PHRASE STRUCTURE – TRANSFORMATIONAL ANALYSIS
AND
THE CONCEPT OF STYLE AS CHOICE

ROBERT BRIDGES' POEM

NOVEMBER

AS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an exploration of the practical aspect of Phrase Structure-Transformational Grammar as a descriptive method that might be applied in analyzing literary styles. The definition of style as choice is intimately related to the view of Phrase Structure-Transformational Grammar as a set of choices represented by: Phrase Structure Rules and Optional Transformations.

Robert Bridge's poem "November" shows a sort of tendency to certain Phrase Structure Rules and certain Transformations that go hand in hand with the overall meaning of the poem: there is an evident employment of Phrase Structure Rules related to the Complex Noun Phrase structure, and Simple Verb Phrase structure, as for Transformations, the poem makes use of such processes to the limits, such as Relative Clause Reduction, Pronominal Adjective Reduction, and Place-Expression Fronting. However, the operations of Deletion and Reordering, involved in the transformations above, are heavily relied upon in the poem. Thus, they play a more powerful role in conveying the main subject matter of the poem.

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to work out a sort of relationship between linguistic theory and stylistic practice. The most common studies of style continue to proceed from the observations made by nontransformational approaches to stylistics (see Hoey,2001: 20-30). They tend to focus on discrete features of language – words, or groups of words, sound, tropes, diction, devices of conjunction, parallel structures, and so on (Ohmann, 1980: 135). It is necessary for a stylistician to adopt a linguistic theory that takes into account the "deeper structural features of language" (Falk, 1978:420), especially those which should enter into a stylistic description.

It is the concern of this paper to consider how an understanding of Noam Chomsky's theory of phrase structure- transformational grammar can be used in stylistic analysis of a literary text. However, the potential usefulness of Chomsky's grammatical theory, insofar as stylistic analysis is concerned, should be investigated in the light of a particular examination of the common sense notion of style. In its most general interpretation, the word style refers to the way in which language is used "in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on" (Ohmann, 1980:136). Leech and Short (1981: 10-11) resort to Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, to clarify this common definition of style, in the sense that:

> *langue* being the code or system of rules common to speakers of a language (such as English), and *parole* being *the particular uses of this system, or*

selections from this system, that speakers or writers make on this or that occasion. One may say, for example, that certain English expressions belong to the official style of weather, forecasting ('bright intervals', 'scattered showers', etc.), while other expressions ('lovely day', a bit chilly', etc.) belong to the style of everyday conversational remarks about the weather.

(Italics mine)

It seems that style belongs to *parole* in the sense that it is a *selection* from a total linguistic repertoire that constitutes a style. That is to say, style as a phenomenon results from a tendency of a writer to consistently choose certain structures over others available in the language. Therefore, Carter (1984:6) holds that style consists in the linguistic choices made by the writer, and it is the first priority of the linguist to ask : Why does the author here choose to express himself in this particular way? What kind of aesthetic effect that might be achieved by these particular choices on the linguistic level?

The concept of style as a linguistic choice prerequisites a common set or system of linguistic choices that should be identified clearly and objectively. This triggers the question of phrase structure- transformational grammar as a system or linguistic repertoire that provides the writer with certain choices or derivative relationships of alternativeness among constructions (Ohmann, 1980: 137-38). Thus, the question raised here is: how far does

phrase structure- transformational grammar lend itself to such a perspective of linguistic selections?

In the phrase structure component, to begin with, there is a set of rules which specifies the kinds of constituent structures that are permitted in English, as shown in Figure (1) below:

Figure (1)
(Taken from Falk, 1978: 231)

Constituent Structure Rules

$S \rightarrow NP + (AUX) + VP$

$$NP \rightarrow \begin{cases} NP + (S) \\ (ART) + (ADJ) + N + (S) \end{cases}$$

$$VP \rightarrow \begin{cases} BE + ADJ \\ V + (NP) + (PP) \end{cases}$$

$PP \rightarrow P + NP$

A quizzical look at this set of rules will indicate that there are alternate ways or choices of proceeding from identically labeled nodes, and alternate ways of expanding (or rewriting) a symbol (Ohmann, 1980: 138). For example, a verb phrase may be expanded into five possible combinations or choices:

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                    ──────────────▶   V

                    ──────────────▶   BE + ADJ

VP  ────────────────────────────▶   V + (NP)

                    ──────────────▶   V +(PP)

                    ──────────────▶   V + (NP) + (PP)
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The importance of such rules in stylistic analysis comes from the fact that the structural meaning of, say, [V + (NP)] differs considerably from that of [BE + ADJ] (ibid.). Accordingly, a writer's preference for one or another of these rules or forms might be a stylistic choice of some interest.

The transformational component, on the other hand, provides the stylistician with a set of transformational alternatives. The most striking characteristic of such transformations is that a large number of them are *optional* (Traugott, 1980:142). Transformations are operations which *add, delete, reorder*, or *combine* constituents, some of the transformational processes *must* be performed on a grammatical sentence to be generated (the technical term for this is that they are 'obligatory'), others, however, do not have to be performed (ibid.). For example, it is not necessary, although possible, or 'optional', to turn an active sentence like: (*Sue cooked chicken*) into the passive (*Chicken was cooked by Sue*), but it is obligatory to convert an abstract underlying *string*, to be strict with the terminology, such as: (*NEG I saw someone*) into some other string, either (*I didn't see anyone*) or (*I saw*

no one), because the element *NEG* can not turn up in surface structure (Chomsky, 1987: 82).

The optional transformations might be quite promising as a source of some interesting insights into the concept of style as choice. This kind of transformations may reasonably be thought of as alternatives or choices to specify the grammatical operations that might be performed upon underlying *kernel* sentences (or strings, strictly speaking) (Ohmann, 1980: 138). The way the writer exploits certain optional transformations, which differs from writer to writer, will certainly be of stylistic significance (ibid: 140). The fact that a style is in part a characteristic way of using the transformational alternatives makes it reasonable to expect that transformational analysis will be a valuable aid to the description of literary styles.

In the rest of this paper, the researcher attempts to study the stylistic choices shown in Robert Bridge's poem "November" quoted below which exemplifies, according to the researcher, a good sample to implement stylistic description through phrase structure-transformational analysis :

NOVEMBER

The lonely season in lonely lands, when fled
Are half the birds, and mists lie low, and the sun
Is rarely seen, nor strayeth far from his bed;
The short days pass unwelcomed one by one.
Out by the ricks the mantled engine stands
Crestfallen, deserted, - for now all hands
Are told to the plough, - and there it is dawn appear

The teams following and crossing far and near,
As hour by hour they broaden the brown bands
Of the striped fields; and behind them firk and prance
The heavy rooks; and daws grey-pated dance:
As a while, surmounting a crest, in sharp outline
(A miniature of toil, a gem's design,)
They are pictured, horses and men, or now near by
Above the lane they shout lifting the share,
By the trim hedgerow bloom'd with purple air;
Where, under the thorns, dead leaves in huddle lie
Packed by the gales of Autumn, and in and out
The small wrens glide
With a happy note of cheer,
And yellow amorets flutter above and about,
Gay, familiar in fear.
And now, if the night shall be cold, across the sky
Linnets and twits, in small flocks helter-skelter,
All the afternoon to the gardens fly,
From thistle-pastures hurrying to gain the shelter
Of American rhododendron or cherry-laurel:
And here and there, near chilly setting of sun,
In an isolated tree a congregation
Of starlings chatter and chide,
Thickset as summer leaves, in garrulous quarrel:
Suddenly they hush as one, -
The tree top springs, -
And off, with a whirr of wings,
They fly by the score
To the holly-thicket, and there with myriads more
Dispute for the roosts; and from the unseen nation
A babel of tongues, like running- water unceasing,
Makes live the wood, the flocking cries increasing,
Wrangling discordantly, incessantly,
While falls the night on them self-occupied;
The long dark night, that lengthens slow,
Deepening with Winter to starve grass and tree,
And soon to bury in snow
The Earth, sleeping 'neath her frozen stole,
Shall dream a dream crept from the sunless pole

Of how her end shall be.

2. Phrase Structure Analysis

One particular observation might be shown by using phrase structure rules in analyzing this poem: the way the phrase structure rule operates in Noun Phrases is totally different from that which operates in Verb Phrases: The choices available in phrase-structure grammar for the constituent structure of Noun Phrase can be presented as :

NP ⟶
- NP + (S)
- (DET.) + (ADJ.) + N + (S)
- (DET.) + N
- (ADJ.) + N
- N + (S)
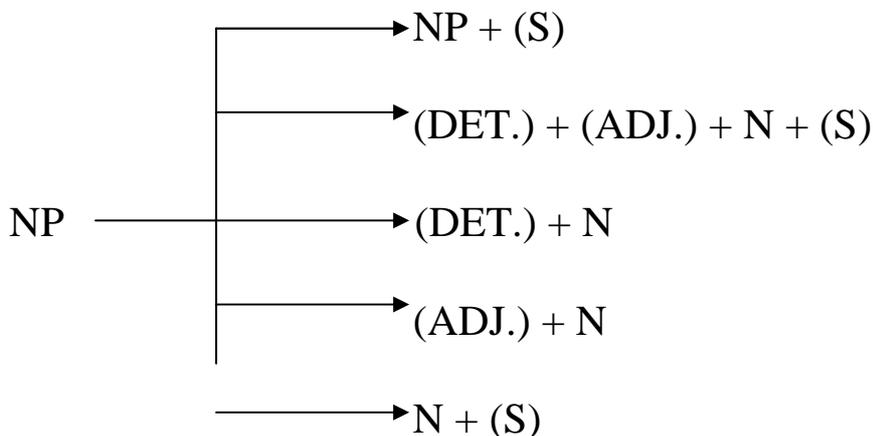
However, the dominant constituent structure of Noun Phrase in the poem can be introduced in the phrase structure as follows:

NP → (DET.) + (ADJ.) + N + (of NP)

as in :

". . . the brown bands of the striped fields/ a miniature of toil, . . ./ . . . the gales of Autumn, . . ./ . . . a happy note of cheer, / . . . the shelter of American rhododendron . .

./ . . . chilly setting of sun, / . . . a congregation of starlings . . ./ . . . a whirr of wings, / a babel of tongues, . . ."

In relation to the choices available in phrase-structure grammar for the constituent structure of verb phrase (see p.105), Robert Bridges uses only the first choice, throughout his poem, to present the vast majority of the verb phrases. Thus, they can be simply described by the first constituent structure rule:

VP → V

as in :

". . . when *fled/* . . . and mists *lie* low, . . ./ the short days *pass* . . ./ . . . the mantled engine *stands/* the teams *following* and *crossing* . . ./ . . .*firk* and *prance/* . . . they *shout* . . ./ . . . in huddle *lie/* the small wrens *glide/* . . . yellow amorets *flutter* . . ./ . . . to the gardens *fly/* . . .*chatter* and *chide,/* . . . they *hush* . . ./ the tree top *springs,-/* they *fly*. . ./ while *falls* the night. . ./ . . , that *lengthens* slow. ."

What is striking here is that the constituent structure of noun phrase is variously modified and full of possibilities and results from almost a rich exploitation of the choices that Phrase Structure grammar offers, while the constituent structure of verb phrase consists

solely of only one obligatory constituent excluding all the other possibilities and choices of verb phrase structure. This might be ascribed to the different messages which the poet tries to convey via the structural complexity of the Noun Phrase and the structural simplicity of the Verb Phrase.

3. Transformational Analysis

Robert Bridge's language in "November" shows some interesting transformations that add further dimensions which have proved useful in the stylistic analysis of this poem. It seems evident that Bridges' style is so largely based on just three transformations: he is relying heavily on, first, Relative Clause Reduction, second, Prenominal Adjective Reduction, and third, Place-Expression Fronting. Each one will be rapidly reviewed below:

3.1 RELATIVE CLAUSE REDUCTION (RCR)

Unlike coordinate sentences, relative clauses, which are subordinate clauses, are dependent (Roderick, 2001:37). They are "embedded sentencelike structures" that follow a noun phrase and that normally begin with a relative pronoun (ibid.: 38). Thus, their function is to describe or particularize an N mentioned in the higher sentence (Traugott, 1980:158), as in (The man *who is sitting on the bench* was once a millionaire.) Relative clauses can be reduced by modification or deletion of elements:

(1) The man ~~who is~~ sitting on the bench was once a millionaire.

The RCR transformation would convert the structure of (1) into the surface structure of (2) by deleting the relative pronoun (who) and the following form of the verb 'to be':

(2) The man sitting on the bench was once a millionaire.

Nevertheless, RCR is allowed only under five main circumstances (ibid: 159). These are when the relative clause contains in surface structure:

1. be + adjective
2. be + adverb of place or time or (PP)
3. auxiliary be + en or be + ing + V
4. main verb (have)
5. an object which is relativized   (ibid.)

These cases are illustrated in the following examples respectively:

(3) I have a book ~~which is~~ full of lies.

(4) I know the man ~~who is~~ in the corner.

(5) She was overwhelmed by the feeling ~~which was~~ generated in her by his reply.

(6) Anyone ~~who has~~ a happy face can join.

(*who* is deleted and *has* is replaced by *with* : Anyone *with* a happy face can join.)

(7) I read the book which you gave to me.

   The RCR is heavily used in Robert Bridge's poem "November", it works in the poem through five patterns:

   1. be + adjective : as in

   . . . mantled engine stands
   Crestfallen, deserted,- . . .

   And yellow amorets flutter above and about,
   Gay, familiar in fear.

   Thickset as summer leaves, . . .

   A babel of tongues, like *running- water* . . .

   While falls the night on them *self-occupied*; . . .

   2. be + adverb of place or time or (PP): as in
   . . ., dead leaves *in huddle* lie
   . . ., *in small flocks* helter-skelter,

   . . ., *in garrulous quarrel*:

   3. auxiliary be + ing + V : as in

The teams *following* and *crossing* far and near,

From thistle-pastures *hurrying* to gain . . .

. . ., the flocking cries *increasing*,
Wrangling discordantly, incessantly,

Deepening with Winter to . . .

The Earth, *sleeping* 'neath her frozen stole,

4. main verb have: as in

With a happy note of cheer,

And off, *with* a whirr of wings,

. . ., and there *with* myriads more
Dispute for the roots; . . .
5. auxiliary be + en + V: as in

Packed by the gales of Autumn,

Shall dream a dream *crept* from the . . .

The RCR- and all transformational rules- might be represented by two parts (Chomsky, 1987: 83). The first, the structural description (SD) specifies the type of structure (or string, to use Chomsky's terminology) to which the RCR applies (ibid.). The second part, the

structural change (SC) specifies what changes this transformation brings about in the structure (ibid: 84). Thus, the patterns of the RCR above might be presented in the following forms respectively:

1. S D : <u>NP</u> + <u>which/ that</u> + <u>BE</u> + <u>ADJ</u>
        1   2   3   4
   S C : $\Longrightarrow$ 1 ¢ ¢ 4

2. S D: <u>NP</u> + <u>which/ that</u> + <u>BE</u> + <u>ADV. of place or time or</u>
<u>(PP)</u>   1   2   3   4

    S C : $\Longrightarrow$ 1 ¢ ¢ 4

1. S D : <u>NP</u> + <u>which/ that</u> + <u>AUX. BE</u> + <u>ING</u> +<u>V</u>
        1   2   3   4   5

    S C : $\Longrightarrow$ 1 ¢ ¢ 4 5

4. S D : <u>NP1</u> + <u>which</u> + <u>have</u> + <u>NP2</u>
       1   2   3   4

    S C : $\Longrightarrow$ 1 ¢ ¢ with   4

5. S D : <u>NP</u> + <u>which/ that</u> + <u>AUX. BE</u> + <u>EN</u> + <u>V</u>
       1   2   3   4   5

    S C : $\Longrightarrow$ 1 ¢ ¢ 4 5

The ($\Longrightarrow$) means " is transformed into " ; while (¢) refers to the deletion of a constituent in the surface

structure. For convenience in indicating changes, the constituents are numbered, thus, the numbers in (S D) indicate the order of the constituents before the RCR applies.

3.2 PRONOMINAL ADJECTIVES REDUCTION (PAR)

For a full comprehension of the nature of (PAR) as a transformation, it should be tackled within the context of other different but related transformations such as : Relativization , and RCR . For example, to produce a sentence with the following surface structure:

(1) The man who is old was once a millionaire,

Relativization should be applied, first, on its deep structure below:

(2) The man the man is old was once a millionaire.

This rule of Relativization would substitute *who* for the second occurrence of *the man* producing the surface structure of (1). But how is it possible to produce a sentence like:

(3)   The old man was once a millionaire.

The surface structure of (3) is the outcome of three transformations: First, Relativization which gives the
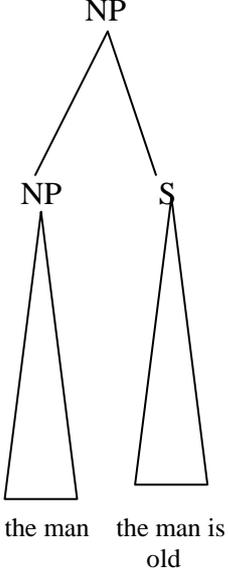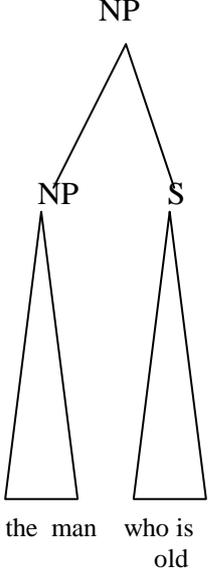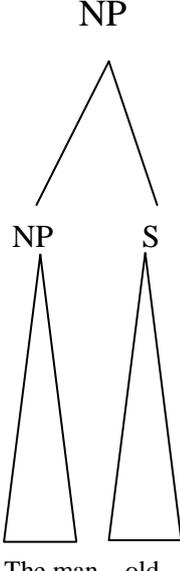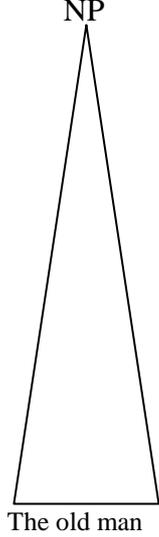
surface structure of (1); second, RCR which gives (4) below:

(4)   The *man old* was once a millionaire,

(4) is ungrammatical at the surface level. All that is needed to convert it to a grammatical surface structure is a third transformation called (Adjective Inversion), which changes the order of a sequence (Noun + Adjective)- produced by RCR- to the sequence (Adjective + Noun) (Falk, 1978: 229). The result of applying this additional transformation is the surface structure of (3) above. Figure (2) below summarizes the role of Relativization, RCR, and PAR or (Adjective Inversion) :

Figure (2)

(Taken from Falk, 1978: 229)

Deep Structure	Relativization	RCR	PAR

Accordingly, it is useful to argue that the sequence (Adjective + Noun) in English always results from an underlying sentence, embedded as a relative clause (Traugott, 1980: 160). Thus, (the old man) is the surface structure produced by applying the RCR and the PAR on the underlying structure: (The man who TENSE be old). This will delete the relative pronoun (who) and verb (to be), reordering the adjective (old) to pronominal position between the determiner and the head noun.

The PAR is one often-used transformation in "November" :

"The lonely season in lonely lands, . . ." ; "The short days . . ." ; ". . . the mantled engine . . ." ; "the brown bands. . ." ; "the striped fields" ; "The heavy rooks" ; "sharp outline" ; "the trim hedgerow" ; "purple air" ; "dead leaves" ; "The small wrens" ; "a happy note" ; . . .etc.

All the pronominal adjectives above are derived from relative clauses that have gone through deletion and reordering transformations. Thus, the (S D) for PAR is :

S D : (DET.) + NP + who/ which + TENSE + BE + ADJ.
      1   2   3   4   5   6

The (S C) is :

S C : $\implies$ 1 6 2 ¢ ¢ ¢

3.3 Place-Expression Fronting (PEF)

Throughout Robert Bridge's poem, place is fully and carefully specified by a movement transformation (fronting place expressions) which gives them a special role in the poem. PEF moves place expressions out of their normal position at the end of the underlying sentence to the beginning. This transformation takes on a significance it would not have in ordinary discourse,

since place expressions in "November" undergo an optional movement transformation.

The PEF is obviously a dominant transformation in "November" : "*Out by the ricks* the mantled engine stands", ". . . and *there* it is dawn appear", ". . . and *behind them* firk and prance", "*Above the lane* they shout . . .", "*By the trim hedgerow* bloom'd . . .", "*Where, under the thorns*, dead leaves . . .", " . . ., and *in* and *out*/ The small wrens glide", " . . . *across the sky*/ Linnets and twites, . . ."," . . . *to the gardens* fly", "*From thistle-pastures* hurrying to . . .", "And *here and there*, near chilly . . .", "*In an isolated tree* a congregation/ Of starlings . . .", " . . .,and *there* with myriads more", " . . .; and *from the unseen nation*/ A babel of tongues, . . .".
The PEF applied in the lines above might be given in the following S D:

$$S D : \underline{NP}_1 + \underline{VP}_2 + \underline{PP}_3$$

The structural change through reordering is given as :

$$S C \implies \quad 3 \ 1 \ 2$$

4. The Aesthetic Function

So far, much of formal description has been done, however, the move from formal description of styles to critical and aesthetic interpretation should be the

ultimate goal of stylistics (Short, 1996: 27). Thus, the question that should be posed, up to this point, is: What effect does Robert Bridges achieve by using such syntactic choices? And how do they contribute to the overall meaning of the poem under examination?

Robert Bridges' style in "November" shows preference for complex noun phrase structure, [(DET.) + (ADJ.) + N + (of NP)], but simple verb phrase structure consisting of only one intransitive verb, [VP → V]. "November" is a poem which is built upon a vision, a world full of possibilities, objects and processes in nature, it is a changing season, and a complex structure of noun phrase which involves modifiers might be a good syntactic device to hold for the rich description of the agricultural environment depicted in the poem.

The truncated structure of the verb phrase together with the various deletion transformations involved in RCR and PAR set the view of "November" as a time of *lacks* and *absences*: absence of others, absence of motion, absence of active life. Such a sense of absence is intimately correlated with the *syntactic absence,* so to speak, of complex constituents in the verb phrase and with the deletion of certain elements in the surface structures.

But what is the stylistic effect of PEF? This transformation heightens the reader's comprehension of place as being crucial in creating the sensation of loneliness in Autumn, it is a "lonely season" and places look "deserted" everywhere. This might be the major subject matter of the poem, and PEF conveys this effect

through a transformational reordering of sentence structure, highlighting place adverbials as being special constituents which are pushed foreword to be in the foreground rather than in the background.

5. Conclusions

The analysis carried out in this paper is by no means final, and there is no reason to risk generalization from it, and in fact full stylistic description of "November" would need to be far more elaborate than the simple sketches offered in this paper. Nevertheless, the simple analytic procedure that draws heavily on the concept of phrase-structure rules and grammatical transformations proved useful in achieving some insights into Bridges' style as a set of deliberate choices. Thus, Bridges' style in "November" shows certain preferences for linguistic choices offered by phrase-structure and transformational grammars. This tendency to choose certain phrase-structure rules and transformational processes is intimately associated with, and partly limited by, choice of subject matter.

However, the transformational choices, in "November", are more suggestive and promising than phrase-structure ones. That is why the central theme of the poem, (absence and loneliness in Autumn), is conveyed through certain transformational choices that involve syntactic deletion and reordering.

Thus, although one can not claim too much for this kind of analysis, one can not deny that Generative Grammar with Transformational Component, in the first hand, and Phrase Structure Component constitutes a potential significant tool in stylistic description, and this might help linguists to explicate the elusive notion of style as choice.

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