

SENTENCE PATTERNS IN THE WRITING OF
AVERAGE NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Recent articles discussing the problems in high school composition should alarm, if not shock, the high school English teacher. For a more frightening experience, one should look closely at the sentence structure of average ninth-grade students. One could offer endless speculations as to why these problems occur. But, rather than to offer various reasons for the problems, the purpose of this paper will be to isolate a problem and propose a solution.

The major problem in students' writing is faulty embedding; failure to properly combine kernels discloses a lack of skill in making simple transformations. Apparently the students' background in "grammar" is not sufficient in producing syntactic growth.

The present study is designed to focus on three things: the problem of faulty embedding, various measurements and methods of syntactic development, and a proposed solution of sentence-combining exercises.

First, a look at the problem of embedding and the various kinds of research being done on the subject will help to reveal the problem. Furthermore, a close look at

the written data of approximately 120 regular middle-class ninth-grade students will provide examples of the embedding problem.

Second, consideration of the various measures in syntactic development will provide means for a possible solution. While free modification is important in measurement in syntactic development, bound modification is a more essential measurement in high school students' composition. In addition to the selection of modification, an evaluation of traditional and generative grammar is necessary. Although traditional grammar is popular with many teachers, a generative grammar is a vital measurement and aid in syntactic development.

Third, through a generative approach of combining kernel sentences and through the data gathered from regular middle-class ninth-grade students, a possible solution can be proposed.

CHAPTER I

FAULTY EMBEDDING

Statement of Problem

The major problem in students' writing is faulty embedding. Whether this problem stems from a weak background in language or from unfamiliarity with the printed page and sentence structure is difficult to establish; however, the fact that students use faulty sentence embedding excessively is worth consideration. Often students are unable to combine kernel sentences into a complex statement. For example, they would have difficulty combining the four following sentences into the possible combined sentence:

1. He was a student.
2. He was serious.
3. He studied every night.
4. He failed mathematics.

POSSIBLE COMBINED SENTENCE: Although he was a serious student who studied every night, he failed mathematics.

Instead of writing the preceding combination, the average ninth-grade students who use faulty embedding might write the following:

He failed mathematics and he studied every night and he was serious too.

The reason for this apparent lack of skills is simply that their skills are underdeveloped. They need more opportunities to build their skills. They need to learn to build complex sentences by combining kernel sentences. Several questions pose a challenge: Can faulty embedding patterns be eliminated in the majority of ninth-grade compositions? Can a generative grammar help students improve their sentence structure? Is traditional grammar essential to building facility in writing? If English teachers are going to meet the ever-growing problems in high school students' compositions, they must be willing to face these perennial questions. In seeking the answers, teachers must be willing to do research, to experiment, and to re-evaluate their present teaching of composition.

Related Research

Fortunately, many teachers and professors are already hard at work looking for new approaches to the teaching of composition. Verna L. Newsome clearly sees this problem:

. . . I do believe we must isolate the many problems involved in teaching composition and tackle them separately if we are to solve any of them. The two techniques of expansion and transformation can be used in the classroom to help students write the more sophisticated sentences. . . . Transforming two or more sentences to form a new sentence reveals the processes of coordination and subordination more clearly and brings alternative grammatical structures

into sharper contrast than the additive method. However, expanding basic sentences may be a more economical way to provide practice in using specific structures. If students are to develop greater flexibility and maturity in their writing they need experience of various kinds in manipulating a wide range of structures.¹

Newsome, along with others, can see the need for something other than a concentrated study of grammar to improve sentence structure. Likewise, James L. Green comments:

If we consider our practice and the focus of our textbooks, I think most of us will conclude that we pay relatively little attention to the sentence. We are eager to have our students write paragraphs and themes and research papers. When we consider the sentence at all, we seldom go beyond grammar. We teach students to recognize and name types of phrases and clauses and sentences; but we do not encourage them to consider the differences in rhetorical effect among structures. When we do teach rhetoric, too often when we teach grammar, we focus on sentence defects.²

Another teacher, Eileen McGuire, writes of the inadequacy of traditional grammar:

When a student is "grappling" with forms and ideas, a grammar of rigid classifications and static relationships offers little in the way of immediate help. He needs a grammar that moves with his thought, that in some way parallels the process going on in his mind. Generative grammar seems to provide this help.³

¹Verna L. Newsome, "Expansion and Transformations to Improve Sentences," English Journal 53 (May 1964): 335.

²James L. Green, "Acrobats, Plowmen, and the Healthy Sentence," English Journal 58 (September 1969): 893-94.

³Eileen J. McGuire, "Sentence Building and Transformational Grammar," English Journal 56 (May 1967): 748.

Frank O'Hare, a leading proponent of generative grammar, advocates sentence combining, which is an embedding process. He asserts:

Sentence combining helps the writer enlarge the practical-possible so that it can be utilized during the composing process. . . . Students exposed to sentence-building techniques could use these syntactic manipulative skills at the prewriting or rewriting stage in their work in composition. They would be better able to "unchop" the choppy sentence and eliminate the run-on sentence.¹

John C. Mellon, like O'Hare, advocates sentence-combining practices as a way of teaching syntactic fluency. Mellon claims that sentence-combining practices enhance the growth of syntactic fluency in a naturalistic manner.²

Another writer, Charles Cooper, recommends sentence-combining and feels it is essential to building facility in writing. He states, "The fact remains that mature syntax is characterized in large part by amount and depth of embedding, and this is a developmental task the child must master."³

¹Frank O'Hare, Sentence Combining, NCTE Research Report 15 (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1973), p. 70.

²John C. Mellon, Transformational Sentence Combining, NCTE Research Report 10 (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1969), p. 26.

³Charles R. Cooper, "An Outline for Writing Sentence Combining Problems," English Journal 62, pt. 1 (January 1973): 98.

One other writer, William Strong, presents a very valid argument in favor of sentence combining. He contends, "Sentence combining is about as basic as kernel sentences." He goes on to say that a kernel sentence is a fundamental and recurring pattern in language.¹ To explain the "basic" process of combining kernel sentences, he writes:

. . . you take the idea of kernel sentences, and you link it up with another idea, the idea of transforming, which is also pretty basic. A transformation, you may recall, is a mental operation for combining kernels and thus "stringing out" nominals and predications. More technically, transformations are what enable us to embed modifiers, make deletions, and perform a variety of other linguistic functions such as coordination and subordination.²

Strong maintains that the syntactic model, kernels and transformations, is very powerful because it focuses on two incredible yet basic facts of language: that children invent for themselves an encoding/decoding system and that syntactic growth is a natural feature of normal language development. He goes on to say that neither grammar book nor sentence combining can explain any of this "basic stuff" satisfactorily; however, sentence combining can and does acknowledge that all of us are sentence-generating geniuses. He claims that we are transformational wizards with banks of linguistic data already programmed into our

¹William Strong, "Back to Basics and Beyond," English Journal 65 (February 1976): 56.

²Ibid.

brain computers. He points out that our task is not one of putting in more data or analyzing structure operations but one of a "basic" and simple nature: "It's one of helping kids exercise the output functions of their brain computers and thus explore the depths of their linguistic power."¹

Finally, Strong summarizes by saying:

If sentence combining works because it trains a kid to hold longer and longer discourse in his head--to embed and subordinate at greater depth as a means of expressing thought--it is indeed something more than a return to traditional basics. Rather, it is a means to intervene in cognitive development and, perhaps, to enhance it.²

Many writers are giving considerable attention to sentence structure and a generative grammar. Perhaps this study will produce evidence of the effectiveness of sentence-combining practices that will eventually lead to syntactic growth.

Definitions

Since the terms sentence embedding and sentence combining are associated with structural grammar and transformational grammar, perhaps definitions are necessary. Starting with the English sentence of generative grammar, Jeanne Herndon says:

First, there are the phrase structure rules which describe the parts and relationships in simple,

¹Ibid., p. 60.

²Ibid.

declarative sentences. These sentences are referred to as the kernel--the sentences that form the core of the language. Next, there are the transformational rules for changing these sentences into other forms, such as the passive, negative, yes-no questions, and so on.

Some of the phrase structure and transformational rules allow for the fact that simple sentences may be combined to form complex and compound types of sentences. When two sentences are combined, one is said to be embedded in the other. The rules for these processes are stated in such a way that they can be used and reused, embedding sentences into other sentences, layer after layer. Such rules allow repeated use of the phrase structure rules in infinite combination.¹

She goes on to say that there are two sets of rules that are basic: the phrase structure rules of the kernel sentences and the transformational rules that may be applied to generate all other sentences.²

Generative grammar uses symbols as well as rules to show various categories and relationships. Jacobs and Rosenbaum say, "the deep structure of sentences consists of three basic constituents: noun phrases (NP's), auxiliaries (AUX's), and verb phrases (VP's)." The first phrase structure rule states that every sentence consists of a noun phrase, an auxiliary, and a verb phrase.³ If rearrangement,

¹Jeanne H. Herndon, A Survey of Modern Grammars (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), p. 125.

²Ibid., p. 126.

³Roderick J. Jacobs and Peter S. Rosenbaum, English Transformational Grammar (Waltham, Mass.: Xerox College Publishing, 1968), p. 44.

addition, or deletion occurs, separately or combined, through the use of transformational rules, the transformation is called a single-base transformation. But, says Jeanne Herndon, "When strings are combined, the process is referred to as a double-base transformation."¹ Concerning the combination of strings, Jacobs and Rosenbaum say:

Since noun phrases can optionally contain sentences, the phrase structure rule $NP \rightarrow (ART) N$ must now be amended to show the possibility of a sentence following a noun:

$$NP \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} NPS \\ (ART) N (S) \end{array} \right\} \quad 2$$

Likewise, the phrase structure rule for the verb phrase $VP \rightarrow VB NP$ must be amended to show the possibility of two noun phrases in the verb phrase:

$$VP \rightarrow VB (NP) \left\{ \begin{array}{l} (NP) \\ (S) \end{array} \right\} \quad 3$$

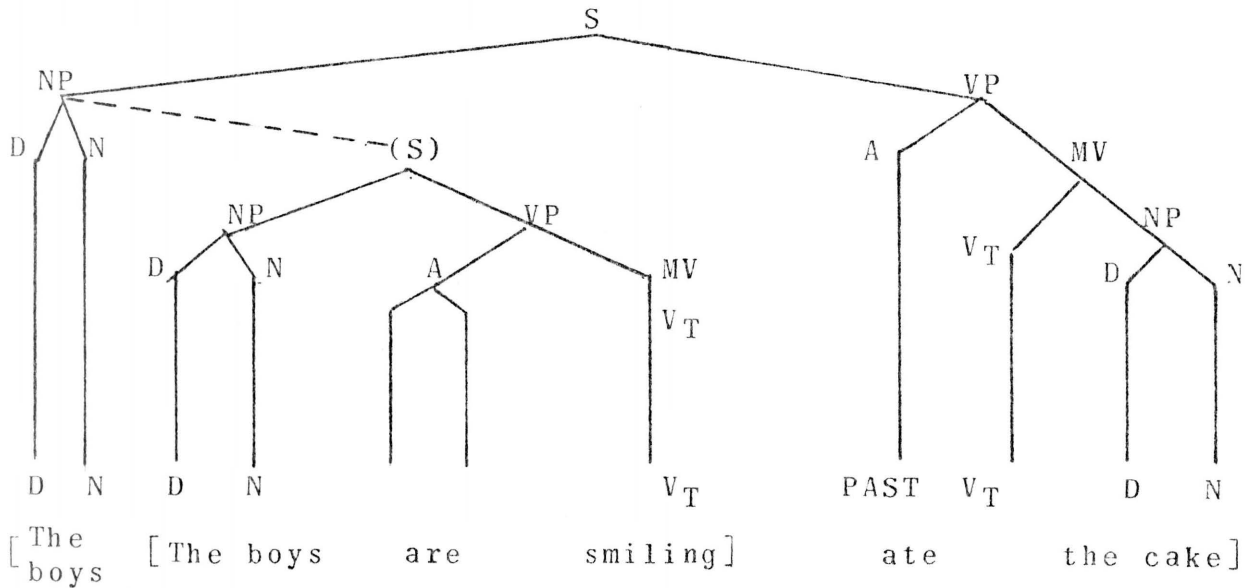
Consider only the $NP \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} NP S \\ (ART) N (S) \end{array} \right\}$ rule for an example. Herndon gives a good explanation of what occurs:

The rule says that any noun phrase structure may or may not be followed by a sentence. When such a sentence does follow a noun phrase structure, it must, obviously, be embedded in the sentence of which the NP is a part. For example:

¹Herndon, p. 157.

²Jacobs and Rosenbaum, pp. 45-46.

³Ibid., p. 56.



Embedding the sentence in square brackets into the main sentence involves changing some elements--the determiner and noun of the sentence to be embedded--and changing of elements is among the processes assigned to the transformational rules. In this case the transformational rule must deal with two strings of symbols--that of the main sentence and that of the sentence to be embedded. . . . The main sentence is usually referred to as the matrix sentence. This is a very precise descriptive term: the dictionary definition of matrix is "that which gives origin or form to a thing, or which serves to enclose it." The sentence that must be embedded in the matrix sentence is sometimes called the constituent sentence because it is a part of a larger structure, and sometimes called the insert sentence because that is what we propose to do with it.¹

This particular transformation, the embedded sentence, presents many problems to ninth-grade students. At times they try to embed ideas that are non-coordinate or unequal.

¹Herndon, pp. 176-77.

At the same time, they often try to combine too many thoughts in one sentence. And to compound their problems, they use too many or too few marks of punctuation.

After reading related research and defining generative grammar terms concerning embedding, the writer began to observe more carefully the various structures of embedding in ninth-graders' compositions. The questions grew even larger: Why have these ninth-graders not mastered the developmental task of embedding? Why has traditional grammar failed to prepare them for sentence combining? Should teachers look to a generative grammar to improve students' compositions?

Description of Data

Approximately 120 male and female students, who were divided into four classes, provided the written data for this research. These students were classified as regular middle-class ninth-grade students. Each of four regular classes which they composed met sixty minutes per day in a self-contained classroom. These students wrote approximately 600 compositions and 120 six-week journals during the first two trimesters. The assignments were the following:

1. an autobiography written in the third person
2. a six-week journal
3. an essay test covering On the Beach

4. an essay test covering My Antonia
5. a creative writing assignment related to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
6. an additional creative writing assignment

The students were classified as regular, a classification which needs defining. Regular English students are students who scored from the sixteenth to the eighty-fifth percentile in language on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, which the students took when they were in the eighth grade. The results of the Comprehensive Test, along with the results of the Kuder Test and the students' eighth-grade English grades, determined their placement in regular ninth grade English classes. A breakdown of the range follows:

	Mechanics	Expression	Spelling	Total
Scale Score	4.2	5.5	6.8	5.4
National Percentile	9%	22%	32%	16%

	Mechanics	Expression	Spelling	Total
Scale Score	9.9	12.9	10.1	11.3
National Percentile	67%	93%	72%	85%

Another classification that needs defining is middle-class. Because of proximity to the Dallas/Fort Worth

area, Lewisville has experienced a population explosion during the past twenty years. Population has grown from 2,100 in 1957 to approximately 27,000 in 1976; the majority of employed residents work in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. Reflecting this rapid growth, the secondary school enrollment has almost doubled in the past five years. Student enrollment for 1975-76 in Lewisville High School, a four-year school, is 1,912. Of this figure, 96 percent are Anglo, 2 percent are Black, and 2 percent are Mexican-American or other. As a result of the population explosion and the vast number of commuting workers, Lewisville is considered a suburb of the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area with new homes and apartment complexes available to people of middle-class incomes. Hence the school population is largely middle-class.

Although the 120 regular middle-class ninth-grade students completed the various writing assignments during the first and second trimesters, their ability to generate acceptable sentences with good coordination and subordination had not improved. Furthermore, during the first two trimesters, these 120 students were exposed to three weeks of noun study, three weeks of pronoun and preposition study, two weeks of verb study, one week of adjective and adverb study, and one week of paragraph study.

On the students' completion of the traditional grammar studies and the various writing assignments, no appreciable change could be measured in their sentence structure. This discovery suggested that studying traditional grammar would not necessarily enable students to improve their sentence structure.

Sentence Structure Analysis

Analysis of sentence structure revealed various sentence patterns worth noting. In particular, three very distinct patterns of faulty embedding emerge repeatedly in the majority of regular ninth-grade compositions. One structure typically used by ninth-graders is the main clause followed, with or without conjunction or punctuation, by a non-coordinate idea. Another common pattern is the improper compounding of ideas when one idea is logically subordinate. One other frequent construction is the sentence in which ideas, erratically connected by commas, are disjointed and incoherent. All of these constructions are the results of faulty embedding. (In all of the examples used, the sentences will appear exactly as the students wrote them. Spelling and punctuation will not be corrected. Names used are fictitious.)

One structure that appears often in ninth-graders' compositions is the pattern containing the main clause followed, with or without conjunction or punctuation, by a

non-coordinate idea. In these sentences the non-coordinate idea clearly does not belong with the main clause. For instance, one student writes:

Paul is in high school now and all of that is in the past and he thinks he'll start all over again.

Clearly, there are three distinct ideas in the preceding sentence which make combining, by coordination or subordination, next to impossible. Furthermore, the writer probably does not know himself what the main idea is in this sentence. Another sentence employing this construction reads:

She is very stubborn and loses her temper easy but her mother says she shouldn't be so friendly.

Again, two different thoughts appear separated by a conjunction that means "contrary to expectation"; however, the latter idea is not contrary but non-coordinate. It simply does not belong to the main thought. This type of faulty embedding reveals the students' inability to distinguish compatible thoughts. The reader wonders which thought is foremost in the writer's mind: the fact that "she is stubborn and loses her temper" or the fact that "her mother says she shouldn't be so friendly."

Another student writes:

Ted has a 1,000 Harley Davidson and like alot of parents they don't allow me to ride on motorcycles.

Likewise, these dissimilar thoughts cannot be brought together successfully. The fact that "Ted has a 1,000 Harley Davidson" cannot be equated with "like alot of parents." Possibly the main idea in this sentence is "Ted has a 1,000 Harley Davidson."

The following example shows two coordinate ideas followed by a non-coordinate:

Jim lived with his parents and they died when he was young, so he moved to Nebraska to live with his grandparents, and he liked Antonia alot.

The ideas "after Jim's parents died" and "he moved to Nebraska to live with his grandparents" are compatible as long as one is subordinate; however, the added idea "and he liked Antonia alot" is definitely not related to the first two ideas.

Another student who uses this same pattern writes:

. . ., but she didn't make the team because of her size and she wasn't such a hot player.

Combining of the first two clauses could be done quite easily, but the last idea is definitely not related to the first two. Although the last idea, "she wasn't such a hot player," seems tacked on as an afterthought, it is probably foremost in the writer's mind.

Another example of the non-coordinate idea is:

When she was little she would be cold but the rabbit skin that her father made her kept her warmer, and proud.

Similar to the preceding example, this sentence has possibly congruent ideas; however, the last tacked-on afterthought, "and proud," has nothing to do with being cold and being warm.

Another interesting structure is the following:

. . . but Jim doesn't want to come back to see her because he wants to remember her the way she was not old and different.

This student meant to say that Jim doesn't want to see Antonia aged and wrinkled because he wants to remember her as he last saw her, when she was a young vibrant girl. But, from the student's sentence structure, the reader might think that Jim wants to remember her the way she was not, old and different. This type of construction leaves the reader suspended in mid air. Another example of this same pattern reads:

Antonia liked her mom ok but she loved her daddy so much, she looked up to him, she didn't like Ambrosh that much.

Clearly, the last clause does not belong to the two previous clauses. Not only is the idea "she didn't like Ambrosh that much" non-coordinate, but it abruptly leaves the reader dangling.

Another sentence that clearly reveals this pattern of a concluding non-coordinate idea is:

Lena was a party girl she let Jim kiss her all the time and she represented the working women.

It sounds as if this writer is deducing: Working women are party girls and they kiss boys all the time. Certainly the student did not mean to imply this reasoning. The first two clauses could possibly be brought together, but the idea "she represented the working women" is most certainly non-coordinate. Another example that reveals the non-coordinate idea is:

Antonia's father was always trying to make her happy though he was not happy himself in that strange country and he tried to help his friends when they needed it.

The last idea, "he tried to help his friends when they needed it," is incongruous and cannot be a part of the two preceding ideas.

Another common pattern in ninth-graders' compositions is the improper compounding of ideas when one idea is logically subordinate. This structure could also be classified as a comma splice with a stated action followed by a clause showing reason or result. These sentences show the students' inability to combine sentences by making one subordinate. One student writes:

She wants to learn to play the guitar, she likes almost any kind of music.

Possibly these two clauses are compatible, but one is definitely subordinate. The following examples are similar:

The town was so small, she had only one playmate.

She feels no one should be cruel to them, although there are some people in this world who just don't care.

They married and had ten or eleven children and Antonia was very happy, although she still loved Jim.

We started practicing in mid-summer and it was three weeks before the finals.

Other student sentences revealing the reason clauses that are improperly combined are:

She likes the country because she always writes her book about it or puts the people on the prairie.

Lena gives the book romance because Jim really loves her.

Her big brother Ambrosio made her work as a man would and he got all of the money, she really couldn't say anything because he was older than she, but she did as he said.

James Burden is a lawyer who was going to Black Hawk to live with his grandmother because his parents had died.

When the students start the structure with the main clause, it is easy for them to add the result or reason clauses to justify what they have said previously. The latter example is misleading in the information that it conveys. The reader believes that James Burden, the lawyer, goes to live with his grandmother because his parents have died. Actually Jim Burden goes to live with his grandparents when he is ten years old. Much later he becomes a lawyer.

Other sentences reveal improper compounding resulting in poor expressions:

John Osborne died by taking the pill but it was funny in away cause before he died he wanted to be by the thing he loved the most and that was his racing car.

They were gonna get a sheet of glass and carve the animals in so if their was people left they would know what it was like when everybody was alive.

He liked her very much he has a romantic relationship with her but she treats him like a baby and he doesn't like that.

There are no hospitals in Little Oak, she was born at home.

. . . he wanted to play around with Antonia but she played it smart, although she didn't know about his plan to.

Antonia was always easy to get along with even when she was young to now.

Antonia got her warm heart from him and her will to help others.

A third structure which frequently appears in ninth-graders' compositions is the sentence in which ideas, erratically connected by commas, are disjointed and incoherent. In these constructions, excessive combining occurs. The writers usually have no idea where they will carry the reader; they simply run on and on until they are out of thoughts. The long constructions grow complex and tiresome, and the short ones show a lack of reason and forethought. For instance, the three following examples all show incoherence and lack unity:

Saturday went by catching crabs and exploring.

When John was four he was a explorer until he found a home of little bugs he sat in nobody ever told him they were fire ants.

The reason I think about this just having a good time is because my mom and dad wont let me go to visit my cousin because of this guy I like down thier and its been a month sence Ive seen or heard from him.

In structures of this nature, it is difficult to determine the main thoughts. To comprehend them, the reader may need to think imaginatively during several readings. Other sentences revealing the disjointed and incoherent patterns are:

I go and pick up my money and then I go a put it in the safe in my Silverado pick-em-up truck and pick up my woman and head for the next rodeo that comes along.

Her father he was very found of her and he liked her very much when he died she was kind of lost.

I have dreamed and probably always will dream of going around the world and help the people who need help or write a book about the people of the world and what they do and why they do it.

Lori is a motorcycle freak she wants a Yamaha TY80A its low torque like its mainly for riding in the woods and going over trees and making your own way.

My favorite character is Antonia because she's gone through the hardest life in the book, and her life is exciting, what I mean is more things have happened to her than anybody else, and because she's just a good character.

In the incoherent, disjointed structures, the students seem to want to crowd as many ideas as possible into sentences without stopping to make any transformations. At times

the sentences are so packed that the reader feels overwhelmed:

Her brother, I, personally hated he was very cruel, and very selfish he thought only of himself, he made Tony work hard, I think if he hadn't she would have been nicer and not had so much pressure put on her.

She coped with these problems by taking her mind off of it by, going to the dogtown or to the garden, just somewhere where she could get her mind at ease like when her father died or when Pavel died and when they didn't have any food.

Mr. Shimerda comidited suaside, she had to work as a hired girl, she had a baby but not married and the father was a conductor.

How about when she was supposed to get married and guy ran out on her and she had the baby she still loved the guy and gave him another chance things didn't seem to upset her that much she carried on her life regulary.

It was hard living so poorly, no food, no money and and when winter came her father comitted suicide, which was very hard for her, she had to work in the field which took away her womanlynness.

Obviously, the three distinct sentence patterns of faulty embedding reveal students' lack of ability to combine kernel sentences. Their ideas are non-coordinate, improperly combined, or incoherent. Moreover, students have difficulty in identifying the main ideas in their sentences, and often they add ideas that are totally unrelated. These students need opportunities to build correct sentences, to identify main ideas, to coordinate, and to subordinate. They need to do exercises which require them

to embed several kernel sentences. The design of this study and the preponderance of evidence will support the belief that sentence-combining practice leads to syntactic growth.

CHAPTER II

MEASURES IN SYNTACTIC DEVELOPMENT

Various Clause Patterns

Although several scholars have written influentially about measurements in syntactic development, they do not always agree. More often than not, they build on what other scholars have discovered. Kellogg W. Hunt, who has contributed greatly to measures in syntactic development, points out:

For the last thirty years we have known at least three things about the development of language structure. First, as children mature they tend to produce more words on any given subject. . . . Second, as children mature, the sentences they use tend to be longer. Third, as children mature a larger proportion of their clauses are subordinate clauses.¹

Furthermore, Hunt claims that in the last two years, it has been possible to add a few more measures:

As students mature they tend to produce longer clauses. . . . Clause length is a better index of language maturity than sentence length. . . . A new unit of measurement which is more significant than sentence length, can aid in syntactic development research. . . . Superior twelfth graders do not

¹Kellogg W. Hunt, "Recent Measures in Syntactic Development," Elementary English 43 (November 1966): 732.

write more subordinate clauses than average twelfth graders. Instead they write much longer clauses.¹

The new unit of measurement of which Hunt speaks is called the "minimal terminal unit," or "T-Unit." The "T-Unit" is exactly one main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses are attached to that main clause.² He feels that this measure is more significant than the widely used sentence-length measurement. To introduce the unit he uses a one-sentence theme which was written by a fourth grader:

I like the movie we saw about Moby Dick the white whale the captain said if you can kill the white whale Moby Dick I will give this gold to the one that can do it and it is worth sixteen dollars they tried and tried but while they were trying they killed a whale and used the oil for the lamps they almost caught the white whale.

In sentence length this fourth grader is superior to the average writer in Harpers and Atlantic. Now let me cut that sentence up into the new units. Each unit will consist of exactly one main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses happen to be attached to or embedded within it.

1. I like the movie we saw about Moby Dick, the white whale.
2. The captain said if you can kill the white whale, Moby Dick, I will give this gold to the one that can do it.
3. And it is worth sixteen dollars.
4. They tried and tried.
5. But while they were trying they killed a whale and used the oil for the lamps.
6. They almost caught the white whale.³

¹Ibid., p. 738.

²Ibid., p. 737.

³Ibid.

Justifiably, Hunt feels that this measurement is more reliable than traditional measures which are guided by students' punctuation.

Various Indexes

Through the use of Hunt's various indexes, Hunt has taken other scholars' research data and discovered significant trends. For instance, he writes:

From the first public school grade to the last the number of subordinate clauses increases steadily for every grade.

This tendency has implications for teaching language. Without ever using the words "main clause" and "subordinate clause," the language arts teacher . . . can show her students another way of saying the same thing.¹

Certainly, Hunt's indexes are momentous in measuring syntactic growth. As Hunt continues explaining the various indexes, he says:

Now let us pull all these various indexes together in a single piece of arithmetic. "Average clause length" is the number of words per clause. "Subordinate clause index" is the number of clauses per T-Unit. "Average T-Unit length" is the number of words per T-Unit. "Main clause coordination index" is the number of T-Units per sentence. "Average sentence length" is the number of words per sentence.

These five measures are very useful analytically and are all related arithmetically. The number of words per clause times the number of clauses per T-Unit equals the number of words per T-Unit. That times the number of T-Units per sentence gives the number of words per sentence. The first index times the second equals the third. The third times the

¹Ibid., p. 734.

fourth equals the fifth. Clause length times subordinate clause index equals T-Unit length. That figure times main clause coordination index equals sentence length.¹

Through the T-Unit measurement of clause length, Hunt feels that he gets a better index of language maturity than through measurement of average sentence length.

Again and again Hunt declares that longer clauses reveal more development and maturity. He describes the process as reduction and consolidation, but he quickly adds: "The same process is described by generative-transformational grammarians as embedding transformations."² He summarizes his position by saying:

Little by little the evidence piles up that the reduction and consolidation of many clauses into one is intimately related to syntactic growth both in writing and reading. If writers must build up clauses, then readers must break them down. A whole new range of applications is open up for approaching reading difficulty.³

Hunt has made a great discovery concerning reading and writing. Longer clauses reveal depth of embedding; and, most certainly, this consolidation is intimately related to syntactic growth in reading and writing.⁴ Hunt concludes

¹Kellogg W. Hunt, "A Synopsis of Clause-to-Sentence Factors," English Journal 54 (April 1965): 300-309.

²Hunt, "Recent Measures in Syntactic Development," p. 738.

³Ibid., p. 739.

⁴Ibid.

by suggesting that teachers be trained in clause-consolidation "so that children can be taught what otherwise they must discover unaided."¹

Following Hunt's school of thought, John C. Mellon says that the range of sentence types in students' writing continually and sequentially increases as the students mature. He says this growth is reflected in the length of independent clauses, more elaborate sentences, more subordination, variety in sentence patterns, and more deeply embedded sentences.² Furthermore, he claims that this growth in sentence structure manifests cognition and occurs without the aid of formally designed pedagogy. He distinctly says "that growth of syntactic fluency can result only from increased use of sentence-embedding transformations."³

Actually, Mellon says that he is basing his study on a reworking of Hunt's data. He summarizes his findings:

Clearly, Hunt has shown that the hallmark of mature syntactic fluency is the ability to "say more," on average, with every statement. Increased use of relative transform means in effect that the student more often makes secondary statements, either fully formed or elliptical, about the nouns in his main sentences. Greater use of nominalized sentences

¹Ibid.

²Mellon, pp. 15, 16.

³Ibid., p. 16.

means that he more often predicates upon statements, as it were, rather than upon simple nouns. Furthermore, transformed sentences will be recursively embedded at increasingly deeper levels, and relative transforms will be more frequently used in parallel "clusters" surrounding single nouns. . . . Generally speaking, then, the above embedding transforms, together with measures of depth of embedding, cluster size, and unique nominal patterns, constitute the appropriate criteria for describing growth of syntactic fluency. In like manner, example sentences used in the secondary grades as practice exercises designed to enhance this growth would feature many of these transforms in concert and would exemplify the widest possible diversity of grammatical patterns.¹

Bound Modifiers Vs. Free Modifiers

Contrary to the idea of Hunt and Mellon concerning syntactic maturity and various clause patterns, Francis Christensen, another well-known and influential stylist, argues that the long noun clause does not reveal a mature style. He says Hunt and Mellon advocate the bound modifiers, whereas he advances the free modifiers. The bound modifiers are restrictive and essential in the sense that they represent nominalization and relative embedding. An example of bound modification, which is underlined, follows: A pale nervous girl about six years old, who was apparently going to school for the first time, tightly held the hand of her weeping mother. On the other hand, the free modifiers are loose and additive. And they have more

¹Ibid., pp. 19-20.

to do with phrases and sentences than with words. An example of free modification, which is underlined, follows:

These countries were once the center of the storm, and as the Curtain was coming down their hotels were filled with correspondents, pushing and crowding each other, playing what is known in the trade as journalistic boomerang (you take a rumor, throw it out, and by the end of the day it has touched so many other people that it comes back to you fresh and vital, passed on by people you haven't even spoken to).¹

While advancing the idea of free modification, Christensen expresses his dislike of the idea of nominalizing and relative embedding when he asserts:

The very hallmark of jargon is the long noun phrase--the long noun phrase as subject and long noun phrase as complement, the two coupled by a minimal verb. One of the hardest things to learn in learning to write well is how to keep the noun phrases short. The skillful writer is the writer who has learned how to keep them short. On nearly every page of this paper I have had to resort to syntactic devices to keep them within bounds--devices, such as this appositive, that are practically unknown to our textbook writers.²

Christensen wonders if the type of syntactic growth that Hunt and Mellon are advancing is what we really want. "A mature style," says he, "must say much in little," but, at the same time, "a mature style must be easily decoded."³

¹Francis Christensen, "The Problem of Defining a Mature Style," English Journal 57 (April 1968): 578.

²Ibid., p. 575.

³Ibid., p. 576.

On the other hand, the type of syntactic growth that Christensen advocates may not be ideal either. A close examination of the last quotation reveals a style wordy, repetitious, and difficult to decode. His four sentences contain ninety-seven words which include final ending modifiers and an appositive. These same sentences can be rewritten by using long noun phrases and an appositive. The four sentences with ninety-seven words reduced to three sentences with seventy words are easier to decode:

The long noun phrase, used as subject and complement, coupled by a minimal verb, constitutes the very hallmark of jargon. Keeping the noun phrases short is one of the most difficult disciplines in composition; however, the skillful writer learns to keep them short. While writing this paper, I deliberately kept noun phrases short by resorting to syntactic devices, such as this appositive, that are practically nonexistent in our textbooks.

Clearly, these rewritten sentences are much easier to read and understand.

Nevertheless, Christensen boldly asserts: "The long clause is not the mark of a mature style but of an inept style--the easy writing that is curst hard reading."¹ To prove his point, Christensen offers one example of the bound modifier and one example of the free modifier. He introduces the sentences by saying:

Northrop Frye might have written this sentence:
The curriculum is at best, however, a design
to be interpreted by teachers with varying

¹Ibid.

degrees of ability and insight for children with different equipment in intelligence and language background.

Instead, he [Frye] wrote this one:

The curriculum is at best, however, a design to be interpreted by teachers, for students--by teachers with varying degrees of ability and insight, for children with differing equipment in intelligence and language background.

As a skillful writer he [Frye] has found a device to avoid a long noun phrase of twenty-four words. Although his sentence is longer by four words, it is immeasurably clearer and more emphatic.¹

In these particular examples, the former with the long twenty-four-word noun phrase is easier to read and understand than the latter example of Christensen's free modifiers. This latter example does not follow his formula for a mature style: "Pack much into little, but . . . pack it so that it can be readily unpacked."² In fact, the latter passage is a poor example to support his argument for free modifiers.

Although Christensen recommends the free modifiers, he especially favors the "final free modifiers" because they give the options that he thinks rhetoric demands. He is convinced that the mature contemporary style of writing will include:

1. A mature style will have a relatively high frequency of free modifiers, especially in the final position. The frequency of free noun, verb,

¹Ibid., p. 575.

²Ibid., p. 576.

and adjective phrases and of verbid clauses will be high.

2. Such a style will have also a relatively high frequency of structures of coordination within the T-unit--what might be called intra-T-unit coordination. Intra-T-unit coordination, producing compound sentences, should be regarded as a feature of paragraph rather than sentence structure.

The very fact that these two classes of structures are not common in the writing of school children is proof in itself that they are marks of a mature style.¹

Concerning Christensen's last statement, some teachers might say the real reason that these two classes of structures are not common in students' writing is that most teachers do not encourage their use. Many teachers consider the free modifiers as comma splices and not marks of mature style. High school students must first concentrate on bound modifiers that are essential and restrictive. After developing skills in using bound modifiers, along with the appositive, in sentence-combining exercises, students are better prepared to handle the free, loose, or additive modifiers. But to concentrate on the free-ending modifiers would lead to one-sided embedding. And without variety in embedding, composition would surely become a "curst" drag. Christensen's program is more suitable for writing poetry, but it is not adequate for high school composition.

Although both bound and free modifiers are processes of embedding, the bound should be emphasized more with high

¹Ibid., p. 579.

school students. Hunt and Mellon propose programs of study more applicable to high school students than does Christensen. Hunt and Mellon are advocating a study that will result in syntactic growth, whereas Christensen is proposing a study that may result in syntactic confusion.

Definitions of Grammars

Another means of measuring syntactic development is to evaluate the effectiveness of traditional grammar and a generative grammar in influencing writing. Does traditional teaching of grammar prepare students to build facility in writing, or do students remain underdeveloped in syntactic maturity? Will a generative grammar allow students to develop skills in recognizing coordination and subordination, and will this new grammar enable students to combine sentences with greater ease? What does the term grammar really mean? Has this word changed? What are the definitions of these various grammars?

Owen Thomas reviews the OED definition of grammar as:

That department of the study of language which deals with its inflectional forms or other means of indicating the relation of words in the sentence, and with the rules for employing these in accordance with established usage: usually including also the department which deals with the phonetic system of

the language and the principles of its representation in writing.¹

Thomas points out that this definition, more than forty years old, antedates structural and generative grammars. He says a more recent definition is found in Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 1966:

1. The study of the system underlying the esp. formal features of a language, as the sounds, morphemes, words, or sentences; a theory specifying the manner in which all sentences of a language are constructed.²

Not only has the word grammar changed in its meaning, but also the types of grammar are finely delineated. As Thomas explores the various types of grammar, he states:

In the broadest sense of the term, grammar encompasses any statement that relates to language considered as language. . . . We can, then, use the word grammar to refer to any--and all--of the following:

1. Intuitive grammar. The "linguistic knowledge" possessed by a person--knowledge which the person employs in the acts of speaking, reading, writing, and listening.
2. Generative grammar. A logical representation--a "model"--of an individual's linguistic knowledge (i.e., a description formulated in terms of logical symbols; a theory).
3. Structural grammar. First, a description of actual speech; second, a description of writing. In both instances, the description is chiefly taxonomic (i.e., the description establishes categories for sounds and letters, for lexical items, and for the recurrent syntactic structures). Thus, a generative grammar is a representation of

¹Owen Thomas, "Some Perspectives on Grammar and Linguistics," English Journal 63 (December 1974): 63.

²Ibid.

intuitive grammar, while a structural grammar is a description of speech.

7. Traditional grammar. Generally, a compilation of conjugations, definitions, declensions, and prescriptive statements concerning language use, based--in part--on similar grammars written in Greece and Rome. The original traditional grammarians were chiefly concerned with the written form of standard English.

Since all these grammars focus, in one way or another on the nature of language as language, then they are all contained within the meaning of the word grammar, taken in its broadest and most complete sense. Consequently, it is meaningless to speak abstractly of a single "best grammar"; rather, we must always ask, "best for what?"¹

Although Thomas offers sound definitions concerning the various grammars, he fails to mention transformational grammar, which is an outgrowth of structural and generative. Even though transformational is close to generative, there is a distinction between the two terms. J. M. Walsh and A. K. Walsh describe this distinction:

In brief, the transformation can be described as an operation or procedure by the use of formulas, and these, by extension, can be developed into ones that generate the grammatical sequences and reject the ungrammatical.²

All of these definitions certainly multiply the meaning of grammar. Teachers of English must enlarge their own concepts of grammar to embrace the full meaning of the

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²J. Martyn Walsh and Anna K. Walsh, Plain English Handbook (Ohio: McCormick-Mathers Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), p. 192.

word. Perhaps teachers hold too closely to a narrow set of principles and rules that will not allow for expansion or extension. In the past, teachers have been guilty of becoming locked-in on the idea and definition of traditional grammar. To neglect teaching students the sacred parts of speech would have been a cardinal sin. The meaning of grammar was prescriptive, not descriptive. Fortunately, many teachers and writers are redefining grammar and re-evaluating its results.

Traditional Grammar Vs. Structural or Generative Grammar

One other method of syntactic growth is an effective grammar. Can a greater syntactic growth occur through traditional grammar or through structural or generative grammar? Lena Reddick Suggs reports the results of an experiment which compared the writing progress of an eleventh-grade experimental group studying Robert's Patterns of English with an eleventh-grade control group studying traditional grammar. The results of this experimental group are very interesting:

Although the main purpose of this experiment was to determine whether or not the teaching of grammar had any practical effect on writing, it seemed logical that an understanding of the subject matter was important. The advocates of structural grammar claim that traditional grammar is in many ways non-understandable. It appears that the results of a comprehensive test on each type of grammar would lend support to that assumption.

The comprehensive tests were mimeographed and administered during two class periods at the end of the experiment. While these tests differed according to the subject matter, each test contained some work from all areas studied. These were graded by points so that the two tests could be compared. These tests showed rather startling results. When the percentages of correct responses were computed, it was found that Group A [the experimental group] had an average of 79.5% and Group B [the control group], 48.5%.

In addition to the favorable statistical results, other factors have influenced this teacher. While students might have felt at times that the assignments in structural grammar required too much work, they were never frustrated as were those in the traditional grammar class. This is the way one boy expressed his thought about the study: "It also helps you to understand things much better. It isn't hard to learn nor easy to forget."¹

Through her research, Suggs learned that students must understand the language before they can use it with great facility. She goes on to say, however, that much work needs to be done before a completely satisfactory structural grammar is produced.²

Another writer, Michael Grady, is searching for a grammar that will improve composition. In "Structural Structuralism: Composition and Modern Linguistics" which appeared in the English Journal in 1965, Grady explains how he revised some of Paul Roberts' patterns and presented

¹Lena Reddick Suggs, "Structural Grammar Versus Traditional Grammar in Influencing Writing," English Journal 50 (March 1961): 176.

²Ibid., p. 178.

seven of these patterns to his students. He calls these patterns the basic format of structural analysis. Next, he presents basic patterns of expansion in an ascending order:

- First step up: Expansion by simple modifiers
- Second step up: Expansion of verb phrases
- Third step up: Expansion by included patterns
(relative and subordinate)
- Fourth step up: Gross punctuation¹

He concludes by saying:

The study of structural analysis is not the end-all of writing instruction, any more than is an isolated study of The Elements of Style. And even the outline I have given does not go into such grammatical study as ambiguity, pronoun reference, dangling modifiers, parallel structure, etc. However, I discovered empirically that if I began my courses using the format described above, the students learned to write syntactically correct, properly punctuated sentences. As the basic sentence pattern is the backbone of an expanded sentence, so the outline given above has served well as the backbone of a whole course on composition. . . . The outline is structured, and it moves from the less complex, building on what has been already presented instead of inserting random facts in the midst of other, equally random, facts. A composition is a body of words, and matters of rhetoric and diction may be seen as limbs cannot function effectively unless they have structurally sound support.²

Lena Suggs, Michael Grady, and other scholars are looking to a modern grammar to improve composition. Likewise, Ruth E. Bertsch says: "I drill and drill, and still they don't understand the grammar. They can't write a

¹Michael Grady, "Structured Structuralism: Composition and Modern Linguistics," English Journal 54 (October 1965): 635-38.

²Ibid., p. 639.

decent paper, because they can't recognize a sentence."¹ Her searching led her to introduce to her high school classes the linguistic "birds" which are prevalent in so many of the newer descriptive explanations of English. Although her method is a mixture of both the traditional and the generative, she says it works. Her purpose is to teach the expression of ideas in complete sentences. But of her method, she declares: "Since my method is neither 'fish nor fowl,' both the linguist and the traditional teacher will shudder at some of my ideas, but they work."² Bertsch uses the following procedure. First, she writes seven sentences on the blackboard. She says these sentences are the basic patterns for all English sentences:

1. Birds fly.
2. Birds eat worms.
3. Birds are happy.
4. Birds are animals.
5. Birds give me happiness.
6. They made me president.
7. They made me happy.³

Second, she and the students name traditional parts of speech for all of the words in the sentences. Only nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives appear in the sentences.

¹Ruth E. Bertsch, "Linguistic Birds and Sentence Structure," Elementary English 51 (January 1962): 46.

²Ibid., p. 47.

³Ibid.

Third, she and the students work out seven formulas for the sentences:

1. N-V
2. N₁-V-N₂
3. N₁-V-A
4. N₁-V-N₁
5. N₁-V-N₂-N₃
6. N₁-V-N₂-N₂
7. N₁-V-N₂-A ¹

Fourth, together in class, students build longer sentences.

For example:

Basic sentence--Boys play.

Expansion--The noisy boys in the room on the second floor which is a playroom play boisterously when it rains because they can't go outside.²

Fifth, students are given lists of subordinators, connectors, and prepositions and asked to name and cross out these words in the expanded sentence. Only the basic sentence remains: Boys play. They match this basic sentence with the basic pattern: Birds fly, N-V. Sixth, she explains the subordinators, connectors, and prepositions; then she has students memorize them. Seventh, when the material is seemingly mastered, the students find these patterns in Saturday Review. Eighth, students write an expository

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

paragraph of about 150 words, each new sentence beginning a new line, each sentence numbered. Finally, using the previous procedure of elimination, the students mark each sentence correct, run-on, or fragment.

Bertsch says this method is easy to evaluate and analyze. As a result of this study, she heard a student make the following statement: "Now I know what to look for when I proofread."¹ She concludes by saying: "Using this procedure, I find that now I can teach a briefer, more meaningful grammar; and instead of getting to the writing at last, I can have it all along."²

In summary, there are numerous methods of measuring syntactic development. The various clause patterns and indexes presented by Kellogg Hunt are helpful. Indeed, his minimal terminal unit, better known as the T-Unit, is a great advancement in measuring syntactic growth. Other measures that lead to syntactic development, say Hunt and Mellon, are the longer clause and increased use of sentence-embedding transformations. The mastery of bound modifiers is more essential at first than the final free modifiers which Christensen advocates. Finally, an effective measurement and development of syntactic maturity can

¹Ibid., p. 48.

²Ibid., p. 49.

be accomplished through a new grammar, generative or transformational, and a program of expansion or combining exercises.

CHAPTER III

SENTENCE-COMBINING

Types of Practices

Since there are many kinds of sentence-combining practices, consideration of several practices is necessary, beginning with the more-structured signaled problems and ending with the less-structured open-sequenced problems.

A structured program of sentence-combining practices that exemplifies transformational grammar is presented in John C. Mellon's research study, Transformational Sentence-Combining. First, he points out that the sentence-combining problems were solved in connection with his study of transformational grammar. He also notes that during the study the students were able to construct a variety of sentences more mature in structure than those typical of their own writing at the time. Mellon goes on to say:

The overt tasks required of the student were first that he transform the separate sentences according to directions keyed to rule formulations he had earlier studied, then that he embed these transforms as constituents in other sentences according to a simple embedding format employed in all problems, and finally that he write out the result in the form of a single fully developed complex sentence. In short, the student was given a set of kernel sentences plus directions for combining these sentences into a single complex statement, which he was then required to write out.

The following is an example illustrating the form of these transformational sentence-combining problems:

Problem:

The children clearly must have wondered SOMETHING.

The bombings had orphaned the children.

SOMETHING was humanly possible somehow.

(T:wh)

Their conquerors pretended SOMETHING.

(T:infin-T:exp)

Chewing gum and smiles might compensate for the losses. (T:fact)

The losses were heartbreaking.

They had so recently sustained the losses.

Write-out:

(Here the student writes the fully formed sentence.)

Briefly, the right-hand indentations show how the embedding is to proceed. The first sentence is always the main clause. . . .

In solving problems such as the above, the student begins with the main-clause sentence incremented by the first embedded transform. Since he is not to write the sentence until it is fully formed, his first step above is simply to relativize the second sentence and to say the following:

The children whom the bombings had orphaned clearly must have wondered something.

He then normalizes the third sentence as a question clause, inserts it in place of "SOMETHING," and says the following as a second approximation of the final sentence:

The children whom the bombings had orphaned clearly must have wondered how something was humanly possible.

This process is continued until all sentences are transformed and embedded. Finally, while holding the fully formed sentence in memory, the student writes it out as follows:

The children whom the bombings had orphaned clearly must have wondered how it was humanly possible for their conquerors to pretend that chewing gum and smiles might compensate for the

heartbreaking losses which they had so recently sustained.¹

Mellon's sentence-combining signals offer enough transformational rule tags to guide the students' consolidation. However, as Mellon points out, the students must retain the fully formed sentence in memory while they write it. With a minimal amount of explanation, Mellon's sentence-combining practices could easily be used apart from a study in transformational grammar. Although these exercises could be a part of a study in composition as well as in grammar, Mellon reemphasizes:

. . . these sentence-combining problems were an integral part of the students' work in grammar. They were not represented as lessons in compositions, nor should they be viewed as any kind of a "linguistic approach" to writing. . . . Furthermore, the sentence-combining practice was not advertised to the student as a simulation of the composition process. . . . The assumption was simply that when he came to writing, the student would, as a natural result of prior sentence-combining practice, produce sentences whose structures would be more mature than those of the sentences he would otherwise have written.²

The following are a few of Mellon's sentence-combining problems:

Fact clause:

- A. SOMETHING seemed to suggest SOMETHING.
 Bill finished his lessons in less than an hour. (T:fact)
 He had received special help from another student. (T:fact)

¹Mellon, pp. 22-23.

²Ibid., p. 25.

- B. The fact that Bill finished his lessons in less than an hour seemed to suggest that he received special help from another student.

WH-Infinitive Phrase:

- A. The instruction manual did not say SOMETHING.
Someone overhauls the engine sometime. (T:wh=inf)
- B. The instruction manual did not say when to over-haul the engine.

Gerund Phrase:

- A. SOMETHING caused howls of laughter from the audience.
Paul accidentally dropped the curtain during SOMETHING. (T:gerund)
Charlie read the Gettysburg Address. (T:gerund+of)
- B. Paul's accidentally dropping the curtain during Charlie's reading the Gettysburg Address caused howls of laughter from the audience.

Derived-Noun Phrase:

- A. SOMETHING will very likely hinder SOMETHING.
Those trawlers are closely concentrated.
(T:der-NP, alternate)
We speedily recover the astronauts. (T:der-NP)
- B. The close concentration of those trawlers will very likely hinder our speedy recovery of the astronauts.

Relative Clause:

- A. Officer Hermes ambled over toward the automobile.
Officer Hermes only wanted a light for his pipe.
He had flagged the automobile down out of the traffic lane.
- B. Officer Hermes, who only wanted a light for his pipe, ambled over toward the automobile which he had flagged down out of the traffic lane.

General Problems:

- A. SOMETHING is to learn SOMETHING.
A person reads this man's biography. (T:infin)
The secret of Thomas More is a kind of personality.
(T:fact)
Thomas More's deeds have caused so much controversy.
The personality arises from SOMETHING.
He unfailingly expressed a life of prayer.
(T:der-NP)
The life of prayer was specific.

The life of prayer was exemplary.

The life of prayer was relative to all his actions.

- B. For a person to read this man's biography is to learn that the secret of Thomas More, whose deeds have caused so much controversy, is a kind of personality which arises from his unfailing expression of a specific, exemplary life of prayer relative to all his actions.¹

Since Mellon uses abbreviated grammatical instructions extensively, his students must be familiar with transformational rules. However, is familiarity with grammar rules necessary? Surely a knowledge of rules of grammar, whether transformational or traditional, is not imperative to improving syntax. Mellon's signals could be simplified, and the study of grammar could be eliminated altogether. Furthermore, the sentence-combining problems could be a practice in composition. In other words, students do not have to understand all the mechanics of the language in order to identify and produce acceptable sentence structure.

Certainly a traditional study of grammar had not aided my students in writing mature sentences. Approximately 120 students were exposed to the following: two weeks of noun study, three weeks of pronoun and preposition study, two weeks of verb study, one week of adjective and adverb study, and one week of paragraph study. Since my students showed no appreciable change in their ability to

¹Ibid., pp. 95-99.

generate acceptable sentences with coordination and subordination, obviously they needed something other than a traditional study of grammar to improve their sentence structure.

A researcher who supports sentence-combining without formal grammar study is Frank O'Hare. He departs from Mellon's approach and improves his sentence-combining problems. O'Hare states:

. . . the present study incorporated very important changes in Mellon's format, and these changes were so important as to alter the very nature of the activities. This study is a replication of Mellon's only in the sense that the students' final product was a series of similar sentences. . . . The present study abandoned entirely the formal study of grammar because grammar study was not needed. What was needed was a series of simple, consistent, practical, and efficient signals designed for the sole purpose of facilitating the sentence-combining operations. They had to be easy to understand and easy to use.¹

Indeed, O'Hare simplifies the signals. He uses Mellon's example, which appears earlier, to compare and contrast the two methods:

(Mellon's Problem)

Problem:

The children clearly must have wondered SOMETHING.

The bombings had orphaned the children.

SOMETHING was humanly possible somehow. (T:wh)

Their conquerors pretended SOMETHING. (T:infin-T:exp)

Chewing gum and smiles might compensate for the losses. (T:fact)

The losses were heartbreaking.

They had so recently sustained the losses.

¹O'Hare, pp. 27, 28.

(O'Hare's Problem)

The children clearly must have wondered SOMETHING.

The bombings had orphaned the children. (WHOM)

SOMETHING was humanly possible somehow. (WHY)

Their conquerors pretended SOMETHING. (IT-FOR-TO)

Chewing gum and smiles might compensate for the losses. (THAT)

The losses were heartbreaking.

They had so recently sustained the losses. (WHICH)¹

Using O'Hare's method, the students do not have many abbreviated grammatical instructions, and they do not have to decide which words to use. Simplifying the signals allows the students time to work on the embedding problem itself. Moreover, O'Hare's system of sentence-combining does not necessitate the study of traditional or transformational grammar. O'Hare concludes:

The case for this study's sentence-combining practice is a strong one both from a practical and a theoretical standpoint. It should facilitate syntactic skills already possessed by "training" the memory and increasing the cognitive "chunking" ability of the students. The system is simple and can be learned by the average English teacher in several inservice sessions. Because it demands an acceptant, non-error-oriented environment that accentuates the positive, students should find it easy to do and relatively interesting. Few students should make many mistakes.²

Certainly, O'Hare's system can enable students to increase in syntactic fluency, without a formal study of grammar, by practice in multiple embedding of kernels in sentence-combining problems.

¹Ibid., pp. 28,29.

²Ibid., p. 32.

Other influential writers are providing opportunities for students to develop facility and flexibility in writing. Verna L. Newsome writes about one method: "After students have written numerous sentences following a few basic patterns, they are ready to expand these sentences by coordination or by subordination."¹ To accomplish this expansion, Newsome suggests practice in adding modifiers to basic sentences. She and the students take a kernel sentence, for example: "The road ends." After adding adjectives that precede road, they move on to a relative clause, a participial phrase, or a prepositional phrase. Following the word ends, they might add an adverb and a prepositional phrase. Finally, the finished sentence might read: "The long, narrow farmer's road which winds through the woods ends abruptly at the foot of a hill." However, Newsome is quick to add: "There are two dangers to be avoided in such a procedure: cluttering sentences with modifiers and creating synthetic, artificial sentences."² An additional danger is possible ambiguity: is the farmer or the road long and narrow? Newsome goes on to say:

Expanding basic sentences by adding various structures of coordination and of subordination familiarizes students with these structures, gives them practice

¹Newsome, p. 328.

²Ibid.

in using the structures, and reveals the points in a sentence where additions can be made. However, the step-by-step processes of coordination and of subordination can be shown most clearly by transformations--that is, by combining two or more sentences to form a new sentence.¹

In the following practice example a coordinating conjunction is used after the process of deletion to produce the sentence:

Intellectual curiosity is an asset to
the college freshman.
A disciplined mind is an
asset to the college freshman.
Intellectual curiosity ~~is-an-asset-to-~~
~~the-college-freshman;~~ and a disciplined
are assets
mind ~~is-an-asset~~ to the college freshman.²

Newsome further states that the process of coordination almost assures parallel construction. This procedure also distinguishes between a compound sentence and compound elements within a simple sentence.³ As she gives three typical examples of students' faulty embedding, she says:

Faculty coordinations often could be avoided or corrected if the writer were aware of the original sentences from which the compounds were derived.

Three student sentences will illustrate the point:

1. "A hunter sometimes shoots at something he
can't even see and may be a man."

This sentence is an unsuccessful transformation of two sentences: "A hunter sometimes shoots at something he can't even see. It may be a man."

¹Ibid., p. 329.

²Ibid., p. 330.

³Ibid.

Since the subject of the second sentence does not repeat the subject of the first sentence, it cannot be omitted.

2. "Mr. Humphrey had been ill for several months and finally almost reaching the point of insanity."

The lack of parallel construction takes on meaning when a reconstruction of the two original sentences brings the missing auxiliary to light: "Mr. Humphrey had been ill for several months. He finally was almost reaching the point of insanity."

3. "The time and place was a few days before election in Milwaukee."

In this sentence two subjects have been forced into an unhappy marriage which cannot be mended by the simple device of agreement. The marriage must be dissolved, and each member of the ill-mated partnership must be restored to its original state of single blessedness. "The time was a few days before election. The place was Milwaukee."¹

In the preceding examples, Newsome has definitely pinpointed a major problem in students' compositions. Indeed, if students were aware of the original sentences from which the compounds were derived, much of their faulty coordination could be avoided.

According to Newsome, the transformation process in creating modifiers is more complex than coordination. Using input as the clause to be inserted, consumer as the matrix, and output as the results, Newsome offers the following as an example of a relative clause operation:

Input. Mr. Tulliver owned Dorlcote Mill. → Mr. Tulliver owned which → Mr. Tulliver owned
Consumer. Dorlcote Mill was on the River Floss near St. Ogg's.

¹Ibid.

Output. Dorlcote Mill, which Mr. Tulliver owned, was on the River Floss near St. Ogg's.¹

Another example shows a relative clause being reduced to a participial phrase:

Input. The rain was beating down incessantly day after day.--which was beating down incessantly day after day.

Consumer. The rain gave warning of the disastrous flood.

Output. The rain (which was) beating down incessantly day after day gave warning of the disastrous flood.²

One other example which offers a choice of three available conjunctions reads:

Input. The two peoples were closely related.-- (because, since, as) the two peoples were closely related.

Consumer. The Danes and the Anglo-Saxons soon amalgamated.

Output. The Danes and the Anglo-Saxons soon amalgamated (because, since, as) the two peoples were closely related.³

Newsome feels that transformation reveals the process of coordination and subordination more clearly than the additive method. And if students are to develop facility and flexibility in writing, they need a variety of opportunities to practice forming a wider range of constructions.⁴

In "Sentence Building and Transformational Grammar," Eileen J. McGuire attempts to bring the practical possibilities of transformational grammar to aid the students

¹Ibid., p. 332.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 334.

⁴Ibid., p. 335.

in writing good sentences. One of her six writing activities suggests that students combine simple, basic sentences which serve as building materials for more complex sentences. She writes the following example:

- a. Brutus feared Caesar's power.
- b. He compared Caesar to a serpent's egg.
- c. The egg is not harmful in the shell.
- d. It is hatched.
- e. It may be poisonous.

One student version:

Brutus, fearing Caesar's power, compared Caesar to a serpent's egg which, although not harmful in the shell, may be poisonous when it is hatched.¹

One other activity concerning embedding transformations is:

Give formal demonstration of transformations: subordination, formation of relative clauses, deletion of relative pronouns in transforming clauses to verbal phrases, etc.²

Since the students have been actively engaged in performing these operations, McGuire says that the demonstration will be easy to follow.

In conclusion, McGuire states:

Although this program places primary importance on rhetorical matters, it also provides a good foundation for any kind of work in grammar Their [students'] training in the construction of good sentences had erased their fears of unfamiliar grammatical terms.³

To this point, McGuire has simplified the sentence-combining problems somewhat. She calls the kernels building materials

¹McGuire, p. 749.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 750.

which are used for more complex constructions. She has omitted from her exercises any signals or tags which indicate a transformation is needed.

Another influential writer, William Strong, simplifies sentence-combining problems still further than McGuire. In addition to the concept of open problems, Strong adds the idea of sequenced kernels. His open-sequenced exercises are not signaled and the combining is not so fixed or specified as Mellon's and O'Hare's. The following is a sequence entitled "Rock Concert":

1. The singer was young.
2. The singer was swarthy.
3. He stepped into the spotlight.
4. The spotlight was red.
5. His shirt was unbuttoned.
6. The unbuttoning bared his chest.
7. Sounds ballooned around him.
8. The sounds were of guitars.
9. The sounds were of drums.
10. The sounds were of girls.
11. The girls were screaming.
12. He nodded.
13. He winked.
14. The wink was to his guitarist.
15. The drummer responded with the beat.
16. The singer became animated.
17. His legs were like rubber.
18. His body jerked.
19. His head was thrown back.
20. He wailed a shout.
21. The shout was in the microphone.
22. The microphone was at his lips.
23. His movements were twisting.
24. His movements were strobed.
25. The strobing was with floodlights.

26. His voice was a garble.
27. The garble was loud.
28. The auditorium swirled.
29. The swirling was rock.
30. The rock was "heavy."¹

In this sequence no signals appear to indicate transformations. The students must decide what the main clause is as well as what the particular transformations are. Strong explains two examples of possible outgrowths from this sequence:

Putting the first three clusters of kernel sentences in "Rock Concert" together you might come up with something like this:

The singer, who was young and swarthy,
stepped into the red spotlight. His unbuttoned
shirt bared his chest. Sounds of guitars, drums,
and screaming girls ballooned around him.

But you might create other versions also. Here's a version that uses different transformations and, in addition, creates a cumulative sentence by integrating the three clusters:

As the sounds of guitars, drums, and screaming
girls ballooned around him, the young, swarthy
singer stepped into the red spotlight, his shirt
unbuttoned, baring his chest.

. . .
In an exercise such as "Rock Concert," the fact that the clusters of transformations "hang together" as a piece of relatively coherent discourse is very important. Why? Because the exercise then provides a means for particularly skill-deficient students to develop a feel for what paragraphs are like.²

Strong admits that the sequence method is similar to copying, but he does not apologize for this route to learning. He also feels that both "signaled" and "open"

¹Strong, p. 62.

²Ibid., pp. 62-63.

exercises are good; one offers discipline and the other freedom.

In concluding, he offers three hints on using sentence-combining exercises:

First of all, encourage kids to trust themselves and each other when testing out the grammaticality of solutions; this is absolutely fundamental, I think, whether you are working with "signaled" or "open" exercises. Second, direct students to do the exercises orally so that they are forced to hold longer and longer stretches of discourse in their heads; . . . And, third, make transformed sentences visual at every opportunity by having students put them on the board or on overhead transparencies for projection to the class; this enables students to compare alternative structures, and enables you to discuss solutions to immediate problems of writing mechanics.¹

Clearly, Strong has found a partial solution to students' faulty embedding. With his sequenced "skill builders," students are given an opportunity to combine and compose at the same time. The fact that there is no set answer would promote attention and participation. As Strong says, "the mental sense of composing . . . is basically an additive or synthesizing thing."² To create discourse, students put things together, rearrange, substitute, and delete. Likewise, students can do these operations in Strong's exercises even though the sequence is not original with them.

¹Ibid., pp. 63-64.

²Ibid., p. 64.

Most Effective Practices

Strong's method provides students with freedom to compose sentences as well as to combine sentences. Since the students have no signals, they must select the main sentences and insert the other sentences. One other outstanding attribute of Strong's program is the sequence which actually results in a narrative/descriptive paragraph. Instead of a series of unrelated sentences, Strong's open-sequenced problems offer the student an opportunity to compose a paragraph. Undoubtedly, Strong's approach to sentence-combining is one of the most effective approaches that exist. If time had permitted, the present study would have included Strong's open-sequenced exercises. Since the present study was too brief for Strong's program, a method with restricted answers which could be calculated quickly and accurately was used instead. Therefore, the open-type problems, which Strong also advocates, constituted the pre-test and the post-test.

Another exponent of sentence-combining problems is Charles R. Cooper. He presents an effective outline, as well as excellent sentence-combining problems, that serves as a helpful guide in beginning a sentence-combining program. The following is his outline:

- I. Noun Modifiers
 - A. Adjective word embedding
 - 1. Simple
 - 2. Participle
 - a. ing
 - b. ed
 - 3. Compound adjectives
 - 4. Adverbs
 - B. Adjective phrases
 - 1. Prepositional phrases
 - 2. Appositive phrases
 - 3. Participle
 - a. ing
 - b. ed
 - 4. Infinitive phrases
 - C. Adjective clause embedding
 - D. Multiple adjective embedding
- II. Noun Substitutes
 - A. Noun clauses
 - 1. Fact clauses
 - 2. Question clauses
 - B. Noun phrases
 - 1. Gerund phrases
 - 2. Infinitive phrases
 - C. Multiple embeddings¹

The first portion of this outline, Roman numeral I, was used in the present study and found very helpful. Most of the sentences on the pre-test came from Cooper's article, "An Outline for Writing Sentence-Combining Problems."²

Pre-Test and Assessment

Cooper's outline and many of his sentences comprise the pre-test: thirty-three sentence-combining problems which chiefly had to do with noun modifiers: adjectives,

¹Cooper, "An Outline for Writing Sentence-Combining Problems," pp. 99-102.

²Ibid.

adjective phrases, adjective clauses, and multiple adjectives. Cooper uses underlining to signal transformations, but in this study all signals have been eliminated. The students must locate the main clause in each problem and make the proper transformations without the help of signals. The thirty-three problems begin with the simple adjective embedding and grow progressively more difficult. The problems are given during a fifty-five minute period. Thinking that the problems were an assignment, the students did not suspect that the work sheets represented a pre-test. Before receiving the problems, they were requested to simply combine the sentences, adding, substituting, or rearranging the words.

Most of the 120 students did not remember ever working sentence-combining problems before. The few who did remember combining sentences said that they combined groups of two sentences using and, but, and or. Although the majority of students had not been exposed to sentence-combining exercises, they were very cooperative in doing the problems. They did not display impatience or frustration as they often did in previous grammar studies.

The following thirty-three sentences constitute the pre-test:

Pre-Test

- a. He was a student.
 - b. The student was serious.
1. Possible combination: He was a serious student.
- a. He was in the house when it caught fire.
 - b. The house was old.
2. Possible combination: He was in the old house when it caught fire.
- a. He fell from the roof.
 - b. The roof was steep.
3. Possible combination: He fell from the steep roof.
- a. He saw the dog.
 - b. The dog was sleeping.
4. Possible combination: He saw the sleeping dog.
- a. The plane crashed into the house.
 - b. The plane burns.
5. Possible combination: The burning plane crashed into the house.
- a. The house had a pool.
 - b. The owners abandoned the house.
6. Possible combination: The abandoned house had a pool.
- a. The police captured the convict.
 - b. The convict escaped from prison.
7. Possible combination: The police captured the escaped convict.
- a. The students did their homework.
 - b. The homework was assigned.
8. Possible combination: The students did their assigned homework.
- a. He dated the girl.
 - b. The girl loves fun.
9. Possible combination: He dated the fun-loving girl.

- a. He saw the dog.
- b. Fleas bite the dog.

10. Possible combination: He saw the flea-bitten dog.
- a. The man is a fireman.
 - b. The man is outside.
11. Possible combination: The man outside is a fireman.
- a. The number is the answer.
 - b. The number is below.
12. Possible combination: The number below is the answer.
- a. The sky was full of stars.
 - b. The sky was above.
13. Possible combination: The sky above was full of stars.
- a. The people on the boat asked us to come aboard.
 - b. The boat was alongside.
14. Possible combination: The people on the boat alongside asked us to come aboard.
- a. The man is in the room.
 - b. The man is my teacher.
15. Possible combination: The man in the room is my teacher.
- a. We sailed in the boat.
 - b. The boat was the one with the blue sail.
16. Possible combination: We sailed in the boat with the blue sail.
- a. My old friend is a plumber.
 - b. My old friend is Bill Jones.
17. Possible combination: My old friend, Bill Jones is a plumber.
- a. My neighbor took me around the track.
 - b. My neighbor is the race car driver.
18. Possible combination: My neighbor, the race car driver, took me around the track.

- a. I stepped on the ant.
 - b. The ant was carrying a crumb.
19. Possible combination: I stepped on the ant carrying a crumb.
- a. The runner wins.
 - b. The runner was making the best effort.
20. Possible combination: The runner making the best effort wins.
- a. We ate the food.
 - b. The food was prepared by the chef.
21. Possible combination: We ate the food prepared by the chef.
- a. The homework took too long.
 - 2. The homework was assigned by the math teacher.
22. Possible combination: The homework assigned by the math teacher took too long.
- a. We were given food.
 - b. The food was to eat.
23. Possible combination: We were given food to eat.
- a. The team was our next opponent.
 - b. The team was the one to beat for the championship.
24. Possible combination: The team to beat for the championship was our next opponent.
- a. People shouldn't throw stones.
 - b. People live in glass houses.
25. Possible combination: People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
- a. The man is a congressman.
 - b. The man is the one I admire most.
26. Possible combination: The man I admire most is a congressman.

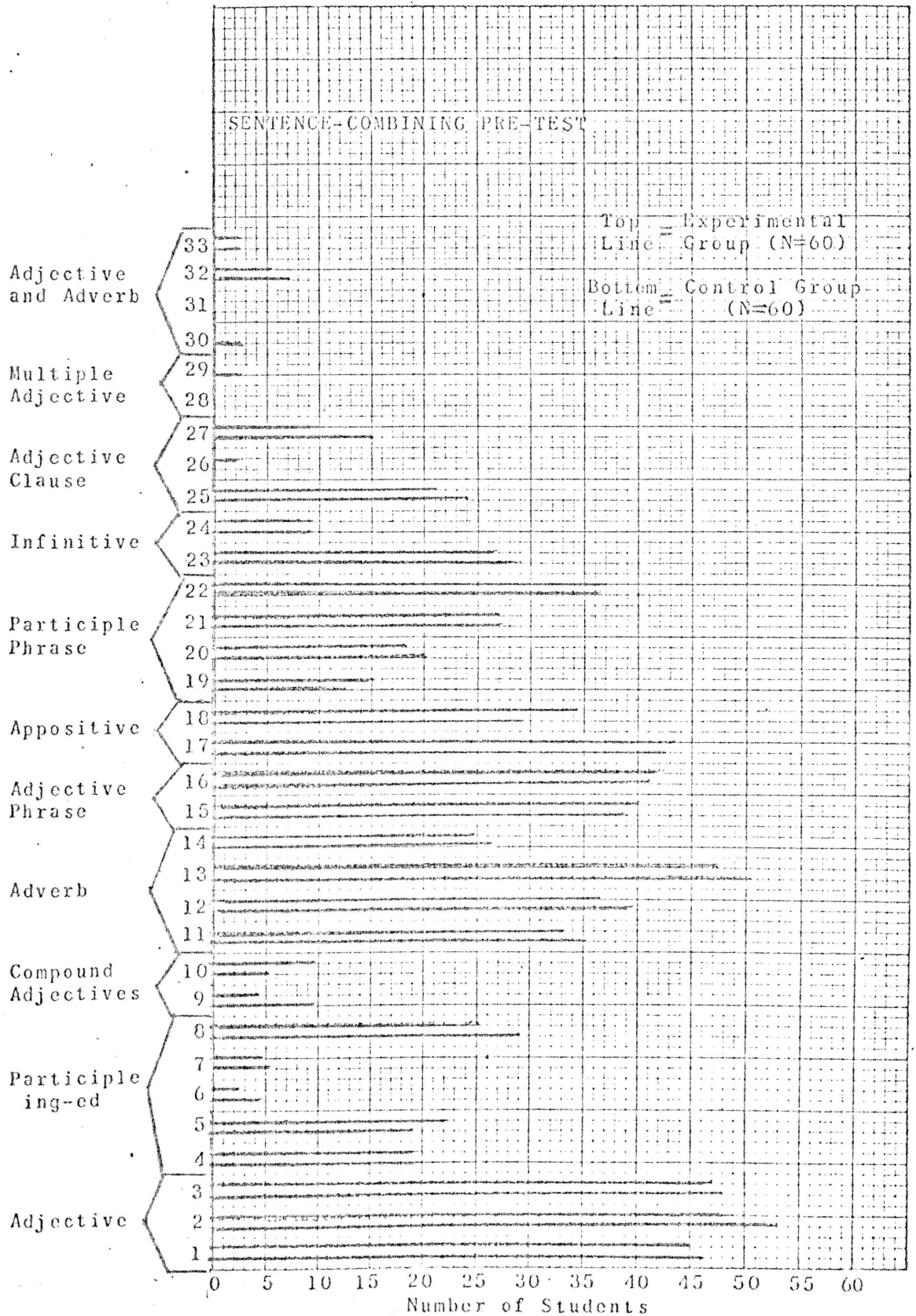
- a. He read a story.
 - b. The story had a surprise ending.
27. Possible combination: He read a story which had a surprise ending.
- a. The sailor finally came on deck.
 - b. He was tall.
 - c. He was rather ugly.
 - d. He had a limp.
 - e. He offered them a prize.
28. Possible combination: The tall, rather ugly sailor with a limp, who had offered them a prize, finally came on deck.
- a. The girl was tall.
 - b. The girl was slender.
 - c. The girl won the beauty contest.
 - d. The girl was local.
 - e. The girl competed in the finals.
 - f. The finals were state-wide.
29. Possible combination: The tall, slender girl, who won the local beauty contest, competed in the state-wide finals.
- a. Dorothy was tired.
 - b. She did not stop sewing.
 - c. She is a determined person.
30. Possible combination: Dorothy, who is a determined person, did not stop sewing, although she was tired.
- a. A knock developed in the engine.
 - b. It had been overhauled.
 - c. He sold the car.
31. Possible combination: When a knock developed in the engine, which had been overhauled, he sold the car.
- a. Ellen did not eat the candy.
 - b. She was overweight.
 - c. Her mother had reminded her to avoid sweets.
32. Possible combination: Ellen, who was overweight, did not eat the candy, because her mother had reminded her to avoid sweets.

- a. We were late for dinner.
- b. The traffic held us up for an hour.
- c. It was unusually heavy.

33. Possible combination: We were late for dinner because the traffic, which was unusually heavy, held us up for an hour.

The sentence-combining pre-test begins with three simple adjective-embedding problems. The next five problems involve participle embedding, two ing and three ed. Following these are two compound-adjective problems. After these come four adverb, two appositive, and four participle phrase problems. Two infinitive and three adjective clause problems appear next. And finally, growing more complex, come the multiple-adjective and the adjective-adverb problems. The three-page pre-test contains eleven types of embedding.

A bar graph which clearly depicts the results of the pre-test follows:



As the bar graph indicates, there are thirty-three sentences which represent eleven types of embedding. The top bar depicts the experimental group, which was composed of sixty regular ninth-grade students. Similarly, the bottom bar represents the control group, which was composed of sixty regular ninth-grade students.

The bar graph denotes two significant things. First, the graph indicates that both groups, the experimental and the control groups, had comparable knowledge of sentence-combining. When one group did well or poorly, the other group made a similar showing. Second, the graph reveals the strengths and the weaknesses of each group. For instance, the majority of the experimental group (top bar) displayed a fair command of adjective, adjective phrase, and simple adverb embedding. Likewise, the majority of the control group (bottom bar) exhibited a comparable ability in the same three types of embedding. Concerning their weaknesses, both groups revealed a lack of skill in participle, compound-adjective, adjective clause, multiple adjective, and adjective-adverb embedding. And as the graph indicates, some of the problems were so challenging that none of the students were able to properly combine them.

After taking the pre-test, the experimental group worked one sentence-combining problem each day for three

weeks; the group therefore worked fifteen problems. Each day after the tardy bell rang, the experimental group would solve one sentence-combining problem from the various kernel sentences which were already on the blackboard. Each time a different student would volunteer to go to the blackboard and try, sometimes successfully, to properly combine the kernel sentences. Usually, the students would help each other arrive at an acceptable combination. However, sometimes they had to rewrite their sentence several times before it "sounded just right." Only then, after they had finished, did the teacher make comments.

Experimental Group Vs. Control Group

While they were working these problems, the students were directed by the teacher to leave out unnecessary words, to add prepositions, relative pronouns, or subordinating conjunctions when necessary, to change forms of verbs if necessary, and to look for main ideas and embed the others in them. Other than these instructions, the teacher offered very little help.

At first this exercise took sometimes ten or fifteen minutes, depending on the complexity of the problem. However, after two weeks, the students began properly combining any type of problem in less than five minutes.

Actually, the experimental group enjoyed this daily exercise, especially when the kernel sentences were interesting and related to their world. This activity pulled the students into a joint decision which each one could share in.

At the end of three weeks, the groups were given a post-test similar to the pre-test. The adjective phrase problems were omitted and a multiple adjective with a relative clause problem was included instead. Other than this slight change, the post-test contained the same types of problems as did the pre-test.

Post-Test

Combine the following groups of sentences into single sentences. Example: He was a student.

The student was serious

He was a serious student.

- a. He was in the boat when it sank.
- b. The boat was old.
1. He was in the old boat when it sank.

- a. He fell from the building.
- b. The building was two-story.
2. He fell from the two-story building.

- a. He saw the elephant.
- b. The elephant drinks.
3. He saw the drinking elephant.

- a. The truck crashed into the house.
- b. The truck was in flames.
4. The flaming truck crashed into the house.

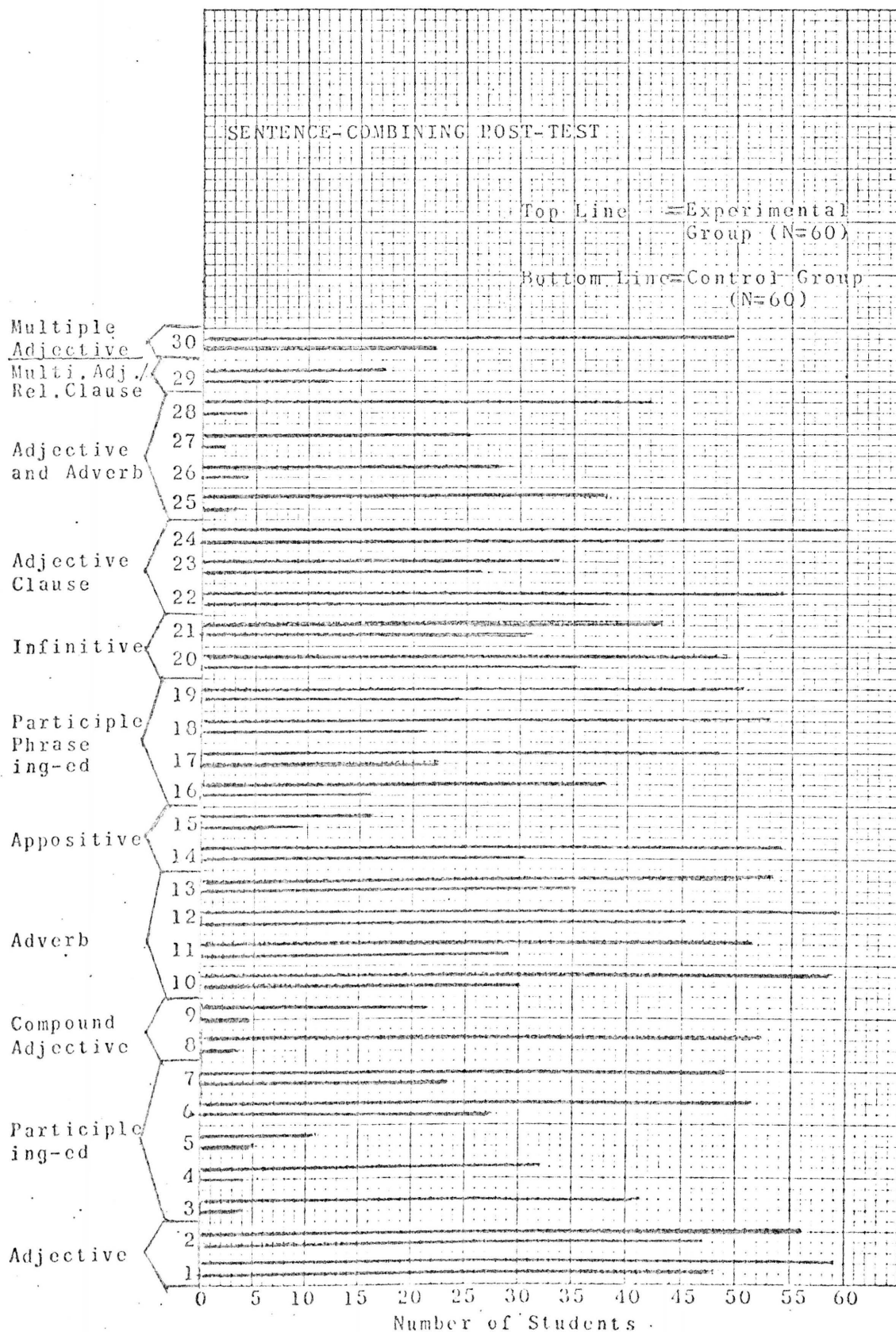
- a. The woman had a small child.
- b. The husband deserted the woman.
5. The deserted woman had a small child.

- a. The doctor performed the surgery.
- b. The surgery was scheduled.
- 6. The doctor performed the scheduled surgery.
- a. The lawyer defended the man.
- b. The man was convicted.
- 7. The lawyer defended the convicted man.
- a. He dated the girl.
- b. The girl loves fun.
- 8. He dated the fun-loving girl.
- a. She disliked the boy.
- b. The boy was free of care.
- 9. She disliked the care-free boy.
- a. The man is a carpenter.
- b. The man is outside.
- 10. The man outside is a carpenter.
- a. The answer is in the proper place.
- b. The answer is below.
- 11. The answer below is in the proper place.
- a. The room was full of people.
- b. The room was above.
- 12. The room above was full of people.
- a. The driver in the car honked and waved.
- b. The car was alongside.
- 13. The driver in the car alongside honked and waved.
- a. Bob and Bill have to report for practice soon.
- b. Bob and Bill are the Cunningham twins.
- 14. Bob and Bill, the Cunningham twins, have to report for practice soon.
- a. Have you met Jane Bradshaw?
- b. Jane Bradshaw is my best friend.
- 15. Have you met Jane Bradshaw, my best friend?
- a. He ran over the dog.
- b. The dog was carrying the bone.
- 16. He ran over the dog carrying the bone.
- a. The girl wins.
- b. The girl is painting the best pictures.
- 17. The girl painting the best pictures wins.

- a. We ate the sandwiches.
- b. The sandwiches were prepared by mother.
- 18. We ate the sandwiches prepared by mother.
- a. The new people were fired.
- b. The new people were employed by the company.
- 19. The new people employed by the company were fired.
- a. He was given an airplane.
- b. The airplane was to fly.
- 20. He was given an airplane to fly.
- a. The place is Miami, Florida.
- b. The place is for a honeymoon.
- 21. The place to go for a honeymoon is Miami, Florida.
- a. The boy is my first cousin.
- b. The boy just waved to me.
- 22. The boy who just waved to me is my cousin.
- a. She gave him an answer.
- b. The answer was an abrupt and definite no.
- 23. The answer that she gave him was an abrupt and definite no.
- a. Johnny rode the bike.
- b. I had sold it to him.
- 24. Johnny rode the bike that I had sold to him.
- a. Esther took the job as baby-sitter.
- b. The pay was poor.
- c. She liked baby-sitting.
- 25. Esther, who liked baby-sitting, took the job as baby-sitter, although the pay was poor.
- a. The snowstorm finally stopped.
- b. The snowstorm had been the heaviest of the year.
- c. We went skiing.
- 26. When the snowstorm, that had been the heaviest of the year, finally stopped, we went skiing.
- a. Charlene studied the spelling list for an hour.
- b. She was an "A" student.
- c. She did not pass the test.
- 27. Although Charlene, who was an "A" student, had studied the spelling list for an hour, she did not pass the test.

- a. My aunt Martha lives in New York.
 - b. She is coming to visit.
 - c. I cannot go to the prom.
28. Since my aunt Martha, who lives in New York, is coming to visit, I cannot go to the prom.
- a. A girl tightly held the hand of her mother.
 - b. The girl was pale.
 - c. The girl was nervous.
 - d. The girl was about six years old.
 - e. The girl was apparently going to school for the first time.
29. A pale nervous girl about six years old, who was apparently going to school for the first time, tightly held the hand of her mother.
- a. The alleys were littered with bottles and garbage.
 - b. The alleys were between the apartment buildings.
 - c. The apartment buildings were dismal.
 - d. The bottles were broken.
 - e. The garbage was rotten.
30. The alleys between the dismal apartment buildings were littered with broken bottles and rotten garbage.

As the second bar-graph indicates, the experimental group surpassed the control group in every type of embedding. Still, the experimental group, like the control group, showed weaknesses as well as strengths. For instance, although the experimental group showed improvement, they showed a weakness in participle embedding. They improved slightly in embedding compounds. On one sentence, almost all of the students correctly combined; but on the other sentence, only twenty-one out of sixty embedded properly. Obviously, one sentence was much easier to work with than the other.



In the appositive embedding, the students in the experimental group were able to properly combine the internal appositive, but not many were able to correctly combine the ending appositive. On the multiple adjective, multiple adjective with a relative clause, and the adjective-adverb embedding, the experimental group showed a significant improvement. In fact, the improvement made in the latter type of embedding is perhaps the most significant. As the graph denotes, the experimental group was using subordination and the relative clause with greater ease. The following is an example which represents over half of the experimental group's response: Although Charlene, who was an "A" student, had studied the spelling list for an hour, she did not pass the test.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study was designed to focus on three areas concerning regular middle-class ninth-grade students' composition: the problem of faulty embedding, various measurements and methods in syntactic development, and a proposed solution by sentence combining exercises.

Related research and sentence analysis revealed faulty embedding to be a major problem in high school students' composition. This faulty embedding manifests itself in three distinct patterns: the main clause followed by a non-coordinate idea; improper compounding when one idea is logically subordinate; and ideas, erratically connected by commas, which are disjointed and incoherent.

A step toward a solution comes through the consideration of various clause patterns and indexes. Kellogg Hunt's T-Unit is a useful measurement for syntactic growth. Other gauges of maturity are the long noun clause and increased subordination. For high school students, bound modification is more essential than free-ending modification. One other means of measurement and development is the use of a generative grammar. A study of traditional grammar is not essential to syntactic growth. Students can increase in syntactic fluency by practice of multiple

embedding of kernels in sentence-combining problems. The types of sentence-combining practices include the open and the signaled. When accompanying a transformational grammar study, the signaled are appropriate, but when sentence-combining practices are a part of composition, the open exercises are more suitable. The open-sequenced problems offer opportunity in composing and freedom in combining.

Specifically, the plan of the classroom research was:

1. to give 120 students, as a pre-test, thirty-three sentence-combining problems, which represented eleven types of embedding.
2. to make an assessment of their ability to combine kernel sentences.
3. to give the experimental group a sentence-combining problem on the blackboard each day for three weeks.
4. to give the control group no sentence-combining problems for three weeks.
5. after three weeks, to give each group a post-test similar to the pre-test and to measure the increase in the experimental group's ability to combine kernels.

The result of the classroom research showed that the experimental group increased in their ability to combine kernel sentences. After being exposed to one sentence-combining problem each day for only three weeks, students in the experimental group were recognizing different patterns of embedding without the help of the teacher. They were holding longer discourse in their minds as they were making the proper transformations. The experimental group were recognizing subordinating ideas as well as main ideas. They were using relative pronouns, prepositions, and subordinating conjunctions without the teacher's prompting. Furthermore, the experimental group maintained a high level of interest throughout the study. Each day most of the students were anxious to see the problem displayed on the blackboard. Members of the control group began to ask why they too could not solve those "fun-problems."

The results of the present study indicate that if students are given an opportunity to combine kernels and make necessary transformations, apart from a grammar study, they will show a significant change in syntactic development. Although this study was too brief to measure growth in their own composition, the results of this study strongly suggest that members of the experimental group

were recognizing patterns that were far more mature syntactically than their own.

Therefore, a sentence-combining study for three trimesters would be profitable. The students would receive one sentence-combining problem on the blackboard each day. The sequence of kernels used each day would relate to the students, to sports, or to school activities. Together the class members would solve each problem. Occasionally the students would be asked to write a short theme using various types of embedding that they had learned. Hence, after months of daily exposure to sentence-combining, the students' syntactic growth would appear in their writing.

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