C. T. Onions and Japan:
Influence of His Grammar on English Language Education in Japan

Hiroyuki Eto

1. Introduction

C[harles] T[albut] Onions (1873-1965) may be remembered today primarily as one of the most distinguished lexicographers in the history of English philology — particularly known as one of the four editors of *The New English Dictionary* (1884-1928). Because of his outstanding work of editing and revising dictionaries,[1] many of his other contributions, even if not totally forgotten, hardly seem to be as appropriately evaluated as they should be. Among them is his *Advanced English Syntax*, to which we must pay more attention in order to re-evaluate its status in the developmental history of English philology. Moreover, this grammar book is important for Japanese historians of English philology since it had — and still has — a profound impact on English language education in Japan. In order to review Onions' influence in Japan and consider the reasons, I compare in this brief article Onions' *Advanced English Syntax* with Itsuki Hosoe's (1884-1947) *Outline of English Syntax* with a focus on (1) the "five forms of the predicate" or the "five sentence patterns" and (2) the "equivalents."

2. Onions' Life and Academic Achievements

C. T. Onions is neither a big name among historians of linguistic science today nor a celebrity in the sphere of modern linguistics, which is why Onions' name is rarely seen in a title of a paper of linguistics journals or heard of at linguistics lectures or conferences.[2]

Needless to say, however, there is an article on Onions' life in the *DNB* (Bennet 1981), whose description presents a concise as well as detailed portrait of Onions' life and his great contribution to English philology. In addition, the obituary for Onions in *The Times* on January 12, 1965 — three days after his death — also provides his brief but well-summarized life history. According to the articles in the *DNB* and the obituary, Onions' life and his academic achievements can be characterized in terms of the following three points:

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[1] *A Shakespeare Glossary* (1911), *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (1933), and *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966).

[2] In fact, there is no entry for "C. T. Onions" in today's major linguistics reference books such as *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (1991), *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (1994). Even if we find his name in the index of linguistics dictionaries or other reference books, it is mostly referred to just in connection with the making of the *NED*.

- Onions devoted his life to the study of the English language and literature and to working with dictionaries, mostly with the *NED*;
- therefore, as mentioned above, Onions is recognized more generally as a lexicographer than as a grammarian;
- and, what is the most important for this paper, Onions' life has virtually nothing to do with Japan.

3. Onions' *Advanced English Syntax*

Compared with his contribution in English lexicography, Onions' other philological works do not draw so much attention. Except for dictionaries and glossaries, he published small pamphlets, articles, and reviews in some journals.[3] In fact, Onions did devote himself to English dictionaries and may have shared little power and enthusiasm with other realms of English philology.[4]

Among Onions' miscellaneous works, I cast a glance at his grammar book: *An Advanced*[5] *English Syntax: Based on the Principles and Requirements on the Grammatical Society* published in 1904 in the Parallel Grammar Series edited by E[duard] A[dolf] Sonnenschein (1851-1929), Onions' teacher at Mason College, Birmingham.[6]

In the introduction Onions provides a full scheme of sentence analysis. The following two main parts, which are the syntax proper, are arranged as seen in the other grammar books of the Parallel Grammar Series. In Part I he presents "a treatment of syntactical phenomena based on the analysis of sentences" (1929: iii) and in Part II he "classifies the uses of forms" (1929: iii). Onions' aim in this small grammar is in short the "sentence analysis" of present-day English and the categorization of sentence patterns based on their basic constructions.

4. Onions' English Grammar and Japan

Onions' life has practically no relationship with Japan. Probably he met some visiting scholars or students from Japan at Oxford. But, unlike the case of Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), with whom some Japanese students — later leading figures among Buddhist scholars — studied Sanskrit and comparative religion, Onions, as far as we know, had no personal contact with Japanese scholars. Nonetheless, Onions' influence on English language education in Japan was, and still is, considerable, not through Onions himself but through his small grammar book.

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[3] Cf. Onions (1948).

[4] This is very similar to the case of Henry Bradley (1845-1923), who has left just one major work, *The Making of English* (1904), except for his intensive and devoted work for the *NED*.

[5] By "Advanced" in the title of this grammar book Onions does not necessarily mean that it is for "advanced students." Regarding this adjective, he mentions in the notes to the third edition as follows: "It having come to my knowledge that the title of this grammar has been misunderstood by some foreign students, I take this opportunity of stating that 'Advanced' refers only to the place of the book in the Parallel Grammar Series and is not intended to describe the method adopted in it" (1929: vi). The main purpose of this grammar is, according to Onions, "to present the main facts of current English syntax in a systematic form in accordance with the principles of the Parallel Grammar Series" (1929: iii).

[6] This is not an only single work of his on English grammar. Onions wrote an article "Grammar" to the 1924 edition of *Chamber's Encyclopedia*.

Most Japanese students who learn English in Japan are taught the "eight parts of speech" and the "five sentence patterns" as the basic foundation of English grammar. The former is learned as the basis of morphology to grasp in a traditional way the nature and function of words in a sentence. The latter is learned, including the notion of the "elements of speech" and the "equivalents," as the basis of English sentence structure. Most Japanese teachers who teach English in Japan believe, though I admit exceptions, that these two principles are important for students to master English, particularly to gain as precisely as possible the art of reading and writing English with propriety.

The notion of the "eight parts of speech" has a long history over two thousand years in the tradition of Western linguistics, while that of the "five sentence patterns" and their constituent "equivalents" is relatively novel. They were formulated by Onions as the basic idea of his English grammar. In other words, the "five sentence patterns" and the "equivalents" constitute the distinctive features of Onions' *Advanced English Syntax*. Since they are still dominant in English teaching of high school level in present-day Japan, almost every one of us who learns and teaches English in Japan knows these two grammatical terms coined by Onions even though many — students as well as teachers — do not know the name of C. T. Onions.

5. Onions' *Advanced English Syntax* and Itsuki Hosoe's *Outline of English Syntax*

Onions' grammar has dominated in Japan since its publication some one hundred years ago. This is because *An Outline of English Syntax*, published in 1917 by Itsuki Hosoe,[7] one of the most eminent English philologists in Japan, helped to make Onions' influence prevail in Japan. Hosoe's *Outline of English Syntax* is still regarded among English scholars in Japan as the first systematic and scientific English grammar written by a Japanese scholar and subsequently became a "prototype" providing general principles for writing English grammar, especially syntax. Besides, a few scholars indicate that his fundamental idea can be seen in Onions' *Advanced English Syntax*.[8]

By comparing these two grammar books in relation to the following three items, namely, (1) the scope of grammar, (2) the five sentence patterns, and (3) the equivalents, we will find out how Hosoe was influenced by Onions.

5.1. Scope of Grammar

In the preface of his grammar, Hosoe exclaims his general philosophy of grammar and the role of grammarians:

[7] Hosoe was born and educated in Japan and gave brilliant achievements in English philology, especially in historical grammar and dialectology. He visited England for two years from 1923, but there is no record to indicate that he contacted Onions to receive his guidance.

[8] Cf., e.g., Otsuka (1953), Konishi (1967).

> 真に文法を明らかにしようとするものは、まずつぶさに言語の実情を精査し、その歴史を究め、また言語はそれを用いる人の心的状態の反映であることも忘れず、一方では理論によりこうあるのを可とすると断ずると同時に、他面ではそれに当てはまらない事実に関してもその存在を直視し、その事実を尊重し、あくまでそのよってきたるゆえんを究明すべく、いやしくも文法を説く以上は、一面では言語の正確度を高めるために良法を指示するだけの覚悟を持つと同時に、他方では言語そのものの本質と動向とを精査し、衆俗の準拠する不言の文法にも明察を加え、将来に現れようとする変遷に対しても、同情のできる地位に立つだけの用意がなくてはならない。[9] (Hosoe 1971: 14-15)

This shows the trend of ideas in English studies – or in linguistics in general – in Japan of the early 20th century. It was strongly influenced by the "scientific" methods of language study of that time, that is, historical-comparative linguistics.[10]

In addition to this historical and comparative style of language study at that time, we have to pay attention to Hosoe's attitude towards application of historical matters:

> 今われわれが研究しようとする英語はもとより近代英語、特にその最近世のものであるが、しかし過去なくして現代はあらず、現代の英語を明らかにしようとするには、しばしば過去の英語を説かなければならない。否、厳密にいうならば過去の英語から由来変遷の跡をたどらずに、英語の真相をは握しようとするのは無理である。ただし、私が本書で企てるところは、そのようにむつかしいものではなく、むしろ実際的見地に立って現代英語の正確な理解に資することにあるから、もとより歴史的考察を背景とはするものの、多く古語を語らず、説明上真にやむをえない場合、または歴史的事実を説くことが正しい理解に力強い助けを与えるような場合のほかは、なるべく中古以上にさかのぼることをしない。[11] (Hosoe 1971: 13-14,

[9] [We grammarians must in the first place observe language as such and study its history thoroughly. We must always keep in mind that speech reflects the thought of people speaking. We can correct grammar with logical rules, while we must not neglect facts outside these rules and survey their origin and development. If we wish to write a grammar, we must present reliable rules for speaking and writing with propriety and, at the same time, must study language according to its nature, consider a variety of dialects, so that we may anticipate language changes in the future.] (Translation mine: HE)

[10] Sanki Ichikawa (1886-1970), the doyen of English studies of pre- and post-war Japan, makes the same comment in his selected papers entitled *A Study of English Grammar* (1912): 要はただ文法をもって単に英語を正しく話したり書いたりする術であるとか、あるいは文法の教える規則は絶対なもので、これに違反する言い方は不正であるとかいうような見方を避けて、英語における種々の現象をそのまま言語上の事実として受け入れ、これを公平に観察し、どうしてこういう言い方が生じたかを、あるいは歴史的に上代にさかのぼって、あるいは他の国語との比較研究により、あるいは心理学の立場から、不完全ながらも説明を試みて見たいというのが本書の趣旨である。(Ichikawa 1912: v) [I do not regard grammar just as an art of speaking and writing English correctly; neither do I obey rules of grammar blindly that prescriptively judge one's English as being right or wrong. I aim in the present book at taking various phenomena of present-day English as such, observing them objectively and, even if not completely scientific, trying to explain them from a historical, comparative and psychological point of view.] (Translation mine: HE)

[11] [The target language of our study is modern English, or present-day English, to be exact. In order to understand today's English, we must often refer to its older stage since the past is a mirror of the present. More precisely, it would be impossible to grasp English as what it is today without considering the origin and development of its grammatical phenomena. Nevertheless, the aim of this book is not so much to trace English back to its ultimate origin as rather to contribute to the precise understanding of present-day English with regard to its practical use. Therefore the present author will not juxtapose unnecessary obsolete forms in OE or in ME even in the historical interpretation of English, and will not trace back the English

> underlining mine: HE)

It is interesting to compare these words with Onions' following remarks in his *Advanced English Syntax*:

> While dealing mainly with the language of the present day, I have endeavoured to make the book of use to the student of early modern English by giving an account of some notable archaic and obsolete constructions. Historical matter has been introduced wherever it was considered necessary for the understanding of important points in syntax-development or seemed to add interest to the treatment of particular constructions. (Onions 1929: v, underlining mine: HE)

Both of them mention virtually the same thing. However, this is not an original idea of Onions', but one of the trends in writing modern English grammar at that time, which is well shown in the following words by Henry Sweet (1845-1912) in his *New English Grammar*:

> As regards its scope, this grammar is strictly elementary, as far, at least, as a grammar which is scientific and historical and not purely distinctive can be said to answer to this description. It confines itself therefore as much as possible to the main grammatical phenomena and main lines of development; and being based on the language of the present time, it ignores historical details which do not bear on Present English. (Sweet 1891: x-xi, underlining mine: HE)

Onions was influenced by Sweet's grammar. He says, "Of the existing grammars which I have consulted, Dr. Sweet's has proved the most enlightening and suggestive" (Onions 1929: v). The line of Sweet-Onions continues to Hosoe.

5.2. Five Sentence Patterns

The notion of the "sentence patterns" is not an unfamiliar term in English grammar. In addition to Onions, some English grammarians present their own system of analyzing and categorizing sentences.[12] Among others, the most comprehensive and complete one of sentence analysis of the English language — though it still receives some criticism — is A[lbert] S[ydney] Hornby's (1898-1978) *Guide to Patterns and Usage in English* (1954), in which he divides English sentences into 25 groups — all together 69 categories including sub-divisions. Compared with Hornby's book, or with other major studies of English syntax, Onions' "five sentence patterns" look too simple

language beyond ME unless such a historical survey is indispensable for explaining grammatical phenomena and providing help in understanding today's English more profoundly.] (Translation and underlining mine: HE)

[12] Cf., e.g., Lowth (1762), Jespersen (1937), Palmer (1938), Fries (1952), Quirk et al. (1972).

and may, therefore, be dismissed as just “unscientific” by modern linguists.

From the pedagogical viewpoint, however, this unscientific system may be practical for non-native students in understanding the basic structure of English. Needless to say, these five forms are not enough to cover all the existing sentences of present-day English. In case we come across some exceptions, we can consider their sentence structure one by one individually and understand their meaning. In order to master the essence of English syntax, it is more useful for students to learn Onions’ five patterns which, even if not perfect, cover more than 80% of English sentences,[13] than to tackle as many as 69 different patterns. This is a matter of educational effectiveness in a classroom, not of scientific rigor. A more detailed and scientific English grammar may not necessarily be more effective or useful in English education.

Onions’ procedure to classify sentences into the “five sentence patterns” or, in his terms, the “five forms of the predicates,” is as follows:

- In the first stage, Onions analyzes the sentence into two parts: the Subject and the Predicate.[14]
- In the next stage, he categorizes the sentence according to the form of the predicate, which is why his “sentence pattern” is identical with the “forms of the predicate.”

Then the predicates are classified into five groups:

1st Form: The predicate consists of a verb alone.

2nd Form: The predicate consists of (1) a verb and (2) a predicate adjective, predicate noun, or predicate pronoun, i.e., an adjective, noun, or pronoun predicated of the subject. The second element is often called the “complement.”

3rd Form: The predicate consists of (1) a verb and (2) an object, which denotes the person or thing which the action of the verb ‘passes over.’

4th Form: The predicate consists of (1) a verb and (2) two objects (indirect object and direct object).

5th Form: The predicate consists of (1) a verb, (2) an object, and (3) a predicate adjective or predicate noun, i.e., an adjective and noun predicated of the object. We also call this the “complement,” to distinguish from that of the 2nd form, the “complement of objects.”

The peculiarity of Onions’ classification of sentences lies in, as indicated above, its simplicity. Therefore, some linguists, particularly structuralists, criticize this system for not being comprehensive and consistent, mentioning that Onions confusingly mixes up the function of words in sentences and their parts of speech.

Hosoe describes the “five sentence patterns” in almost exactly the same manner as Onions’ (Hosoe 1971: 25ff.), which is why the following tables of the “five sentence patterns” by Hosoe and Onions are very similar.

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[13] Otsuka (1953).

[14] This seems very traditional as well as modern, and is seen, e.g., in Plato’s idea of *Onoma* and *Rhema* and also in Chomsky’s NP and VP.

Hosoe (1971 [1917])

第1形式

主 部	述 部
Dogs	bark.
Stars	twinkle.
(His) father	died (yesterday).
(The) man	spoke (at last).
Someone (else)	must go (there).

第2形式

主 部	述 部	
	述 語	補 語
It	was	he.
James	has become	(a) (famous) soldier.
Mary	turned	(very) pale.
(The) man	went (away)	Dejected.
This	seems.	of importance.

第3形式

主 部	述 部	
	述 語	目 的
Cats	catch	mice.
(The) queen	recognized	(the) ambassador.
Children	should obey	(their) parents.
(Many) hands	make	(light) work.
(My) brother	is studying	(the) history (of China)

第4形式

主 部	述 部		
	述 語	間接目的	直接目的
I	gave	him	(a) book.
(His) brother	has sent	her	this.
(The) (old) man	will tell	us	(a) (funny) story
(My) father	has bought	me	(a) (new) house.
(That) lady	showed	(the) officer	(her) passport.
He	asked	(the) boy	(a) question.

第5形式

主 部	述 部		
	述 語	目 的	目的補語
Father	made	me	(a) merchant.
People	call	him	Long John.
They	elected	Mr. Wilson	president
(The) court	declared	him	guilty.
Misfortune	drove	(my) father	mad.
They	thought	it	him.

NB: 主部=subject 述部=predicate 述語=verb 補語=complement
目的=object 間接目的=indirect object 直接目的=direct object
目的補語=objective complement

Onions (1929 [1904])

First Form of the Predicate

SUBJECT	*PREDICATE*
Day	dawns
He	died
My hour	is come
The shades of night	were falling

Second Form of the Predicate

SUBJECT	*PREDICATE*	
	Verb	*Predicate Adjective or Predicate Noun or Predicate Pronoun*
Croesus	was	rich *or* a king
Many	lay	dead
I	am	he
He	became	mad
Seeing	is	believing
To err	is	human

Third Form of the Predicate

SUBJECT	*PREDICATE*	
	Verb	*Object*
Cats	catch	mice
The sea	hath	its pearls
Many hands	make	light work
Nobody	wishes	to know
He	can	tell

Fourth Form of the Predicate

SUBJECT	*PREDICATE*		
	Verb	*Two Objects*	
We	taught	the dog	tricks
I	ask	you	this question
Conscience	bids	me	speak

Fifth Form of the Predicate

SUBJECT	*PREDICATE*		
	Verb	*Object*	*Predicate Adjective or Predicate Noun*
Nothing	makes	a Stoic	angry
People	called	Duns Scotus	the Subtle Doctor
They	elected	him	Consul
He	counted	himself	a happy man
It	drove	him	mad

5.3. Equivalents

According to Onions, the elements of a sentence are the subject, the verb (or the predicate verb), the object, the complement, and the modifier. As the elements of a sentence, nouns, adjectives and adverbs play their role, not always as single words, but also sometimes as a group of words, i.e., phrases or clauses, which Onions names "equivalents."

The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar defines "equivalent" as "a linguistic unit that is equivalent in function to another (which may be specified, as *x-equivalent*)" (Chalker & Weiner 1994: 138), and says that this term was coined by Onions. In more modern grammar "noun-equivalents," for example, is replaced by such terms as *nominal, nominal group or phrase, noun group or phrase, nominal or noun clause*, and so on.[15]

Whatever the terminology is, Onions' idea of grasping a word and a group of words regarding its function in a sentence is quite useful to analyze and understand the sentence structure. In this way, learners of English, especially beginners, can start from a very simple sentence and gradually work their way up to a more complicated one. Students can understand long and complex sentences without much difficulty, realizing that both simple and complicated sentences are of the same pattern.

Regarding the term "equivalents," we may compare its definitions from both grammarians. The following explanation is from Onions:

> The Noun, the Adjective, and the Adverb may be replaced by other parts of speech doing the same work in the sentence, or by a group of words doing the work of a single part of speech.
>
> A word or group of words which replaces a Noun, an Adjective, or an Adverb is called an **Equivalent** (Noun-equivalent, Adjective-equivalent, or Adverb-equivalent).
>
> A group of words forming an Equivalent and not having a Subject and Predicate of its own is called a **Phrase**.
>
> A group of words forming an Equivalent and having Subject and Predicate of its own is called a **Subordinate Clause**. (Onions 1929: 10)

Hosoe's explanation of equivalents is as follows:

> 相当語句　文の主要素たる主語および目的は、名詞をその本体とし、同じく主要素たる補語は名詞または形容詞であるのを通則とし、従属要素たる修飾語は、形容詞もしくは副詞を常例とするが、英語では、通常他の種類に属すとされる語または語の集団が、これらの語相当の役目を勤める場合がすこぶる多い。このようなものを総称して相当語句（Equivalents）と称し、名詞の役を勤めるものを名詞相当語句（Noun-Equivalents）と名づけ、形容詞の用をなすものを形容詞相当語句（Adjective-Equivalents）と呼び、

[15] Chalker & Weiner (1994).

副詞に相当するものを副詞相当語句（Adverb-Equivalents）という。私観によればこれらに関する正確な認識は、特に現代英語のは握にきわめて肝要である[…]。[16] (Hosoe 1971: 47)

As in the case of the "Five Sentence Patterns," Hosoe's description of "equivalents" is essentially identical with Onions'.

6. Concluding Remarks

After a brief comparison between Onions' and Hosoe's grammar, focusing on their central topics of the "five sentence patterns" and the "equivalents," we realize how Hosoe was influenced by Onions' grammar. In fact, Hosoe constructed his basic design of his *Outline of Syntax* from Onions' Part I and re-constructed Onions' Part II to systematize his grammar according to the three "equivalents" as main elements of a sentence. Hosoe's grammar is not a mere copy of Onions', but we cannot deny that it is derivative. Though Hosoe does not mention Onions' name and grammar in any part of his grammar book, I would rather regard this as "strong influence," not as "plagiarism."

It is with the popularity of Hosoe's grammar that Onions' "five sentence patterns" and "equivalents" prevailed in Japan. Now that Hosoe's grammar is judged as outdated on account of its too classical example sentences from English literature, it is not any longer used in today's English classes, which are inclined more to colloquial styles. Nonetheless, Onions' "five sentence patterns" and "equivalents" — together with the "eight parts of speech" — still have a dominant power in teaching English to this very day.[17]

Grammar has two dimensions: art and science. The art of grammar — school grammar or prescriptive grammar — aims at the proper use of a language. In order to understand English and to express ourselves effectively in English, non-native speakers of English need as simple a grammar as possible for analyzing sentences to grasp their meaning. For this pedagogical purpose, Onions' "five sentence patterns" are more appropriate compared with Hornby's 69 patterns, even if the latter is more rigorous and comprehensive from a scientific viewpoint. We need a golden mean between the art and science of English grammar "shunning the Scylla of arbitrary rule on the one hand and the Charybdis of uncontrolled freedom on the other" (McKnight 1928: 398).

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[16] [Equivalents. The subjects and objects as main elements of a sentence are nouns in nature; the complements nouns or adjectives. Modifiers as sub-ordinate elements are composed mainly of adjectives and adverbs. In English a word or a group of words which replaces functionally nouns, adjectives and adverbs is called Equivalents. There are three types of Equivalents: "Noun-Equivalents" which function as nouns, "Adjective- Equivalents" which replace adjectives, and "Adverb-Equivalents" which play the role of adverbs in a sentence. In my opinion it is vitally important to grasp and distinguish these equivalents in sentences in order to analyze and understand the sentence structure of modern English correctly.] (Translation mine: HE)

[17] Most English grammar books for high school students published in Japan today begin with the "eight part of speech" and the "five sentence patters" including the notion of the "equivalents." Cf., e.g., Yamaguchi (1989), Ishiguro (1999), Nakahara (2000), Takahashi (2008).

Another reason is more historical. Up to the modern times, the foreign language for educated people of Japan to master was classical Chinese. Our forefathers traditionally focused on reading and writing it, and they spared no effort in learning how to speak such an old “dead” language for the use of communication. When they read the treasure of Chinese classics and gained its wisdom, they had to tackle sentences of classical Chinese to understand their meaning as precisely as possible. Special devices (signs and pointers) were invented to analyze classical Chinese sentences directly in Japanese syntax. Such a “habit” may continue unconsciously today, and, therefore, we are apt to analyze English sentences just as our forefathers did for classical Chinese hundreds years ago. Onions’ method is easily acquirable and may stimulate as well as satisfy this habit of analyzing sentences.

Onions may not have imagined that such a handy and brief grammar ― which he wrote at the age of 31 ― would have become so popular in Japan. But, as a matter of fact, Onions’ idea of grammar is still alive and powerful in Japan as dominant school grammar for Japanese students to learn and capture the essence of English syntax.

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