Rethinking the Universal Grammar and How to Teach Syntax to Thai Students

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Abstract

The present paper aims to rethink the usefulness of the Universal Grammar (UG) in teaching the English syntax to Thai students. The UG is the shared syntax of all languages, but syntaxes of languages are different because they contain their own parameters. When compared, sentences of two languages can be classified into the same, similar, and different. The same and similar sentence patterns could be said to be the shared UG, while the different ones are the parameters. It is suggested that teachers teach the same and similar sentence patterns before moving to the different ones. Based on theory on language acquisition, it is only after students are competent in the same and similar sentence patterns should they be taught the parameters and more complex sentences. At the same time, teachers should consider errors Thai students make, strategies they use writing in English, and differences between Thai and English that can cause problems in students' writing and find some possible techniques to solve them, also urging students to use the UG as a monitoring device for writing better sentences.

Introduction

Chomskyan theory about the innate core of linguistic knowledge, widely known as the Universal Grammar (UG) (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013), is persuasive. Chomsky points out that every healthy child is equipped with an ability specific only to humans to understand language. This ability refers to the UG. One credible argument of this theory is "the notion of poverty of stimulus," or the idea that children are able to utter linguistic structures they have never uttered before (Meyer, 2009). In other words, children are only a little exposed to language but can produce an unlimited number of sentences. Mullany and Stockwell (2010) support the existence of the UG, saying "there are a finite number of words in the language, but a very very large number of possible utterances". Mitchell et al. (2013) give several reasons to advocate the UG, including that all children of the same language undergo similar developmental stages and that these stages are similar across languages.

The existence of the UG can, in addition, be observed from the production of language of a very young child. According to Shi, Werker, and Moegan (1999 as cited in Kennison, 2014), very young children could distinguish between function or closed class words (and, in, of, this, a) and content or opened class words (mother, apple, water, green), and during the one-word stage, they utter only the latter. Greenfield and Smith (1976 as cited in Kennison, 2014) identified nine relationships expressed in very young children's single words which imply an action, a doer of an action, an object, or a location. Children start to acquire two-word utterances, such as "sit chair" and "car small," in chunks of content words and children begin to form them at a very young age (Brown, 1973 as cited in Kennison, 2014). These still retain the nine relationships suggested by Greenfield and Smith, and through modification and expansion, they will become adult-like speech.

The UG theory, therefore, holds that language development relies on cognition, or on internal mechanisms, and the education of English in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context is obviously based on this belief. This is clearly manifested in the encouragement of rule memorization, but the underlying idea is that there is a structure that facilitates language learning

bestowed to children from birth and the structure still operates in the learning of a new language. Mitchell et al. (2013) explain the possible role of the innate language module and point out two possibilities that the UG facilitates second language learning. These possibilities include "[t]hat they [innate learning mechanisms] continue to operate during second language learning and make key aspects of second language learning possible" and "…that the first language provides a model of a natural language and how it works, which can be 'copied' in some way in learning a second language". All these possibilities should also apply to learning and acquiring a foreign language.

However, it is not the UG alone that facilitates language acquisition. In fact, more people hold that language acquisition is the result of society. Many theorists believe that language is behavior reinforced by society. For example, in *Operant Conditioning*, B. F. Skinner maintains that if an utterance is rewarded or reinforced, it becomes habitual (Brown, 2014). It is believed, too, that language is the consequence of culture and experience. For instance, what makes one understand that this advertisement, "Hotel? Trivago," asks if one wants a hotel, and that if one does, Trivago should be the choice? And what makes one understand that this slogan "Burn forest, burn nation" means "If you burn a forest, you also burn your nation"? Society. Next, Bosmajian (1983) studies how metaphors arouse emotions. The use of "black parasite," for instance, can trigger anger and hatred because society sees parasites as evil. Thus, it is society that plays an important role in the acquisition of language.

The present paper will not elaborate on the social influence on language learning. Based on the knowledge of the UG, its main aim, instead, is to discuss how teachers should teach English syntax in the Thai EFL context, where syntactic similarities and differences between Thai and English play an important role in Thai learners' acquisition of English, and also where their errors and strategies in learning the

language are unique and so need specific solutions. The paper may not receive appreciation in terms of originality, for the UG has been tackled by many researchers and so a lot of knowledge about it has been presented. However, the merit of this paper lies in the teaching techniques that are not common or have not been applied and also in the comparison of Thai and English sentence patterns.

The sections below include 1) the UG and syntax, 2) the syntaxes of Thai and English, 3) Thai students' errors and strategies in learning English, 4) how to teach English syntax to Thai students, and 5) conclusion.

The UG and Syntax

Before thinking about the usefulness of the UG, the very first question to answer is "What is the UG?" As said earlier, the UG, alias the *Language Acquisition Device* (LAD), is an innate system for acquiring language children are thought to be endowed with at birth (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, and Harnish, 2001). Chomsky argues that with this system children produce well-formed novel expressions and not ill-formed ones, and that with it children can move from a one-word stage to multiword stages, developing very complex linguistic systems in a very short period of time on the basis of limited and often fragmentary data. And with this system, too, children are enormously creative in producing sentences, and they can understand sentences they have never uttered or heard before (ibid.).

In reality, the UG explains syntax. According to Alduais (2012), the UG in Chomskyan transformational grammar explains how "elements combine to make larger elements...how the whole element (S) are/is split into parts and yet how these parts are combined to form larger elements till they reach to the highest level which is the sentence." In addition, the combination of elements into sentences is not arbitrary. Chomsky (1986) argues that the core of human language consists of principles and parameters. The former is unvarying and applies to all languages, while the latter refers to the features or rules that make languages different. It is the "principles"

that Chomsky refers to as the UG. Syntax, generally known as a branch of linguistics, refers to the same thing as the UG in that it is about the combination of words into phrases and sentences and rules governing the combination. Syntax refers to 1) "the way that words and phrases are put together to form sentences in a language" and 2) "the rules of grammar for [putting words and phrases together to form sentences]" (Hey and Holloway, 2015). Syntax means "sentence construction", or "how words group together to make phrases or sentences" (Eppler and Ozón, 2013).

From the above explanation, thus, the UG may be thought to be the shared syntax of languages; it is, in other words, the body of knowledge that can explain all languages. The UG is thought to be one universal or system that aims to "study individual languages in great depth in order to identify the principles of grammar which underline and govern specific rules" (Ipek, 2009). Thus, every language can be explained with this one system, or with the UG. On the other hand, the syntax of one language is not necessarily the same as that of another. It contains, as Chomsky points out, parameters that make it from another language. However, when it comes to explaining the syntax of any language, much the knowledge employed comes from the UG.

As a result, the knowledge about the UG is useful for understanding the structure of a language and so can be applied to teaching and learning. However, to point out particular situations where such knowledge is useful, it is imperative to examine what the UG actually does. It explains that every word in a sentence belongs to a category or part of speech, and every sentence contains constituents (Akmajian et al., 2001). The categorization of words is based on their functions; words may be categorized as a noun, a verb, an adverb, and so on. Constituents are generally thought of as parts of sentences, commonly called "phrases," but a sentence itself is already a constituent. Within a sentence, there may be a few or many constituents. Mullany and Stockwell (2010) identify five phrasal types, which are actually

constituents, including noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP), adverb phrase (AdvP), prepositional phrase (PrepP), and adjective phrase (AdjP). Constituents are also hierarchical. For example, "the man" is an NP constituent, and "The man in the room" is also an NP constituent subsuming two smaller constituents, that is, an NP (the man) and a PrepP (in the room). Yet an NP can always be expanded. "The man who painted the wall" is an NP constituent subsuming two constituents, that is, an NP (the man) and an adjective clause (AdjC) (who painted the wall). Note that a phrase constituent is defined by its head. The head is the most essential word. Thus, the head of an AdjP is the main adjective, for example, in "too expensive to buy," "expensive" is the head (see Mullany and Stockwell, 2010). It should be noted, too, that all constituents can always be expanded by smaller constituents (see Akmajian et al., 2001).

To understand that every sentence contains constituents better, consider this sentence and read the explanation that follows:
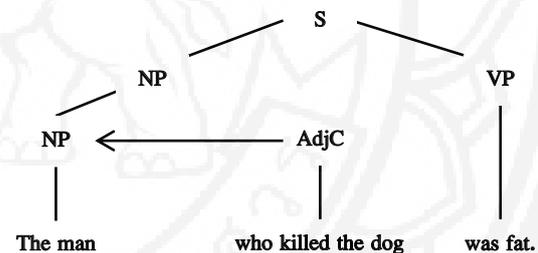
First, every word in the sentence belongs to a word class (the = article, man = noun, who = relative pronoun, killed = verb, dog = noun, was = verb, fat = adjective). Second, there are several constituents in the sentence. Even "who" can be thought of as an NP constituent in the adjective clause "who killed the dog." It is the subject of the clause. However, the three major constituents in the sentence are "the man" (NP), "who killed the dog" (AdjC), and "was fat" (VP). Note that in this article an arrow-tipped line shows that the constituent modifies the constituent to which the arrow points.

The above example reveals that sentences are full of constituents, usually one embedded in another. Embedded

constituents are one difficult feature of syntax, and this is one of the reasons why learning a foreign language is difficult for a foreign language learner. However, Mullany and Stockwell (2010) claim that humans own an interior sense of constituency, which is certainly part of the UG. Such an interior sense is exhibited in the ability to draw lines between meaningful constituents. Consider these examples:

I / live / with my grandmother / in a small house / near the red building.

This is the correct way to identify the constituents with the sentence. All constituents are classifiable into the five types of phrase mentioned above (I = NP, live = VP, with my grandmother = PrepP, in a small house = PrepP, near the red building = PrepP). Lining can be done in other ways in the sentence too. For example, if the last line is taken out, the result is a larger PrepP (in a small house near the red building). It should be noted from this example that one word, such as "I" can form a constituent, but it is not always the case because "the" and "my," for example, do not form constituents.

I live/ with/ my / grandmother in / a small / house near/ the /red building.

This is not the correct way to specify the constituents because the phrases or words in the middle (*with/ my / grandmother in / a small / house near/ the*) do not belong to any of the five types of phrase. In other words, they do not form any constituent.

The claim that the interior sense of constituency is part of the UG may be supported by the sense of well- or ill-formedness. Pinker (1990, 1999 as cited in Akmajian et al., 2001), for example, states that children produce errors such as "I *buyed* a fire dog for a grillion dollars" but do not produce ill-formed sentences such as "Who did John see Mary and___?".

When teachers apply the UG to teaching and learning a language, they actually teach the constituents and sentence patterns shared by languages. In other words, they teach the "principles" in Chomsky's terms. Chomsky (1986) argues that the principles are unvarying and they are the part that all languages conform to. For example, most, if not all, languages have this sentence pattern: Subject + Intransitive Verb, as in "นกบิน" (Thai) and "Birds fly" (English). Therefore, checking if a sentence conforms to a universal sentence pattern is the primary usefulness of the UG. The shared principles can be taught so that students can understand a new language.

However, the principles are also useful for dealing with the mismatches between languages. Each language has its own parameters that are understood by its own speakers. For example, the Thai language is borderless; that is, no punctuation marks are generally used to signal the fullness of sentences (Thep-Ackrapong, 2005). What's more, Thai sentences are often subjectless; that is, a lot of sentences start with a verb phrase. Lengthiness is another feature of the Thai language. Thai students tend to write unnecessarily long sentences. Lack of practice and low linguistic ability cause their writing to be lengthy. Being unable to say something precisely, they use more words to express what they want to say. The lengthiness of their writing must also be due to the culture. Kaplan (1966) claims that the writing of oriental (Asian) students is a spiral circling around the point. Thai students, too, are unable to stay focused on the main idea. The "principles" of the UG can help "monitor" if a sentence contains all core parts and meets the requirement of fullness, or if two or three sentences can be combined to reduce lengthiness. Krashen (1982 as cited in Tricomi, 1986) argues that the UG can be "a monitoring device" for checking the correctness of sentences.

The UG also helps to get rid of ambiguity and confusion. English sentences, especially in writing, are often embedded with modifiers, and sometimes the subject is located so far away from the verb that processing the information from the long line of words is a mental burden. English also allows modifiers, especially an adverbial phrase, to come before the verb, for example, "You will in the end find a good point of this project," but insertions of adverbials between subjects, verbs, and objects are inexistent in Thai, especially in writing. The use of tree diagrams, common in transformative grammar, and other creative diagrams that represent the "principles" can help students to comprehend heavily-embedded sentences.

That the UG can help eradicate ambiguity owing to different grouping of words within sentences may be seen a minor, or secondary advantage. In speech, such ambiguity is dissolved very quickly through the help of the context. However, for EFL learners, tree diagrams not only help them learn to avoid ambiguity but also make them understand the language better because they can see how sentence parts are connected better. For example, the two tree diagrams below help get rid of ambiguity in number by showing whether the subject is singular or plural:
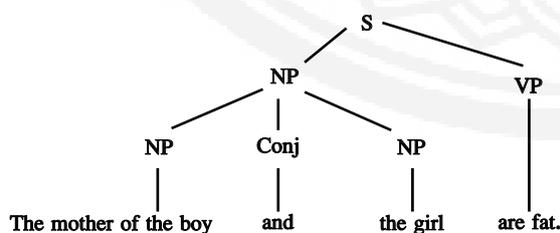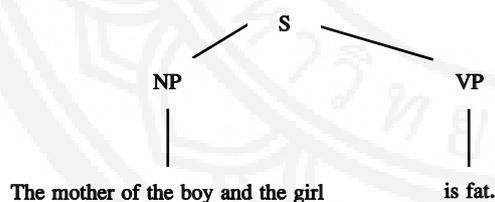
(Adapted from Akmajian et al., 2001)

Finally, the previous explanations mentioned several advantages of the UG in learning and teaching a new language, but can the UG really do so? How much does it help learning a new language? As mentioned above, Mitchell et al. (2013) point out the possibilities that the UG still operates in second language learning and provides models for copying. Similarly, Robinson and Ellis (2008) claim that conceptual structure established in the first language (L1) is available in adult second language learning. Conceptual structure in cognitive linguistics refers to any abstract concepts, including, for example, that red is a violent color and white refers to purity, but it also includes the sentence patterns (thought of different concepts) within the UG. So, it is certain that the UG is accessible in learning a second or foreign language (L2). However, there is some contradictory theory. According to Mehrpour and Forutan (2015), humans possess biological devices planned for acquiring language and these devices lose their capacity at puberty. The time when the devices stop operating is generally known as the critical period (Singleton, 2005). Some theory does not reject the UG but focuses on the influence of society on language acquisition. Imitation theory, for example, claims that children acquire language through listening to speech first and then reproducing it. This theory holds that memorization is the main tool for acquiring language and views acquisition as a result of a person's environment, not of any of his/her genetic makeup (Bergmann, Hall, and Ross, 2007). Then there is some theory that totally rejects the role of the UG in second language learning. For example, Meisel (1997) believes that in learning a new language learners resort to general learning mechanisms, creating their "wild grammar" that does not necessarily conform to the rules of general human languages.

The Syntaxes of Thai and English

In this section, let us think of syntax as a countable noun. As stated earlier, Chomsky believes that the core part of human language consists of principles and parameters, both of which every language contains. For a much larger part, the UG theory has tackled the

former, or the part supposedly shared by all languages. McLaughlin (1991) explains that this part contains unmarked features, which are universal and easy to transfer. The latter, the parameters, McLaughlin explains, contains marked features which are hard or resistant to transfer. Each language has its own syntax which contains both parts. As a result, when the syntax of one language is compared with that of another, both parts can be found.

Thai and English may be said to be subject-verb-object (SVO) languages, for like in most languages, in these languages the subject usually begins the sentence, which is then followed by a main verb that requires a direct object. However, there are many sentence patterns in both languages, which may be the same, similar, or different. To discover these, it is necessary to know the different core parts of sentences that appear in both languages. English sentence contain subject (S), intransitive verb (verb requiring no direct object/VI), transitive verb (verb requiring direct object/VT), direct object (DO), indirect object (IO), linking verb (verb functioning like *be*/LV), be (is, am, are, was, were, be, been/BE), adjective (ADJ), expletive (IT/THERE), prepositional phrase (PrepP), present participle (V-ING), past participle (V-ED), subject complement (SC), and object complement (OC). Note that other names and abbreviations have been used too to refer to these different parts.

Thai sentences contain most of those parts, which appear in the same locations as they appear in English. However, some parts in English sentences appear in different locations in Thai or do not exist in Thai. The indirect object, for example, is not placed before the direct object. There are also not any present or past participles in Thai. The -ING and -ED are expressed in separate words and in different locations.

Therefore, to be able to compare two languages, it is necessary that the comparer know all sentence parts in both languages and be good at both grammars. It is certain that even if one is so knowledgeable in Thai and English, it is often difficult to compare Thai and English sentence patterns in a one part-to-one part fashion. However, despite that, the locations of the core sentence parts, which are generally filled with lexical words, can form basic or simple sentences considered the same, similar, or different between Thai and English. It should be noted further that grammatical words and their locations and grammatical features must be set aside for a short while. Consider the following comparisons of Thai and English sentences in three groups:

1. Same
   - ฉันรักคุณ
   - I love you.
   - เขาดูเศร้า
   - He looks sad.
   - คุณเป็นเพื่อนผม
   - You are my friend.
   - หนังสืออยู่บนโต๊ะ
   - The book is on the table.
   - เขาต้องการให้คุณทำงานหนัก
   - He wants you to work hard.
   - ทอมวิ่งอย่างเร็วไปที่ม้าของเขา
   - Tom ran very quickly to his horse.
   - ฉันจะขับรถของเขาไปที่สวนสาธารณะ
   - I will drive his car to the public park.
   - พวกเราเห็นเขากำลังเดินในสถานีรถไฟ
   - We saw him walking in the train station.

The above examples show that Thai and English share many identical or unmarked structures. Except for the different locations of some grammatical words and the existence and inexistence of some grammatical features, those who are good at translation and grammar can see that the core parts are in the same locations and have the same functions. The patterns of the sentences in this group, therefore, are easy to transfer.

2. Similar
   - ฉันคิดว่าเขาเป็นคนดี
   - I think him a good man.
   - เขาทาสีห้องของเขาเป็นสีแดง
   - He painted his room red.

– นิดาแต่งงานกับเฮนรี่เมื่อสองปีก่อน

– Nida married Henry two years ago.

– มันอันตรายที่จะใช้ถนนนี้ตอนกลางคืน

– It is dangerous to use this road at night.

– มีต้นไม้สูง 5 ต้นอยู่บริเวณหน้าตึก

– There are five tall trees in front of the building.

The examples in the second group show similar sentence structures between Thai and English, which are less unmarked than those in the first group. The locations of the core parts are similar, moving from the left to the right. However, one part-to-one part translation is less accurate than that in the first group. For example, if the first Thai sentence is strictly translated word-by-word, the translator could turn it into a complex sentence (I think that he is a good man). However, there is a shorter, simpler structure in English (I think him a good man) that can express the very same idea. To use this structure, the translator must omit the words "ว่า" and "เป็น" in Thai. In other words, not all words match if the shorter version is chosen. Two more examples that should be highlighted are the last two ones. English has expletives "it" and "there" to start a sentence when the subject is not available. The equivalent Thai sentences leave the subject missing in these structures, but other than that, the other lexical words are arranged from the left to the right and approximately in the same order and have the same functions. As can be seen, the "similar" sentence structures between Thai and English are those with roughly the same positions of core parts but also with a missing or an added word or words in one language but not in the other.

3. Different

– เขาสูงมาก

– He is very tall.

– เท็ดขายมอเตอร์ไซค์ของเขาให้แฟรงค์

– Ted sold Frank his old motorcycle.

– เด็กชายวิ่งไปที่สระน้ำ

– To the pond ran the boy.

As the examples in this third group show, there are not many different or marked structures between Thai and English. The examples also show that differences are caused by the different parts of speech of words meaning the same in the two languages. For example, the Thai words meaning "tall" and "hungry" are verbs not adjectives. Another big difference involves the different locations of the core parts. For instance, the indirect object "Frank" in the second example is placed in front of the direct object "his old motorcycle" in English, whereas it must be placed after the direct object in Thai. For the last example, the structures of the two languages are different; Thai never places a PreP before a VP to show an emphasis.

While many more examples can be found to put in each group of example above, it may be concluded for now that there are many more sentence patterns that languages share than those that they do not share. Why then does it appear that learning English is difficult for Thai students? The cultural aspect put aside, both Thai and English contain their own parameters, or specific rules of use.

Thai Students' Errors and Strategies in Learning English

Certainly, while acquiring a new language, a learner develops a linguistic system called "interlanguage" or "learner language" (Bennui, 2008; Kaewnuch & Boonsue, 2013), which could be defined as "an intermediate stage between a learner's L1 and L2, in which s/he uses rules from both linguistic systems in order to produce sentences in L2" (Luna, 2010). In the linguistic system, the learner certainly produces a lot of errors at all levels (phonetics, phonology, syntax, and semantics). At the syntax level, Thai students' English writing is laden with a wide range of error, including using an adjective as a verb (She *talls** very much), writing fragments (First of all *the advantages of living in an urban area**), not using a determiner (She is ^ good woman), starting with a verb (*Have** four people in my family), fusing two clauses together (I

live in Phitsanulok has many interesting places), and so on. Kaewnuch (2014) found that cognition plays a very important role in acquiring a new language, and syntactic errors produced most by Thai students are in structures that contain object complements and indirect objects.

Every foreign language learner is supposed to develop his/her own interlanguage which may be close to or far from the L2 system. The more the learner acquires the L2, the closer his/her interlanguage is to the L2, and also the more analyzable and reconizable it becomes. When the learner is so poor, his/her linguistic system is hard to analyze. In fact, as witnessed in some students' writing, they may not have attempted to construct any linguistic system that can be called an interlanguage. A lot of Thai students, especially those who are not English majors, are in this situation.

When analyzed, the errors of most Thai students are of several kinds that could be the result of L1 interference. Direct or word-to-word translation from L1 to L2 causes their interlanguages to contain many L1 features. For example, a large number of errors are subjectless sentences. This is one kind of L1 interference. As said above, a lot of times Thai sentences start with a verb. The subject is understood, so the message can get across.

However, their errors are in fact various, and the causes are often unclear. However, Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang (2010) point out five kinds of error: misinformation, addition, omission, misordering, and severe errors. All of these could result from L1 interference, but also could come from other factors. For instance, "He *wills** tell you soon" (misinformation) could result from carelessness or an overgeneralization. Students can generalize the rule of adding -s after the verb of a singular subject to all verbs of singular subjects, creating errors such as "He wents to school." However, although the cause of an error may be hard to identify, types of error are identifiable, such as those by Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang. For the errors by Thai

students, the participants in Kaewnuch and Boonsue (2013)'s study (26 fourth-year English-major students at Srinakharinwirot University) found errors related to determiners, tenses, word forms, punctuations, and subject-verb agreements the most. What is intriguing about these errors and so should be noted is that the written texts by the participants contained mostly parameter errors, or errors specific to the English language itself. To put it another way, most of the errors did not belong to the shared syntax or the UG. This might be because the participants were competent in the UG, or because the focus was not on syntax. But the findings would have been different had the research been conducted with a less competent group of participants.

In teaching syntax to foreign language learners, it is not enough to know the types of error they produce and why they produce them. Students' strategies, or ability, in producing sentences are also a good source of data for planning how to teach syntax to them. For Thai students, two studies have confirmed that their acquisition of English is similar to first language acquisition. In the first study (Kaewnuch, 2014), participants, 80 grade-eight students heavily employed the Det + N, __and__, VI + PrepP + (PreP), Prep + Det + N, and Adj + N. This shows that they acquired language as constituents, confirming that the above claim that very young children acquiring language as chunks (Greenfield and Smith, 1976 as cited in Kennison, 2014) is true. As for the participants' sentence ability, they used the S + VT + DO and S + VI patterns most often. The S + Be + SC and S + Be + Adj patterns came as numbers 3 and 4 respectively. Expletive structures (It + Be, There + Be) appeared in a large number too. In the second study (Kaewnuch, 2016), the participants were 38 first-year, English-majored university students, who, again, utilized the S + VT + DO and S + VI patterns most often. The S + Be + Adj pattern came third. Surprisingly, expletives did not appear in large numbers. The two studies showed

that sentence structures with object complements and indirect objects are difficult and so rarely employed by Thai students. But why the S + Be + Adj pattern, a marked structure, occurred in a large number in the study of the grade-eight students must have been because they had sufficiently practiced the pattern.

How to Teach English Syntax to Thai Students

The literature review on the UG and syntax, the comparison of Thai and English syntaxes, and the findings about Thai students' grammatical and syntactic errors and their sentence ability, explored above, give insights into how to teach English syntax to Thai students.
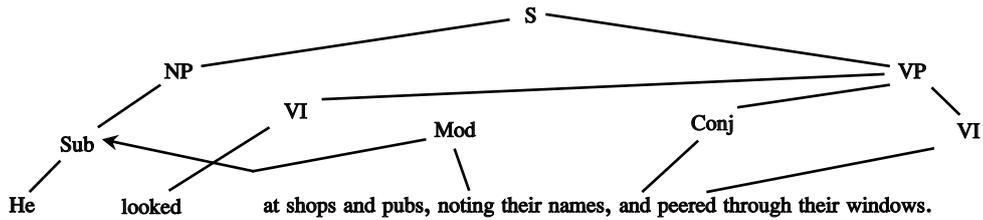
First of all, central to the two studies by Kaewnuch (2014, 2016) is that Thai students acquire English sentence patterns that are similar to those in their mother tongue before the different ones. The two studies are similar to Lowrey (1998)'s in that complex structures are acquired later. Complex syntax, therefore, should be avoided for lower-grade students. The studies by Kaewnuch reconfirm the existence of the shared syntax, the UG and imply that students acquire easier sentence patterns before difficult ones. They acquire patterns with lexical words arranged in the familiar order first. This means that sentence patterns in the first and second groups in the section about Thai and English syntaxes should be taught before the sentence patterns in the last group. Complexity should be gradually added, and should be based on levels. Previous studies such as Hunt (1977, as cited in Yau and Belanger, 1984) reveal that the writing of native speakers of non-Indo-European languages (e.g. Chinese, Thai, Korean, and Laotian) increased in syntactic complexity with age.

To teach sentence patterns, teachers may choose the familiar patterns from the 11 basic sentence patterns of English presented by Kaewnuch (2016) and have students practice them sufficiently before moving to the unfamiliar ones. Some of 11 sentence patterns, such as Subject + Be + Adj. and Subject + VI are the shared
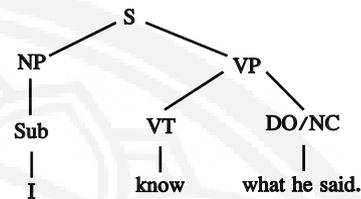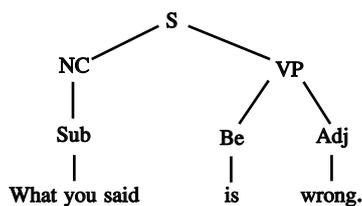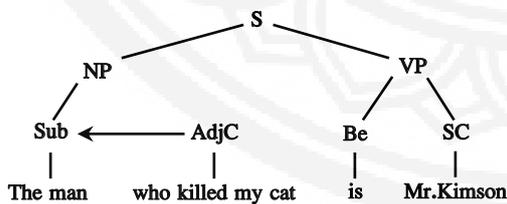
UG, while others may contain parameters. But all of them could be starters to teach syntax, and they can be easily explained with tree diagrams. Meanwhile, teachers also help their students to polish their sentences, eliminating errors and fostering their understanding of grammar and sentence patterns. The difference in parts of speech of words meaning the same in both languages should be taught. Specific usage of some words should also be taught. For example, the verbs "marry" and "discuss" are transitive verbs in English but in Thai the verb meaning "marry" is an intransitive verb while the verb meaning "discuss" is either a transitive verb or an intransitive verb. The teaching of these parameters helps students understand the language more deeply and firmly. By teaching both the patterns and grammar, teachers teach both the principles and parameters as defined Chomsky.

With regards to sentence patterns, or the principles, tree diagrams best represent them. Tree diagrams that teach sentence patterns, however, should go down to levels lower than the NP and VP. In other words, they should present the functions of words or phrases, such as subject, transitive verb, adjective, direct object, and indirect object. In addition, they should illustrate how embeddings are connected to the core parts, in other words, what they do in the sentence. By showing embeddings work, tree diagrams help lessen the cognitive burden in processing the information. For example, looking at the following tree diagram, which represents the S + VI pattern, students know three things:

1) The sentence consists of two major parts, the NP and VP.

2) The modifying phrase, a present participial phrase, modifies the subject though it is far from the subject. (An arrow is used to show that the phrase modifies the subject.)

3) The verb phrase consists two intransitive verbs joined by "and."

```
                                    S
         NP                                              VP
              VI                                    Conj        VI
   Sub  ◄          Mod
   He       looked    at shops and pubs, noting their names, and peered through their windows.
```

Tree diagrams can also be used to explain all types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. After students are competent in finding the core parts of basic sentence patterns in simple sentences, especially one with embedded phrases (mostly present and past participial phrases), teachers can stop using tree diagrams because students can probably analyze clauses in the different types of sentence. After all, every clause follows a basic sentence pattern. However, for students who are not good at processing long lines of words, or at understanding sentences with embedded clauses, widely known as subordinate clauses, the best thing arising from teaching basic sentence patterns to EFL students with tree diagrams probably lies in its helping them to understand that embedded clauses are parts of the core parts, or sometimes act as core parts. They will understand that a basic sentence pattern can always be used to show how a sentence with an embedded clause or more is constructed, especially if the embedded clause is an adjective clause or a noun clause. Consider the following examples:

```
                    S
        NP                      VP
   Sub  ◄    AdjC         Be        SC
    |          |           |         |
 The man  who killed my cat  is   Mr.Kimson
```

```
              S
      NC               VP
      |            Be       Adj
     Sub           |         |
      |            is      wrong.
 What you said
```

```
              S
     NP              VP
      |         VT        DO/NC
     Sub        |           |
      |       know     what he said.
      I
```

Another benefit of teaching the UG which the present paper wants to highlight is that it can help solve problems related to lengthiness, confusion, and functionless parts due to the nature of the Thai language and L1 interferences. Being unable to say something precisely due to low linguistic ability, Thai students use more words than necessary, and they are unaware that they can reduce clauses or combine sentences to read the burden of processing the information on the part of the reader. To solve this problem, they can practice revising long sentences into short ones. Long sentences can be selected from their own writing. Or they can practice combining sentences together. Another big problem is that Thai students usually write from their own thoughts in Thai. The consequence is not just interferences but also lengthiness, because Thai tends to be lengthy. Students tend to put every Thai word into English, making their sentences unnecessarily lengthy and confusing because they often contain parts with no grammatical functions. Students are unaware too that sometimes they can use only one word or a few words to replace many words. One exercise they can do is reading a Thai paragraph and try to grasp what exactly the writer wants to say in each sentence and then shorten each sentence by removing the extra words. They finally translate the Thai sentences into English. Another exercise is using peers' texts to get rid of words, phrases or clauses that have no functions in sentences. Of course,

for all those exercises, they use basic sentence patterns as models to check that all parts are grammatically connected.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to say that the Universal Grammar (UG) is useful in teaching the English syntax to Thai students. The UG is the shared syntax of all languages, but the syntax of one language is certainly different from that of another language, as each language contains its own parameters that make it different from other languages. When compared, sentences of two languages can be classified as the same, similar, and different. The same and similar sentence patterns could be said to be the shared UG, while the different ones are the parameters. It is suggested that teachers teach the same and similar sentence patterns before moving to the different ones. After the students are competent in the same and similar sentence patterns, teachers can have them practice more complex sentences. Meanwhile, teachers should consider errors, strategies, and differences between Thai and English that can cause problems in students' writing and find some good ways to solve them, along with urging students to use the UG as a monitoring device for writing better sentences.

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