

The Effects of English Contractions on the Application of Syntactic Theories

Authors : Wakkai Hosanna Hussaini

Abstract : A formal structure of the English clause is composed of at least two elements – subject and verb, in structural grammar and at least one element – predicate, in systemic (functional) and generative grammars. Each of the elements can be represented by a word or group (of words). In modern English structure, very often speakers merge two words as one with the use of an apostrophe. Each of the two words can come from different elements or belong to the same element. In either case, result of the merger is called contraction. Although contractions constitute a part of modern English structure, they are considered informal in nature (more frequently used in spoken than written English) that is why they were initially viewed as constituting an evidence of language deterioration. To our knowledge, no formal syntactic theory yet has been particular on the contractions because of its deviation from the formal rules of syntax that seek to identify the elements that form a clause in English. The inconsistency between the formal rules and a contraction is established when two words representing two elements in a non-contraction are merged as one element to form a contraction. Thus the paper presents the various syntactic issues as effects arising from converting non-contracted to contracted forms. It categorizes English contractions and describes each category according to its syntactic relations (position and relationship) and morphological formation (form and content) as integral part of modern structure of English. This is a position paper as such the methodology is observational, descriptive and explanatory/analytical based on existing related literature. The inventory of English contractions contained in books on syntax forms the data from where specific examples are drawn. It is noted as conclusion that the existing syntactic theories were not originally established to account for English contractions. The paper, when published, will further expose the inadequacies of the existing syntactic theories by giving more reasons for the establishment of a more comprehensive syntactic theory for analyzing English clause/sentence structure involving contractions. The method used reveals the extent of the inadequacies in applying the three major syntactic theories: structural, systemic (functional) and generative, on the English contractions. Although no theory is without scope, shying away from the three major theories from recognizing the English contractions need to be broken because of the increasing popularity of its use in modern English structure. The paper, therefore, recommends that as use of contraction gains more popular even in formal speeches today, there is need to establish a syntactic theory to handle its patterns of syntactic relations and morphological formation.

Keywords : application, effects, English contractions, syntactic theories

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