Unit 7. Basic and Derived Structures

7.1. Basic and Derived Structures

A description of English so far has been aimed at the analysis of various structures that make up the language, paying attention to notions like ‘form’ and ‘function’ i.e. CONSTITUENT STRUCTURE model of grammar. However, this approach sometimes fails to account for certain structures that we review now by introducing the notions of:

- **BASIC STRUCTURE**, which does not show application of transformation rules,
- **DERIVED STRUCTURE**, which results after rules have been applied to basic structures,
- **TRANSFORMATIONS**, which can be considered as rules that allow a clause to change its structure to a different one.

Examples of transformations are:

1. **Fronting**: \( S + P + O/C/A \rightarrow O/C/A + S + P \)
   
   e.g. 
   
   *I love syntax → Syntax I love*
   *She has a great car → What a great car she has*
   *[“I can’t read he is writing what]→I can’t read what he is writing*

2. **Inversion**: \([A + S + P → A + P + S]\)
   
   e.g. 
   
   *There stood the Commander in chief*
   *Here come the police cars*

Transformations can be:

- **Obligatory**, e.g. Fronting with a WH- element  *“I can’t read he is writing what*
- **Optional**, e.g. Fronting for emphasis

7.2. Style and Transformation

Many transformations are primarily stylistic in function, e.g. passive,

*The heavy rains have destroyed seventy houses*
*Seventy houses have been destroyed by the heavy rains*
*Seventy houses have been destroyed*
Some other transformations involving transposition of clause elements include:

a) **Cleft sentences**

The cleft sentence derives its name from the fact that a single clause is cleft into two clause-like parts, even though it is generally analysed as a single clause with 2 predicates instead of as 2 separate clauses.

- Basic structure:  
  \[ \text{John was wearing pink socks last night} \]

- Derived structures:  
  (Sj)  \[ \text{It was John that was wearing pink socks last night} \]  
  (O)  \[ \text{It was pink socks that John was wearing last night} \]  
  (A)  \[ \text{It was last night that John was wearing pink socks} \]

b) **Existential sentences**

They resemble cleft-sentences in that they are introduced by a special particle as Subject followed by TO BE. The prop subject in this case is the so-called EXISTENTIAL particle ‘THERE’ introducing a proposition of existence.

- Rule:  
  \[ \text{[S + BE + X} \rightarrow \text{There + BE + Sj + X]} \]

\[ \text{Nobody was around} \rightarrow \text{There was nobody around} \]  
\[ \text{A few people are getting promoted} \rightarrow \text{There are a few people getting promoted} \]

c) **Extraposition**

A construction in which a Nominal Clause, usually one functioning as Subject is postponed to the end of the main clause and is replaced in its basic position by the empty subject ‘IT’.

- ‘END-WEIGHT’

- Rule:  
  \[ \text{[S + P]} \rightarrow \text{[It + P + S]} \]  
  \[ \text{[S + P + C]} \rightarrow \text{[It + P + C + S]} \]  
  \[ \text{[S + P + IO + DO]} \rightarrow \text{[It + S + P + IO + DO]} \]

\[ \text{e.g. What you say to them doesn’t matter} \]  
\[ \rightarrow \text{It doesn’t matter what you say to them} \]  
\[ \text{e.g. That the dispute has been settled is encouraging} \]  
\[ \rightarrow \text{It is encouraging that the dispute has been settled} \]  
\[ \text{e.g. To move the exam causes him considerable pain} \]  
\[ \rightarrow \text{It causes him considerable pain to move the exam} \]