Notions*, de Ridder Press.

The reference to Grimes in 3. is to Joseph E. Grimes, 1972, Outlines and Overlays, *Language* 48.3, pp. 513-24; and to Grimes, 1972, Chapter 4 of *The Thread of Discourse*, The Hague: Mouton. The reference to Hale in 4.a is to Austin Hale, 1973, Toward the Systematization of Display Grammar , in Austin Hale, ed., *Clause Sentence and Discourse Patterns in Selected Languages of Nepal*, Part I, General Approach (Norman, Oklahoma: S.I.L.), pp. 1-37.