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Randolph Quirk and serial relationship

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DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENT AND SERIAL RELATIONSHIP

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1. When the aims and methods of the Survey of English Usage were preliminarily drafted, analysis was envisaged as focussing upon 'the plotting of variables'.¹ The purpose of the present paper² is to consider what types of variable need to be distinguished and what kinds of relevance the variables have for descriptive statement.

Quirk, Randolph. 1965. Descriptive statement and serial relationship. *Language* 41.2, 205-17.

Repr. Quirk (1968: 167-83) and Aarts et al. (2004: 327-39)

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Plan

- What is serial relationship?
- Context
- Legacy
- Significance

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SERIAL RELATIONSHIP (SR)

Features: properties of items

- Choose items (typically lexical, i.e. words) which share some properties of distribution.
- Select relevant properties, overt and covert.
- Plot items against properties in a table.
- Rearrange table to display similarities and differences most perspicuously.
- Call the table a matrix.

properties only revealed by testing, including being subject to general rules

1. He X_1 and X_2 to come every day.
2. He X to ~~come~~ every day.
3. Did he X to come every day?
4. He would X to come every day.
5. He X that
6. He X us to come every day.
7. He X that we should come every day.

Properties listed by Quirk
 X is a verb (and X_1 and X_2 are two such verbs, coordinated)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
intends	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
wants	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
seems	+	+	+	+	?	-	-
has (modal-like)	+	+	+	+	-	-	-
used [ju:st]	+	+	?	-	-	-	-
is (modal-like)	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
may	+	-	-	-	-	-	-

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Matrix can display three things

1. Defining properties of items
2. Degrees of identity between items
= 'delicacy' of analysis
3. Gradience

cline or gradient between clearcut members of two categories, with intermediate items situated along it

Question marks along diagonal of matrix (signifying either free variation or doubtful usage) are indicative of gradience.

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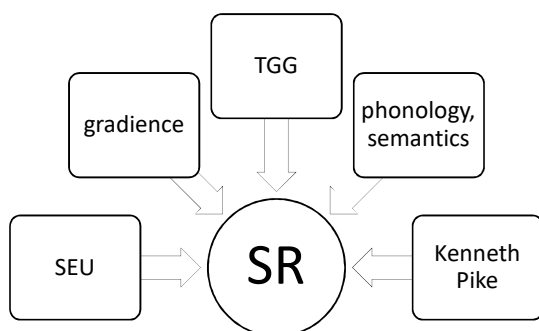
CONTEXT

Survey of English Usage

- Quirk's paper 'Towards a description of English usage' justifies SEU:
 - grammatical description needs a corpus
 - educated British English (cf. Brown Corpus of American English)
 - include speech (unlike Brown)

Quirk (1960)

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Towards a description ...

"Some of the most fertile thinking by linguists in recent years has been on the interpenetration of lexicon and grammar, and on the extent to which phrasal construction and interpretation alike depend upon an indissociable complex of semantic analogy and grammatical analogy."

Quirk (1960: 42)

Towards a description ...

"Some of the most fertile thinking by linguists in recent years has been on the interpenetration of lexicon and grammar, and on the extent to which phrasal construction and interpretation alike depend upon an indissociable complex of semantic analogy and grammatical analogy."

(Cf. modularity of TGG, which kept lexicon, semantics and grammar strictly apart.)

Quirk (1960: 42)

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Gradience

- Quirk adopts Bolinger's notion of gradience
 - One category can gradually merge into an adjacent category, with items on a scale or gradient running from one to the other.
- Reaction against strict Aristotelian pigeonholing and binary divisions in structuralist linguistics.
- See also Aarts's book-length study.

Bolinger (1961) cited Quirk (1965: 208); Aarts (2007)

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Transformational Generative Grammar

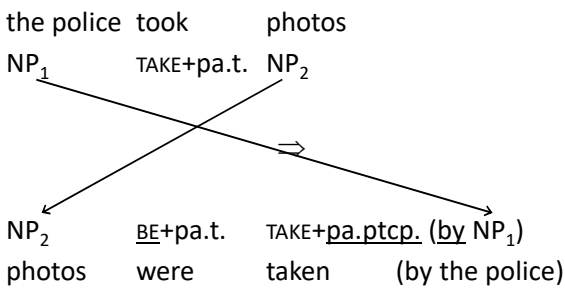
- Phrase structure rules
 - $S \rightarrow NP + VP$
- Transformational rules
 - active \Rightarrow passive
 - declarative \Rightarrow interrogative
 - etc.
- Aim to produce algorithmic grammar that generates all and only the possible sentences of a language – at that time, English above all.

"rewrite Sentence as consisting of a Noun Phrase and a Verb Phrase"

Chomsky (1957, 1965)

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Example: passive transformation



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TGG captures generalisations?

- Just one rule, variously applied:
 - Meg expected Jan to leave Tim.
 - Meg expected Tim to be left (by Jan).
 - Jan was expected (by Meg) to leave Tim.
 - Tim was expected (by Meg) to be left (by Jan).
- Premature use of transformations criticised as 'acrobatics, not descriptions'.

Quirk (1960:47)

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Quirk (1960:47)

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Language not so orderly

- Works:
 - People said prayers
 - ↓
 - Prayers were said
- Doesn't work:
 - *People/they/someone said him to be foolish
 - ↓
 - He was said to be foolish

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Provisional conclusion

- Serial Relationship was of its time.

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LEGACY

Crystal, Svartvik, Coates

- Crystal on English word classes cites Quirk (1965) but does not use SR explicitly.
 - Gradience (within Adj, among temporal nouns, and between Adj and Adv) displayed in SR-like way.
- Svartvik presents elicited acceptability judgements on *dare* and *need* in SR-like tables + frequencies, but only cites other work of Quirk's.
- Coates uses SR in her study of denominal adjectives (1971, based on MA thesis, UCL 1968).

Crystal (1967: 51), Svartvik (1968), Coates (1971)

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Big 'Quirk grammars' (1972, 1985)

- SR is not in index of 1985 grammar.
- Shades of SR appear in the scale of finiteness of verbs (Fig. 3.52) or the criteria for establishing adjective classes (Table 7.3), etc.

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik (1972; 1985: 104, 150, 256, 340, 404, 436)

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Squish

- Ross's term for a gradient within a word or phrasal class.
- Quirk and SR not cited in two papers on squishes (1972, 1973a), but mentioned in paper on 'Nouniness' (1973b).
- One of few scholars from outside UCL orbit to embrace SR.

Ross (1972, 1973a, 1973b)

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Historical work

- Denison plotted various serial relationships among the impersonal verbs of Old English.
- SR only invoked synchronically for Old English.

- Overall, direct legacy seems to be modest, even in present-day English studies.

Denison (1990)

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SIGNIFICANCE

Analogy

- Proportional analogy, 'A is to B as C is to D'

A : B :: C : D

book : ~~beek~~_{pl} :: beam : beams_{pl}

(infrequent pattern)

(increasingly dominant)

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Analogy

- Analogy as mechanism of change explored systematically in Fischer (2007), De Smet & Fischer (2017), etc.
 - Synchronic Quirk (1965) and SR are not cited.
- SR differs from traditional proportional analogy between one pair and another.
- SR is a subtle kind of many-to-many analogy.

Fischer (2007); De Smet & Fischer (2017)

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Diachrony

- Quirk (1965) did not discuss diachrony – only 'dynamic synchrony' of language production.
- Diagonal line for gradience may well be of significance for language change, indicating points of vulnerability.
- Modern corpus and elicitation techniques could exploit this.

Jakobson (1961)

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Example: N → N, Adj

- Many nouns develop adjectival behaviour alongside their nominal categorisations:
 - *cowboy, designer, draft, fun, genius, key, killer, landmark, luxury, niche, rubbish, surprise, etc.*
- Stepwise progression towards adjective-hood.
- Construct SR analysis to exhibit synchronic gradient and explain diachronic development?

Denison (2017, etc.)

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Current alternatives to SR

- Various more or less formal approaches address some of the same issues as SR:
 - Systemic Functional Grammar (Michael Halliday, at UCL 1963-5)
 - Word Grammar (Dick Hudson, at UCL 1964-7)
 - HPSG, ...
 - approaches that use multidimensional scaling
 - Construction Grammar

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Construction Grammar

- Most variants of CxG have parallels with SR:
 - Continuity of analysis from word to larger structures
 - Integration of syntax and semantics
 - Different levels of construction representing more abstract (general) or more concrete kinds of resemblance

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Limitations of SR

- Choice of features and order is subjective.
- But could perhaps use bottom-up, data-driven computer methods to suggest classification
 - Hilpert, Gries & Stefanowitsch, Szmrecsanyi, ...

Quirk: “Computer programs for mechanically sorting and clumping distinctive features so as to show the kind and extent of interrelationship between grammatical structures” !

Hilpert (2013), Gries & Stefanowitsch (2004), Szmrecsanyi (2017), Quirk (1965: 210 n.13), Svartvik & Carvell (1964), Carvell & Svartvik (1966)

Limitations of SR

- Costly in time
- Difficult to integrate into formal theory
- Probably always supplementary to other kinds of analysis
- Most convincing in conjunction with elicitation from (living) speakers

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Rule or memory?

- Widely acknowledged tension in speech between genuine productivity and use of ready-made strings.
- Middle ground between operation of syntactic rules and use of fixed idioms is more important than often recognised.
- SR describes that middle ground in a psychologically plausible way.

Quirk (1960: 56-7)

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Conclusion

- Serial Relationship was of its time.
- Serial Relationship was before its time.

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Thank you

slides and references are on my downloads page:

<http://tinyurl.com/DD-download>

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