

COURSE TITLE: SYNTAX

WEEK 7: TRADITIONAL GRAMMAR

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INTRODUCTION

- ▶ It is an approach that has existed for a long time
- ▶ It is able to do what other theories do- Explaining the nature of language
- ▶ Its insights are still useful in grammar today.
- ▶ Has some drawbacks
- ▶ Its rules are said to be prescriptive

Objectives

- ▶ By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:
- ▶ a. Describe the nature of language
- ▶ b. Explain the major contributions of Traditional Grammar
- ▶ c. Explain the term prescriptive rules
- ▶ d. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of traditional grammar.

Origin

- ▶ Traditional Grammar is applied to summarize the range of methods found in the pre-linguistics era of grammatical study.
- ▶ The whole range of this method emphasizes on the correctness, linguistic pluralism, literary excellence.
- ▶ It also gave preference to the written form of language
- ▶ It used Latin models,- some were imposed on other languages
- ▶ It was a preferred model as English is also an indo- European language-
- ▶ The rules of classical languages were followed considering that English did not have its own grammar
- ▶ It followed Latin Grammar

Classical beginnings: Dionysios Thrax

- ▶ During the fifth century B.C. both Plato (the first to use the term **grammar** to refer to the art of writing words) and the Sophists, teachers of rhetoric, began to take up the analysis of language in the course of their other inquiries.
- ▶ They made distinctions between **nouns** and **verbs**, and the Sophists discussed **gender and the moods of verbs**.
- ▶ In the fourth century, Aristotle refined their definitions and also distinguished the **tenses of verbs**.
- ▶ After Aristotle, the Stoic philosophers of Athens organized grammar and linguistics into a branch of philosophy in its own right.

Classical beginnings: Dionysios Thrax

- ▶ At that point it included many terms and concepts recognized today-even if they were not defined in quite the same way– including:
- ▶ conjunctions, adverbs, articles, predicates, active and passive voice, number in verb and noun, and the nominative, accusative, genitive and dative cases
- ▶ (Robins, Grammatical Theory, "Word Class System," and Linguistics)

Classical beginnings: Dionysios Thrax

- ▶ In the Third century B.C., after The conquests of Alexander, Greek culture was diffused throughout the Near East and the shores of the Mediterranean.
- ▶ This was done through schools-
- ▶ The center for all the scholastic attention to Homer was Alexandria in Egypt, a city with the world's first large university.
- ▶ Here, Homeric scholars studying the changes in the Greek language since Homer were troubled by what they saw as a decline in the quality of the language.
- ▶ Two groups with different views arose: **Analogists** and **anomalists**

Classical beginnings: Dionysios Thrax

- ▶ The Analogists believed in the existence of pattern and regularity in the way words mean and in the grammatical categories and their inflections.
- ▶ Drive slow- incorrect- as slow should be slowly, analogous with adverbs -ly pattern.
- ▶ They believed enough in such regularity that they felt justified in correcting irregular words in the epics (books) themselves.
- ▶ More philosophical in their acceptance of the rough edges of language, the Anomalists argued that patterns in language were only approximate:
- ▶ that most grammatical rules were only labels invented by people, that irregularities and exceptions-"anomalies"-were fundamental characteristics of language.

Classical beginnings: Dionysios Thrax

- ▶ Their position on *Drive Slow* might be that because -ly is not always an adverbial ending (as in the adjective *lovely*) and not all adverbs end in -ly (soon is one),
- ▶ *Drive Slow* is somewhat atypical but entirely acceptable.
- ▶ The Anomalists charged, moreover, that the Analogists, in their enthusiasm for purifying Homer, were making up new forms of words.
- ▶ The debate between the Analogists and the Anomalists stimulated the first grammar books.
- ▶ (e.g. Dionysios Text which became popular among the Romans and in the schools of the Hellenized world around 100 B.C.

Key insights from Dionysios text

On Grammar

Grammar is an experimental knowledge of the usages of language as generally current among poets and prose writers. It is divided into six parts:

Trained reading with due regard to Prosody.

Explanation according to poetical figures.

Ready statement of dialectical peculiarities and allusions.

Discovery of Etymology.

An accurate account of analogies.

Criticism of poetical productions, which is the noblest part of grammatic art.

Key insights from Dionysios text

On reading:

Reading is the rendering of poetic or prose production without stumbling or hesitancy. It must be done with due regard to expression, prosody, and pauses. Through the expression we learn the merit of the piece; from the prosody the art of the reader; and from the pauses, the meaning intended to be conveyed. In this way we read tragedy heroically, comedy conversationally, elegiacs thrillingly, epics sustainedly, lyric poetry musically, and dirges softly and plaintively. Any reading done without due observance of these rules degrades the merits of the poets and makes the habit of readers ridiculous.

Key insights from Dionysios text

On Tone

Tone is the resonance of a voice endowed with harmony. It is heightened in the acute, balanced in the grave, and broken in the circumflex.

On Punctuation

There are three punctuation marks: the full stop, the semicolon, and the comma. The full stop denotes that the sense is complete, The semicolon is a sign of where to take breath; the comma shows that the sense is not yet complete, but that something further must be added.

Key insights from Dionysios text

On the word

A Word is the smallest part of an ordered sentence.

On the sentence

A Sentence is a combination of words, either in prose or in verse, making complete sense.. There are eight parts of speech: Noun, Verb, Participle, Article, Pronoun, Preposition, Adverb, and Conjunction. The proper noun as a species, is subordinate to the noun.

Key insights from Dionysios text

On the noun

A Noun is a declinable part of speech, signifying something either concrete or abstract (concrete as stone; abstract, as in education); common or proper (common as man, horse; proper, as Socrates, Plato). It has five accidents: genders, species, forms, numbers, and cases.

There are three Genders, the masculine, the feminine, and the neuter. Some add to these two more, the common and the epicene-common, as man, horse [referring to both male and female]; epicene, as swallow, eagle [referring to either male or female].

There are two species of nouns, the primitive and the derivative. A primitive noun is one which is said according to original imposition, as earth; a derivative noun is one which derives its origin from another noun, as earth-born [adjectives were considered a type of noun].

A Roman Grammarian: Donatus

- ▶ Among those raised on the work of Dionysios Thrax were the Romans.
- ▶ As the Hellenistic period shaded into the Roman era, Greek continued to be the language of high culture, especially of philosophy and science.
- ▶ Educated Romans were bilingual, and manuals for translation between Greek and Latin were written and used into the Middle Ages.
- ▶ Roman grammarians took Greek grammar and applied it to their language. The fit was close but not exact.
- ▶ NB: The pattern was to be repeated centuries later when English grammarians dressed their language in the same Greek grammatical suit. By then the fit had become much worse. Today, some portions of English grammar have been custom tailored, but others of course are still hand-me-downs.)
- ▶ During the course of the Roman Empire, a **Latin education** gradually took the place of a Greek one, and the works of Virgil and Cicero replaced those of Homer and the Greek tragedians as the chief texts.

Ars Minor “Lesser study”

- ▶ The Ars Minor of Donatus is solely a discussion of the parts of speech.
- ▶ A verb (A very long description) via **question answer-** committing to memory
- ▶ A part of speech with tense and person, without case, signifying "to perform some action," or "to suffer," or neither. How many attributes has the verb?
- ▶ Seven. What? Quality, conjugation, gender, number, inflection, tense, person.
- ▶ In what does the quality of verbs consist? In modes and in forms. What are the modes? Indicative, imperative, optative, subjunctive, as; infinitive, impersonal,
- ▶ How many forms of verbs are there? Four. What? Undefined desiderative, requentative, , inchoative,
- ▶ How many conjugations of verbs are there? Three. What? First, second, third.
- ▶ What is the first? It has in the indicative mode, present time, singular number, second person in the active and neuter verb, long a before the last letter.

The middle ages and renaissance

- ▶ The teacher is now not a school master but a monk/nun.
- ▶ Students studying Donatus' book are receiving a religious education in a monastery or village school.
- ▶ Memorization and recitation now take the form of chanting and singing.
- ▶ Donatus' questions and answers echo the catechism.
- ▶ Greek works are no longer available, though advanced students still study Cato along with Donatus and Virgil along with Priscian
- ▶ The students are learning in school a language that is related to but different from the one they speak at home.
- ▶ A Types of linguistic situation diglossia-the coexistence in one community of two varieties of the same language, each used in different roles.

- ▶ The high form of the language—in this case Latin—is considered at the time to be the superior language and is the medium of religion and literature.
- ▶ It has the more elaborate grammar—that is, it has more inflections—which is codified in books

and passed down through an educational system.

The low forms in the diglossia of the Middle Ages were the early dialects of the Romance languages-

French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian—that were derived from spoken Latin but had become so different from it that Latin had to be learned separately.

Like the lower language forms in diglossic situations generally, the Romance languages were in the Middle Ages regarded as inferior, as less beautiful and less logical than Latin,

But they were used in ordinary and intimate conversation.

Compared to Latin, they had a simpler grammatical structure (fewer and pronunciation).

Between Latin and these languages, much of the vocabulary was the same or very similar, since they were essentially variations of one language, but the high form had A unique vocabulary for learned and sacred items and the low forms a vocabulary for homely ones .

EARLY ENGLISH GRAMMAR: JOHN WALLIS

- ▶ Grammar itself in 1400 was Latin grammar; English was thought to be too primitive to have a grammatical system. (Haussamen, 1993)
- ▶ The first grammarians of English in the sixteenth century took the categories of Latin grammar and applied them to English even where there were no differences that needed categorizing.
- ▶ For example, in Latin, adjectives have inflections that show whether they are singular or plural (bonum, bona) depending on the noun they modify.
- ▶ In Modern English, adjectives are spelled the same regardless of the number of the noun (good boy, good boys),
- ▶ but the early grammarians said that such adjectives were either singular or plural anyway-the difference just didn't show in the spelling.

Haussamen, B. (1993). *Revising the rules: Traditional grammar and Modern linguistics*. Iowa: Kendall/ Hunt publishers, Pg, 18.

John Wallis

- ▶ Wallis, an Oxford mathematician and a founder in 1662 of the Royal Society, an ordained minister, cipher expert, and teacher of the deaf, felt the need for school children started learning English grammar first and Latin grammar only if they needed it,
- ▶ No English grammar was routinely studied in school; language instruction still
- ▶ consisted of several years of learning classical Latin by methods little changed since the days of Donatus.
- ▶ So in 1653 Wallis published his English grammar for one of the few markets for such books that did exist-readers in other countries.
- ▶ It was written in Latin, the language that all educated foreigners already knew.
- ▶ He added that plural is expressed by adding -s to nouns

John Wallis

- ▶ Wallis' text remains pre-modern in some respects.
- ▶ It was used to teach a foreign language,
- ▶ it was written in Latin, and it was intended to teach its readers to read, rather than write, English.
- ▶ One reason is that Wallis was ahead of his time in his rejection of "the mould of Latin" and its many categories that had no relation to English.
- ▶ But perhaps more conspicuously, his book is not a script for classroom recitation, but a rich description of language, to be read and studied privately.

The Eighteenth Century: Lindley Murray

- ▶ Murray's book, *English grammar*, added 21 rules:
- ▶ Some are listed below: (Haussamen, 1993)
 1. A verb must agree with its nominative case, in number and person; as, "I learn;" "Thou art improved;" "The birds sing."
 2. should not be used in between you and I. The pronoun should be me after a preposition.
 3. Split infinitives should not be used.
 4. Only should be next to the word to which it relates.
 5. None should never be followed by a plural verb ye
 6. 5 Different(ly) should be followed by from and not by to or than.

Haussamen, B. (1993). *Revising the rules: Traditional grammar and Modern linguistics*. Iowa: Kendall/ Hunt publishers.

American Grammar Handbook: Edwin Woolley

- ▶ The Americans wanted to have a language of their own, distinct from the British,
- ▶ Webster attempted to come up with a list of items to differentiate it from British English
- ▶ Woolley's book- Majorly, composition writing rules:
- ▶ The contractions don't, isn't, haven't, etc., are not appropriate in formal composition. They are proper in conversation and in composition of a colloquial style. ...
- ▶ Do not use high-flown language for plain things.
- ▶ Bad: To keep the horse healthy you must be careful of his environment.
- ▶ Right: To keep the horse healthy you must be careful of its stable.

- ▶ Note.
- ▶ Showy language, like showy dress, is in bad taste. The essence of artistic language, as of everything artistic, is not abundant ornament but appropriateness. Straining for High sounding expressions to replace plain English makes a style weak and crude. Call a leg a leg, not a limb; call a book a book, not an effort; call a letter a letter, not a kind favor; call socks socks, not hose; call a house a house, not a residence; say "I went to bed," not "I retired"; "I got up," not "I arose." (Haussammen, 1993)
- ▶ Haussamen, B. (1993). *Revising the rules: Traditional grammar and Modern linguistics*. Iowa: Kendall/ Hunt publishers, pg 26.

- ▶ Double negative (i.e., the use, in a sentence, of two or more negative words not coordinate, -as
- ▶ "I could not find it nowhere") was forbidden ..
- ▶ A composition should treat a single subject and should treat it throughout according to a self-consistent method.
- ▶ Use the question mark after a direct question, but not after an indirect question.
- ▶ Bad: He asked what caused the accident?
- ▶ Right: He asked what caused the accident.
- ▶ Right: He asked, "What caused the accident?"

Strengths of traditional grammar

- ▶ Traditional grammar has several strengths that contribute to its enduring relevance in language education and usage:
- ▶ **Structured Framework:** It provides a clear and systematic way to analyze sentence structure, making it easier to understand how sentences are formed.
- ▶ **Standardization:** Traditional grammar helps establish standard language rules, promoting consistency in writing and communication, which is especially important in formal contexts.
- ▶ **Foundation for Language Learning:** It serves as a foundational tool for teaching language, helping learners grasp the basic components of grammar, such as parts of speech, sentence types, and punctuation.

Strengths of traditional grammar

- ▶ **Clarity and Precision:** By outlining specific rules, traditional grammar can help improve clarity and precision in communication, reducing ambiguity.
- ▶ **Critical Thinking Skills:** Analyzing sentences according to traditional grammar can enhance critical thinking skills, as it requires careful consideration of how different elements of a sentence interact.
- ▶ **Historical Insight:** It offers insights into the historical development of a language, revealing how usage has changed over time.
- ▶ **Linguistic Awareness:** Engaging with traditional grammar can increase awareness of language mechanics, fostering a deeper appreciation for language as a tool for communication.

Weaknesses of Traditional Grammar

- ▶ **Rigidity:** It often adheres strictly to rules, which can stifle creativity and flexibility in language use. Language is dynamic, and strict adherence to rules may not reflect how people actually communicate.
- ▶ **Descriptive vs. Prescriptive:** Traditional grammar tends to be prescriptive, focusing on how language "should" be used rather than describing how it is actually used in various contexts. This can overlook natural language evolution.
- ▶ **Limited Context:** It often neglects the social and contextual factors that influence language use, such as dialects, cultural variations, and situational nuances.
- ▶ **Overemphasis on Syntax:** While syntax is important, traditional grammar can overly focus on sentence structure at the expense of other aspects like semantics (meaning) and pragmatics (contextual use).

Weaknesses of Traditional Grammar

- ▶ **Complex Terminology:** The terminology used in traditional grammar can be daunting for learners, making it difficult for non-specialists to grasp basic concepts.
- ▶ **Neglect of Spoken Language:** It often emphasizes written language, which can lead to a lack of understanding of how spoken language operates, including the use of informal speech patterns and conversational dynamics.
- ▶ **Inaccessibility:** The rules can sometimes be too complex or arcane for students, making grammar seem like a chore rather than an engaging aspect of language learning.
- ▶ **Stigmatization of Non-Standard Variants:** Traditional grammar can perpetuate biases against non-standard dialects and forms of English, discouraging the appreciation of linguistic diversity.
- ▶ **Lack of Emphasis on Communication:** It may prioritize correctness over effective communication, leading learners to focus on avoiding mistakes rather than expressing themselves clearly and engagingly.

Summary

- ▶ The major periods, grammarians, and their contribution.
- ▶ The strengths of traditional grammar .
- ▶ The weaknesses of traditional grammar.

REFERENCES

- ▶ Haussamen, B. (1993). *Revising the rules: Traditional grammar and Modern linguistics*. Iowa: Kendall/ Hunt publishers.