

Book Review

***A Note on the Grammar Book:
An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course****

Chan Chung
(Dongseo University)

Chung, Chan. 2008. *A Note on the Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course*. *Linguistic Research* 25(2), 125-137. Although Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman (1999) (CL hereafter) is an excellent comprehensive textbook for the students in an ESL / EFL teacher's course, it has some drawbacks. This review examines what they are and explores better ways to present the relevant issues. First, CL do not clearly distinguish grammatical functions from grammatical categories. The lack of this distinction causes confusion and inconsistency when PS rules are considered. Second, CL's treatment of the determiners such as possessives, partitives, and phrasal quantifiers is too simplified and may lead to a wrong grammaticality prediction. Third, a discussion seems needed regarding the connectivity in the relative clause constructions, which helps to choose an appropriate relativizer. Fourth, a caution needs to be addressed on verbs' subcategorization frames, many of which are not semantically predictable. Problems in the coordination constructions are also illustrated. (Dongseo University)

Keywords ESL / EFL, grammatical functions, determiners, connectivity, subcategorization, coordination

1. Introduction

The Grammar Book: An ESL / EFL Teacher's Course (Celce-Murcia and Larson-Freeman 1999, CL hereafter) is one of the best-known comprehensive textbooks for ESL / EFL teachers. It covers almost all the major constructions in English with linguistics-based analyses. One of its merits arises from the three-dimensional account of each construction: the form, meaning, and use. While most of the other ESL / EFL teacher's textbooks tend to cover only the form and the meaning, it extends the account to the

* I would like to thank Ann Wennerstrom for letting me sit in her class at the University of Washington and have opportunities of discussing the issues presented in this paper with her and other class participants. My thanks also go to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. Of course, all remaining errors are solely mine.

use dimension mainly based on the corpus analysis. Moreover, teaching suggestions in each chapter are also very useful. Even though it has such merits, it seems to have some issues and drawbacks. These defects arise from two factors: one is the mixed use of grammatical categories and grammatical functions, and the other arises from neglect or misrepresentation of some important issues in several constructions such as the noun phrase structures, relative clauses, subcategorization frames of verbs, and coordination structures. The main goal of this review is to discuss those issues and to explore better teaching alternatives from linguistic and pedagogical perspectives.

The organization of this review is as follows. Section 2 considers the problems caused by the lack of distinction between grammatical functions and grammatical categories. Section 3 examines problems arising from the analysis of noun phrases, especially focusing on the treatment of determiners. Section 4 examines the connectivity in relative clauses. Section 5 considers the need of presenting verbs' subcategorization frames. Section 6 discusses the coordination constructions. Section 7 offers a summary and conclusion.

2. Grammatical Categories vs. Grammatical Functions

In chapter 5 of CL, confusion seems to arise from the description of the phrase structure rules due to the lack of clear distinction between grammatical categories (parts of speech) and grammatical functions. For example, the terminologies such as the predicate (PRED) or the subject (SUBJ) traditionally represent grammatical functions, whereas the ones such as the noun phrase (NP) or verb phrase (VP) represent grammatical categories. A problem with the rule system given in CL is that the category names and function names are all mixed up:

- (1) a. $S \rightarrow \text{SUBJ PRED}$
- b. $\text{SUBJ} \rightarrow \text{NP}$
- c. $\text{PRED} \rightarrow \text{AUX VP (Advl)}^n$ (CL: 103)

Categories and functions are both used as primitive notions in most syntactic theories, but they are distinguished to represent different syntactic levels. That is, a category is a more superficial level of representation and can be defined in terms of a form or a position in a sentence. However, a grammatical function is a more abstract

representation in that it represents a more meaning-oriented entity—thematic roles in a more technical term.

The lack of this distinction causes confusion especially when the case is considered where the same functional role is played by several different grammatical categories. For example, students are confused about how the possessive NPs such as *the king of England's* in (2a) and the possessive pronoun such as *his* in (2b) should be treated in the CL:

- (2) a. [the king of England]'s crown
- b. [his] crown

Since they look like a genuine noun (phrase), many students without syntactic background are confused when they are told that the elements should be considered as a determiner (or a specifier in technical terms). However, if we think two different descriptive levels with the functional level and the category level, examples in (2) are no longer confusing. That is, at the level of category, *the king of England's* is a noun phrase and *his* is a personal pronoun. However, at the functional level, both function as a determiner. Another merit of this dichotomy is that we can account for why noun phrases in (3) are ungrammatical, based on a simple restriction on the number of determiners in an English noun phrase (Börjars and Burridge 2000: 191). The restriction can be stated as follows in terms of CL: a noun cannot be specified by more than one core determiner.¹⁾

- (3) a. *the his book
- b. *the Mary's book

That is, the noun *book* here is specified by two core determiners—an article and a possessive pronoun, and it leads to the ungrammaticality.

Examples with a similar problem are (4):

- (4) a. We are open [_{NP} Saturdays]
- b. We are open [_{PreP} on alternate Sundays].
- c. We meet [_{AdvP} very often].

1) According to CL, the core determiner includes possessives, articles, demonstratives, and some quantifiers such as *every*, *some*, etc. (CL: 335).

According to CL, the NP, PreP, and AdvP in the brackets are all introduced by the AdvI given in (1c), and thus it is not easy to explain why they all show different syntactic behaviors: *Saturdays* are an NP since it carries a plural morpheme; *on alternate Sundays* is a PreP since it is headed by a preposition *on*; and *very often* is an adverb phrase since it is modified by a intensifier *very*. If we assume the different levels, however, examples in (4) are no longer problem since it is only at the functional level that they have the same role. All the differences occur at the category level.

Another problem caused by CL's system is that it raises inconsistencies. Consider the example in (5):

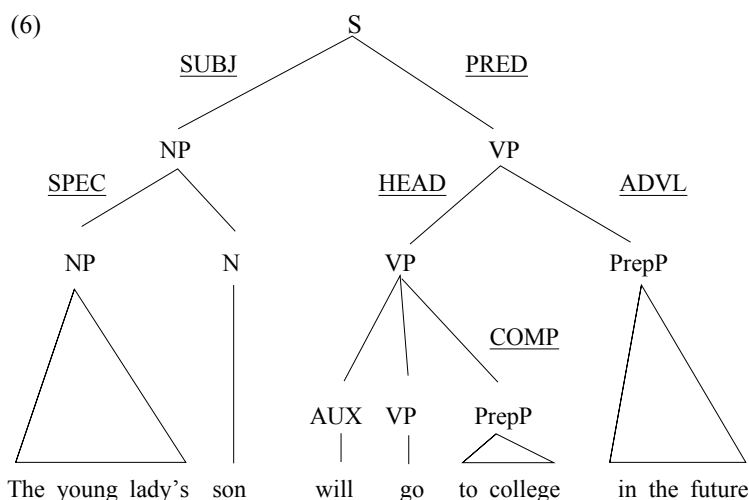
(5) Children rely [_{PreP} on parents] [_{PreP} in their childhood].

In general, the second PreP *in their childhood* is considered as an adverbial, while the first PreP *on parents* as a complement. Then, according to CL, *on parents* is introduced by the PreP in the rule "VP → V (NP)² (PreP)" while *in their childhood* is introduced by the AdvI in rule (1c) first, and then by the PreP in the other rule "AdvI → PreP." Then a question often raised by students is why *on parents* shouldn't be introduced by another element such as the Compl (Complement) first and then by the other rule "Compl → PreP," which makes the whole system very complicated. In other words, the PS rule system given in CL fails to be consistent since the function names and category names are used without clear distinctions. If the distinction is introduced, (5) is no longer confusing. They are both PrePs at the category level, but they have different functions, a complement vs. an adverbial.

The ones that are usually considered as parts of speech are N(P), V(P), A(P), Prep(P), S, S', ADV, AUX, etc., while the ones considered as function names are SUBJ, PRED, Adverbial (adjunct or modifier), complement, specifier, etc.²⁾ In order to simply distinguish the categories from and functions, a separate label needs to be introduced into the tree diagram. For example, a functional specification may be represented on a branch to show the specific function carried by the corresponding

2) CL also treat the ones related to morphological forms like *past*, *pl*, *perf*, *prog*, etc. as independent syntactic elements. They may be considered as functional categories in Chomskyan-style theories (e.g., Pollock 1989). However, they are all considered not as independent syntactic categories but as grammatical features in other theories like Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (Gazdar et al. 1985), Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (Pollard and Sag 1994), and Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan 2001).

category at each node:



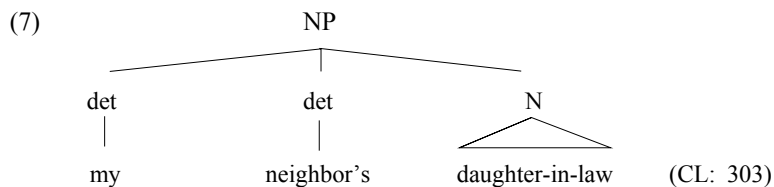
The structure (6) shows the following: the category of *the young lady's* is an NP while its function is a specifier (or determiner); The category of *to college* and *in the future* is the same PreP while they have different functions, a complement and an adverbial, respectively. This approach incorporates linguistic concepts in a better way and avoids unnecessary confusion.

3. Noun Phrase Structures

Several problems arise from CL's analysis of noun phrases, especially from the analysis of determiners. This section examines what the problems are and explores a better analysis under CL's framework.

3.1 Possessives

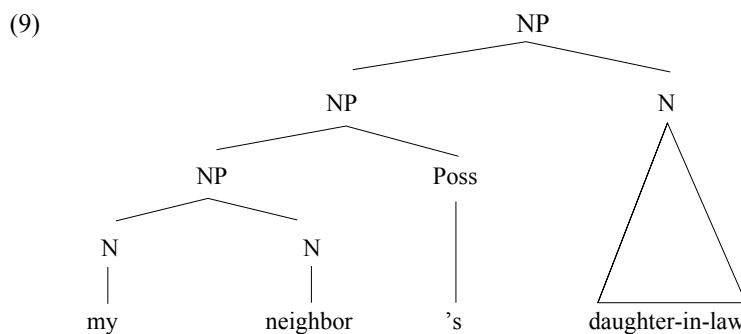
The NP structure given by CL has two determiners that are sisters to the head noun as shown in (7):



This structure has two problems. Semantically, the determiner *my* should specify *neighbor* not *daughter-in-law*. However, (7) does not represent it correctly since here *my* specifies *daughter-in-law*. The other problem is related to a general constraint on the distribution of core determiners in English that are mentioned already: a noun cannot be specified by more than one core determiner. The NPs in (8) are all ungrammatical since they violate this rule:

- (8) a. *her Mary's book / *Mary's her book
 b. *the his book / *his the book
 c. *this his book / *his this book

If we allow the structure in (7), then it is hard to keep the generalization and to account for the ungrammaticality in (8). In order to avoid these two problems, structure (7) should be reanalyzed as in (9):



As shown in (2a), the possessive marker -'s attaches to a whole noun phrase in English. We may use a functional category name for the -'s node, namely 'Poss', as one of the functional categories.³⁾

3) More precisely speaking, the English possessive is considered here as a kind of clitic, which is an independent word at the syntactic level, but a bound word at the phonological level. (See Pollard

3.2 Partitives

Another problem in CL arises from the discussion of partitives (CL: 326-328). CL state the following: "When the partitive noun is part of the subject, the verb agrees with it. If the partitive noun is singular, the verb is singular. If the partitive noun is plural, the verb is also plural (CL: 326)." However, this statement oversimplifies the fact in English and may confuse the ESL learners. We need at least two types of the partitives regarding the subject-verb agreement. One is the type where the number of the whole NP is determined by the partitive noun itself as mentioned by CL:

- (10) a. A mountain of dirty laundry was / *were piled up after our vacation.
 b. Mountains of dirty laundry were / *was piled up after our vacation.
 (adapted from CL: 326)

The other partitive type concerns the determination of the number of the whole NP by the noun occurring after the preposition, not by the partitive noun:

- (11) a. Some of the apple is / *are rotten.
 b. Some of the apples are / *is rotten.

Partitives such as *most of*, *all of*, *half of*, and *the rest of* belong to the latter type.

3.3 Phrasal Determiners

The determiner system proposed by CL may need revision. Following Quirk et al. (1985), CL assume three different types of determiners: predeterminers (e.g., *all* in *all the books*), core determiners (*the* in *all the books*), and postdeterminers (e.g., *many* in *the many books*) (CL: 335). CL state that some phrasal quantifiers such as *another* (the combination of *an+other*), *a few*, *a little*, *a great deal of*, and *a number of* belong to the postdeterminers, entailing they can occur after a core determiner. However, this classification is problematic since such phrasal quantifiers never occur after a core determiner such as *his*. Some of them can rather occur before a core determiner:

and Sag 1994: 54.)

- (12) a. *[his] [another] book
 b. *[his] [a number of] books
 c. *[his] [a lot of] books
 d. *[his] [a great deal of] books
- (13) a. *[another] [his] book
 b. [a number of] [his] books
 c. [a lot of] [his] books
 d. [a great deal of] [his] books

The contrast shown in (12) and (13) suggests that if these phrasal quantifiers should be treated as determiners, they need to belong to core determiners or to predeterminers, rather than to postdeterminers.

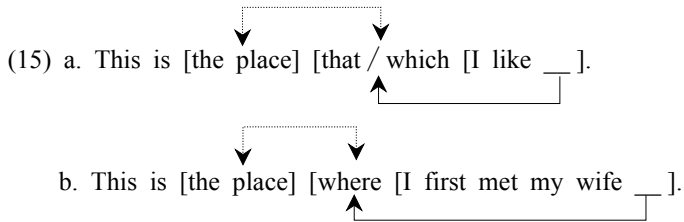
4. Connectivity in the Relative Clause Constructions

Chapters 28 and 29 in CL discuss the relative clause constructions. Here an important issue is unclearly addressed. The issue is the connectivity among the relativizer (relative pronoun or relative proadverb), its gap, and its antecedent.⁴⁾ For example, the grammatical contrasts in the examples in (14) are often confusing to the ESL learners. Why should we use *that* or *which* in a certain case while *where* in the other case?

- (14) a. This is the place that / which I like.
 b. *This is the place where I like.
 c. This is the place where I first met my wife.
 d. *This is the place that / which I first met my wife.

It is generally assumed that a syntactic connectivity should exist between a relativizer and its gap since the relativizer can be analyzed to be extracted out of the gap position, which is represented by the solid line in (15) below. Thus the relativizer and its gap should have the same grammatical category and the same case.

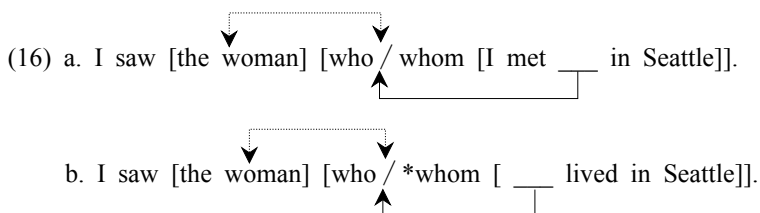
4) See Jacobson (1984) for more detailed and theoretical issues regarding the syntactic connectivity discussion.



In (15a), the relativizer and its gap play the role of the NP object of the verb within the relative clause. It entails that the relativizer should also be a noun, and hence the relative ‘pronoun.’ However, in (15b), the relativizer and its gap play the role of an adverbial and thus the relativizer should also be an adverb, and hence a relative ‘proadverb’.

In contrast, the relationship between the relativizer and its antecedent has only semantic connectivity (Pollard and Sag 1994: 213), which is represented by the dotted line in (15). In (15a), the relative pronoun refers to a non-human being, namely a place, and thus should be *that* or *which* not *who* or *whom*. In (15b), however, the relative proadverb refers to a place and thus should be *where* not *when* or *why*.

The discussion on connectivity helps the ESL learners avoid confusion regarding the selection of a relative pronoun’s case form. The accusative or nominative case is determined by syntactic connectivity, and thus the relationship between the relative pronoun and its gap need to be considered, not the relationship between the relative pronoun and its antecedent. As shown in (16) below, if the gap is an object of a verb or preposition, the relative pronoun should be accusative, *who* or *whom*.⁵⁾ If the gap is the subject, the relative pronoun should be nominative, *who* but not *whom*.



Here the determination of the case has nothing to do with the role of the antecedent NP, *the woman*, since the relative pronoun and its antecedent have just a semantic

5) Here the relativizer *who* is assumed to carry either nominative or accusative case.

connectivity. In (16b), for example, *the woman* is an object of the verb *saw*, but the relative pronoun should be nominative.

5. Subcategorization

The notion of subcategorization is another important issue not clearly addressed in CL. As observed by Hubbard and Hix (1988), the subcategorization frame of a verb is crucial for ESL / EFL writers at the advanced or intermediate stage. Due to the influence of school grammar, many ESL learners tend to think that verbs are classified into five types depending on their complement(s), a verb without an object, a verb with one object, a verb with two objects, a verb with a subject complement, and a verb with one object and one object complement. Such a classification or generalization may help ESL learners read or understand already completed or given sentences. However, when they write or form a sentence in English, much more specific information on a verb's subcategorization is required. At least one section should discuss the difficulty of semantically guessing what should come after a verb to complete a sentence. A few examples from Gazdar et al. (1985: 32) highlight such difficulties:

- (17) a. The beast ate the meat (ravenously).
 b. The beat devoured the meat.
 c. The beast ate (ravenously).
 d.*The beast devoured.
- (18) a. Aren't you even going to try to solve it?
 b. Aren't you even going to attempt to solve it?
 c. Aren't you even going to try?
 d.*Aren't you even going to attempt?

Here the meaning of the verbs *eat* and *devour* in (17), and *try* and *attempt* in (18) are "(near) synonymy," but they have very different subcategorization frames as shown by the contrast in (c,d) sentences. The complements of *eat* and *try* are optional, but those of *devour* and *attempt* are not. The best way to have ESL learners avoid mistakes involving the subcategorization seems to make them refer to a dictionary when they are not sure what the complement is.

6. Coordination

CL assume that only the identical category can be conjoined: “we find difficulties conjoining two constituents that are not of the same type: **bread and strong*, **very big and hide*, **The police saw nothing unusual and effectively*” (CL: 462). However, this statement oversimplifies the fact in English since different grammatical categories can be conjoined especially when the verb is a linking verb, as shown in (19) and (20):

- (19) a. Pat is either [_{AP} stupid] or [_{NP} a liar].
b. Pat is [_{AP} healthy] and [_{PrepP} of sound mind].
c. Sandy is either [_{NP} a lunatic] or [_{PrepP} under the influence of drugs].
d. I am [_{VP} hoping to get an invitation] and [_{AP} optimistic about any chances].
(Sag et al. 1985)

- (20) Pat has become [_{NP} a banker] and [_{AP} very conservative]. (Sag et al. 1985)

A different type of unlike-category coordination construction is also illustrated in (21), where different categories such as AdvP, PreP, and NP are conjoined, all functioning as adverbials:

- (21) a. We walked [_{AdvP} slowly] and [_{PreP} with great care].
b. They wanted to leave [_{NP} tomorrow] or [_{PreP} on Tuesday].
c. We are open [_{NP} Saturdays], [_{NP} any national holiday], and [_{PreP} on alternate Sundays]. Peterson (2004)

Another minor problem in CL is the PS rule for the coordination structure in (22) (CL: 462) since it allows only two or three conjuncts:

- (22) $X \rightarrow X \text{ Conj } X (\text{Conj } X)$

However, the number of conjuncts in the coordination construction can be infinite in principle: A and B and C and D and E, and so forth. Therefore, the rule should be restated as the one in (23), where the last conjunct is annotated with the Kleene star operation, *. It represents the annotated conjunct can be iterated zero, one, or more than one up to the infinite number of times.

- (23) $X \rightarrow X \text{ Conj } X (\text{Conj } X)^*$

7. Conclusion

CL is an excellent comprehensive textbook for the students in an ESL / EFL teacher's course. However, it has some issues and drawbacks that should be considered when the teachers or students use the book. First, note that CL do not clearly make the traditional distinction between grammatical categories and grammatical functions. The lack of this distinction seems to cause confusion when students deal with the elements that several different grammatical categories play the same role, such as a specifier (or determiner) and an adverbial. Such a system also brings about inconsistency in dealing with PS rules. Second, their treatment of the NP structure seems to be too simplified, and a special caution seems needed regarding possessives, partitives, and phrasal quantifiers. Third, a more explanation is needed for the connectivity in the relative clause constructions, which helps students choose an appropriate relativizer. Fourth, a caution needs to be addressed regarding the subcategorization frames of verbs, many of which are semantically unpredictable and bring about difficulties in writing. Problems in the analysis of the coordination constructions are also discussed.

References

- Bresnan, Joan. 2001. *Lexical-Functional Syntax*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Börjars, Kersti and Kate Burridge. 2000. *Introducing English Grammar*. Hodder Arnold.
- Celce-Murcia Marianne and Diane Larson-Freeman. 1999. *The Grammar Book: An ESL / EFL Teacher's Course*, Second edition. Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Gazdar, Gerald, Ewan Klein, Geoffrey Pullum, and Ivan Sag. 1985. *Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hubbard, Philip and Donna Hix. 1988. Where vocabulary meets grammar: verb subcategorization errors in ESL writers. *The CATESOL Journal*, November. 89-100.
- Jacobson, Pauline. 1984. Connectivity in phrase structure grammar. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 1, pp. 535-581.
- Peterson, Peter. 2004. Coordination: consequences of a lexical-functional account. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 22, pp.643-679.
- Pollard, Carl and Ivan Sag. 1994. *Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*. Stanford: CSLI and Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pollock, Jean-Yves. 1989. Verb-movement, Universal Grammar, and the structure of IP. *Linguistic Inquiry* 20, pp.365-424.
- Quirk, Randolph, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech, and Jan Svartvik. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London and New York: Longman.
- Sag, Ivan., Gerald Gazdar, Thomas Wasow, and Steven Weisler. 1985. Coordination and how to distinguish categories, *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 3, pp.117-171.

Chung, Chan

Dongseo University

Churye-2-Dong Sasang-Gu

Busan 617-716, Korea

E-mail: cchung@dongseo.ac.kr

Received : 2008. 05. 08

Revised : 2008. 05. 29

Accepted : 2008. 06. 12

