



Arguments for a Non-Transformational Grammar

Richard A. Hudson

"This autumn, a London lecturer, Richard Hudson, will publish a new theory which could well replace Chomsky's grammar. American academics have already hailed it as the most important single contribution to the theory of language since Chomsky produced the mature version of his own ideas in 1965. Hudson's position is this. 'I don't disagree with Chomsky about the rules of the game', he says, 'what we are trying to discuss here is the nature of language. But I do think that his grammar is unnecessarily complicated, and it's wrong.'

"Hudson's case is that Chomsky took a wrong turning at the start of thinking about how language works. We have seen how, to Chomsky, 'deep structure' became necessary because the existing rules were not enough to explain different meanings for the same sentence. But Hudson says that there is an alternative. 'You can just say,' he suggests, 'that the rules we used to have were a rotten way to analyse a sentence.'

"He rejects too, Chomsky's explanation of how language can be analysed. That explanation involves transformations — the ways that deep structure turns into the words we actually use. The idea gives the name to Chomsky's theories — 'transformational grammar.'

'I don't believe human beings think in the way Chomsky's theories suggest,' Hudson says. 'I don't believe that when someone says, 'he is working,' he is really thinking 'he present being work' as Chomsky says . . . Instead of deep structure and transformations, Hudson proposes a way to map out the structure of a sentence on just one level. The result, called 'daughter-dependency theory', sounds like an immensely sophisticated version of familiar schoolroom ideas about grammar.

"For, as Paul Postal, working independently from Hudson, says: 'All those traditional ideas like subject, object and indirect object don't have a role in transformational grammar. They're marginal. But I'm finding that we still need to use them.'

"And Hudson suggests, half-joking: 'After all, schoolchildren and teachers and people who are naive about the theory of grammar — they've all found this way of looking at sentences convincingly for two thousand years.'

"His grammar involves a complex system of classification of words. 'I feel intuitively that's right,' he says. 'Children have to learn to classify objects, after all, in very many complicated ways. It makes sense to suggest that they do the same with words.'"

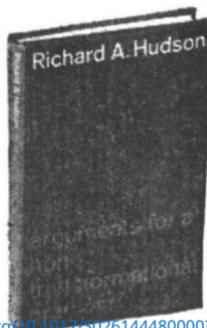
Michael Pye, *Sunday Times*

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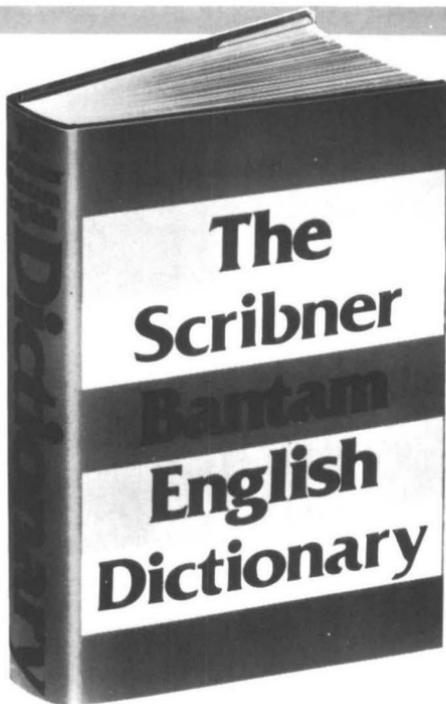
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