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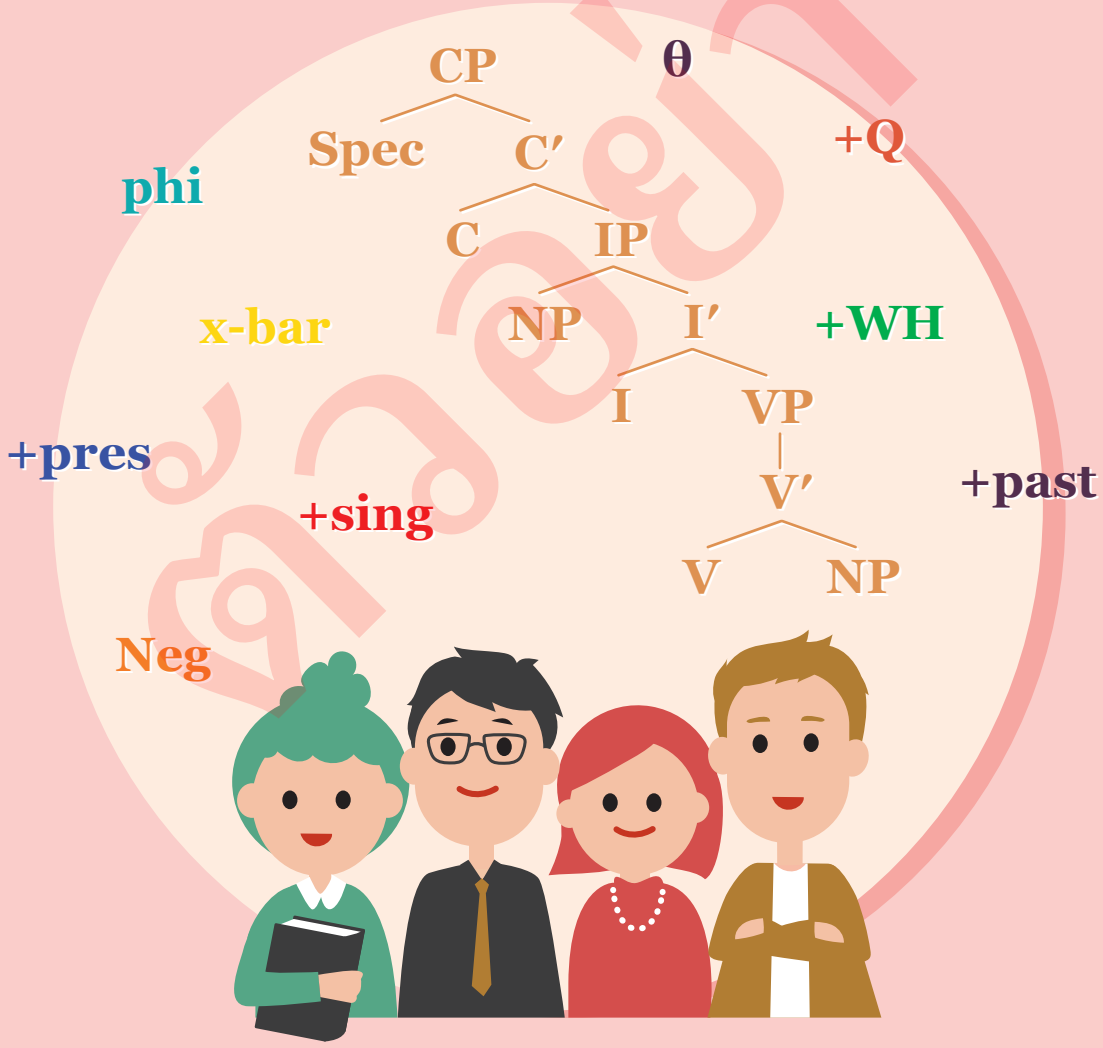
SYNTAX FOR EFL TEACHERS
A GENERATIVE APPROACH

Second Edition



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Contents

PREFACE

As its name, Syntax for EFL Teachers: A Generative Approach, suggests, this book is a two-pronged project. It provides a formal background in English syntax, while targeting EFL practitioners. Keeping in mind the EFL audience, I have chosen the Generative model which is closely related to the framework widely adopted in the EFL literature (e.g. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999)). In addition to its application in English pedagogy, the Generative model can serve as a stepping stone to the understanding of the literature in second language acquisition research that has its basis on formal approaches.

With my target audience in view, it occurs to me that there has not been a textbook that can present theoretical syntax in a way to aid EFL teachers to be able to diagnose their students' problems scientifically. Therefore, I have written this book to serve this purpose. It is also a book I use in courses entitled "Syntax for EFL Teachers" and "Linguistic Foundations for English Language Teachers," offered at the Master's degree Program in English Language Teaching(MA-ELT) of the Language Institute of Thammasat University.

Since the target group is the EFL audience, I have customized my theoretical and technical discussions by selecting only concepts that are essential to the understanding of the standard analyses. Although the text has such limitations, it follows the convention in the linguistics literature. To familiarize the reader with scientific literature, analyses of grammatical structures are presented with theoretical and/or empirical motivation.

The organization is largely problem-based. Prior to the problem-based chapters (4-6), a theoretical background is provided in chapters 1-3. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the Generative model of grammar and core ideas underpinning the understanding of grammar. Chapter 2 presents a fundamental background for syntactic analyses of English constructions, introducing the lexicon, constituency, and subcategorization. Chapter 3 discusses technical issues that regulate the theory and introduces the X-bar model as the generalized internal structure of phrases. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present syntactic analyses of English main and auxiliary verb declaratives and interrogatives; *wh*-questions and relative clauses; passive, raising, and psych verb constructions, respectively. Adopting the problem-based approach, I constructed these three chapters around L2 problems. Precisely, I demonstrate L2 problems relevant to each chapter, discuss the standard syntactic analysis along with the theoretical motivation, and return to the problems posed earlier with my proposed diagnoses. There are practice exercises in all

chapters. Those in chapters 1-3 largely involve expressing theoretical concepts with some application. Those in chapters 4-6 require the reader to apply syntactic knowledge to analyze novel sentences and L2 errors. Further reading is furnished at the end of each chapter for those in need of more information about the theoretical concepts and/or research findings.

I hope that this book will be helpful for the reader to detect his/her students' problems, and consequently enable him/her to resolve the problems to the point. In all, I hope that the reader can gain theoretical knowledge and apply it in his/her EFL classes.

Pornsiri Singhapreecha
August 2023

Chapter 1

Core Ideas to the Understanding of Grammar

Introduction

When one thinks about grammar, one usually associates it with grammar taught in a formal classroom. In this chapter, we are not restricted to a teaching grammar but we are going to widen our perspective of grammar. This broad perspective encompasses a number of notions that revolve around the type of grammar under consideration, i.e. native speakers' knowledge (section 1.1), competence and performance (1.2), grammar (1.3), descriptive vs. prescriptive grammar (1.4), generative grammar (1.5), and Universal Grammar (1.6). This chapter is concluded by a summary (1.7), exercises (1.8), and further reading (1.9).

1.1 Native Speakers' Knowledge

When one is asked "what do you know about your native language?", a variety of answers come to mind. Presumably, one would think of sounds or strings of sounds in association with their meanings. That is, one would say a native speaker knows how to combine sounds to make a word and connect such a word to a certain meaning. Another person might attempt a longer answer, incorporating the term grammar. For instance, "I know grammar rules taught in my L1 classes. These rules are conventions in writing and/or speaking."

Actually, knowledge of such conventions is to be considered differently from a native speaker's knowledge of language. Grammar rules held as conventions aside, what the first person knows is relatively close to the substance we are going to consider next. To put it in a systematic fashion, the kind of native language (i.e. L1) knowledge we are interested in includes four aspects: sounds, word structure,

sentence structure, and meaning. These topics are termed phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (which are identical to four subfields in linguistics). I will discuss each topic by defining relevant technical terms along with examples and return to answer the question of what a speaker knows. Let's begin with phonology.

1.1.1 Phonology

Phonology refers to one's knowledge of the system underlying the production of sounds of a given language. Speaking about sounds, two technical terms are in order: phonemes and allophones. A **phoneme** is the minimal, distinctive unit in the sound system of a language. **Allophones** of a phoneme are phonetic realizations (surface forms) of that phoneme that usually occur in a systematic pattern. An instance of such a pattern is a circumstance under which one particular surface form occurs in a particular context, to the exclusion of other alternative surface form(s) of the same phoneme. In this respect, the different surface forms of the same phoneme occur in **complementary distribution**.

Prior to illustrating complementary distribution, it is useful to understand how phonemes and allophones are encoded. Technically, a phoneme is indicated by means of slashes enclosing the letter, representing the sound unit as in /p/ in English. This symbolizes the underlying, abstract representation of *p*, which is not an actual pronunciation. An allophone is represented by means of brackets enclosing the letter, e.g. [p^h]; this symbolizes the actual pronunciation, i.e. a sound produced by a sudden release of the airflow after the obstruction of it at the upper and lower lips (phonetically termed an aspirated bilabial stop).

To understand the status of phonemes and allophones, let's examine a phenomenon such as aspiration in English and Thai. Aspiration that is involved in the pronunciation of [p^h], as mentioned briefly above, refers to a feature that is associated with a puff of air produced after the obstruction of the airflow at a given point of articulation such as lips (bilabial), the gum ridge and the tongue tip (alveolar), and the velum and the back of the tongue (velar), respectively. In word initial position, native English speakers pronounce /p/, /t/, /k/, with aspiration. (Aspiration is indicated by the superscript ^{h} above the letter as in [p^h], [t^h], and [k^h]). However, when they occur after /s/, the aspiration is absent and the sounds become

unaspirated.[1] Therefore, /p/, /t/, and /k/ are pronounced in word initial position differently from when they follow /s/. Table 1 represents these phonetic facts.[2]

Table 1
English Aspirated and Unaspirated Sounds

Sounds in Question	Spellings	Sounds Produced
/p/,/ t/, /k/	pill, till, kill	[p^h], [t^h], [k^h]
	spill, still, skill	[p], [t], [k]

Table 1 suggests that /p/ has two phonetic realizations: aspirated [p^h] and unaspirated [p], so do /t/ and /k/. Since [p^h] and [p] are surface forms of /p/ (with a slight difference in the presence and absence of aspiration), and their occurrences are predictable (i.e. dependent on phonetic environments), they can be considered members or allophones of the same phoneme. This phenomenon is technically called a **complementary distribution**, as indicated by the fact that the two sounds never occur in the same environment.

Another way to confirm the status of an allophone is to check if the occurrences of [p^h] and [p] in the same environment affect the meaning. Take *spill* as an example. If this word is pronounced with [p^h] instead of [p], albeit a non-native pronunciation, the meaning remains the same. (The same exercise can be repeated for [p] in *pill* as well, with the same result.) Therefore, [p^h] and [p] are not distinct from each other and do not deserve an independent status. In this respect, they are determined as allophones. Technically, the fact that the position of a sound can be filled by slightly different sounds without meaning change is called a **free variation**.

Unlike English, Thai makes use of the presence and absence of aspiration as a means to distinguish between words. For instance, [p^h] and [p] can appear in [_àa], where [_]is a gap to be filled by [p^h] or [p]. The resulting pronunciations [p^hàa] and [pàa] convey different meanings: [p^hàa] means *to cut* while [pàa] refers to a *jungle*

[1] Based on Fromkin et al. (2007), there are two classes of voiceless sounds depending on the timing of the vocal cords. An aspirated [p^h] in *pill* is produced with the lips apart, after which the vocal cords remain open for a very short time, enabling a puff of air to pass through the open glottis. An unaspirated [p] in *spill* is produced right after the lips that have been apart for /s/ are closed; the moment the [p] is released involves the vibration of the vocal cords that extends to the vowel segment. This vibration starts sooner than that of the aspirated one, and is not associated with a puff of air.

[2] In labelling a sound phonetically, it is customary to specify the place (bilabial) and manner of articulation (aspirated stop), and, in certain cases, the state of the glottis (voiced or voiceless), which is not necessary here as English aspiration implies voiceless.

or *forest*. The same pattern applies to [t^h] and [t] and [k^h] and [k]. Therefore, in Thai, aspirated and unaspirated sounds are distinctive, i.e. they are not dependent on phonetic environments and deserve an independent status. In this respect, they are in **contrastive distribution**, and, as a result, are phonemes.

Another type of knowledge of phonology involves the ability to distinguish between permissible and impermissible consonant clusters. Given that in word initial position /pr/ is permissible, whereas /kz/ is not, what would a native English speaker say, if he/she were asked if *traf* or *kzag* were possible as an English non-word?[3] We can ask a native Thai speaker a similar question. What would a Thai person say, if he/she was asked if *p^hsâ:p* or *p^hrâ:p* were possible as a Thai non-word, given that /p^hr/ is permissible and /p^hs/ is not?

The native English speaker would be expected to judge *traf* as a possible non-word and *kzag* as unacceptable. Similarly, the native Thai speaker presumably judges *p^hrâ:p* as a possible non-word and *p^hsâ:p* as an impossible non-word. Both speakers have the judgments that are consistent with the constraints imposed in their phonological inventories. This suggests their knowledge includes permissible and impermissible consonant clusters.

With our inquiry in (1.1) in view, native speakers' intuition includes knowledge of phonological rules such as *English aspiration* and the phonological constraints imposed in their language.

1.1.2 Morphology

The knowledge of morphology involves one's realization of how words are internally structured. Prior to examining common morphological processes, two technical terms are in order: **morphemes** and **allomorphs**.

A morpheme is a minimal unit in word structure with either a constant meaning or no meaning.[4] It can stand alone as an independent word (termed *free* morpheme), or needs to be attached to another morpheme to form a word (termed *bound* morpheme). Like a phoneme, which may vary in phonetic realizations, a morpheme can surface differently. Take the English plural -s, which has three different manifestations, as an example, as in Table 2 below.

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[3] The non-word *traf* is reproduced from O'Grady et al (1997).

[4] Although certain morphemes are not assigned meanings, they are considered distinct units. Kenstowicz (1994), while discussing Aronoff's (1976) generative accounts in dealing with morphology, points out that the morpheme [mit] which appears in [permit, remit, commit] does not have constant semantic value. He further remarks that the grammatical system, nonetheless, analyzes it as a distinct unit, independently from [per-, re-, con-]. The independent status of [mit] is confirmed by a rule which assigns the alternant [mis] to the morpheme [mit] as in [permissive, remissive]; this rule does not apply when *mit* is part of a word, e.g. *vomissive (from vomit).

Syntax for EFL Teachers: A Generative Approach

This book attempts to explain theoretical syntax to EFL teachers. It comprises three components – common L2 problems, theoretical backgrounds, and proposed diagnoses to the problems. The author has customized her theoretical and technical discussions to the EFL audience, while observing the linguistics convention, presenting syntactic analyses with theoretical and/or empirical motivation. In addition to EFL teachers, students, L2 researchers and interested persons are welcome. No prior knowledge in generative syntax is required. Exercises are useful for syntactic practice and analyzing L2 data. Further reading and footnotes provide suggestions to resources for those interested in exploring theoretical issues and conducting research in SLA.

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