

A TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH TO THE QUESTION IN FRENCH



by

Aporn Bukhamana

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T. Nilawidhi  
.....  
Dean of the Graduate School

Thesis Committee Harvey G. Yates..... Chairman  
.....  
Somjai Juntadabon.....  
.....  
Somjai Patanasothre.....

Thesis Supervisor Harvey G. Yates.....  
Date Feb. 17, 1964.....

## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a structural description of the question in French. This description is provided in the form of a series of rules by means of which acceptable questions may be "generated" in French. These rules are of two types: phrase structure rules by means of which strings of morphemes are provided and transformation rules which provide the means for rewriting the morpheme strings so that acceptable questions will be the result.

The transformational theory developed by Chomsky<sup>1</sup> is used in this study. The justification for the use of this approach is that it is believed that it provides a simpler, more nearly complete, and more explicit explanation of the structure of the question in French than is provided by any other approach.

Also provided in the thesis is a chapter pointing out some of the uses that Thai teachers of French may make of the material contained herein in their teaching and in the production of teaching materials.

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<sup>1</sup>Noam Chomsky, Syntactic Structures (Mouton and Company, 'S-Gravenhage), 1957.

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## INTRODUCTION



The linguistic study presented here is a syntactic analysis of French questions. The term "French" is used in its narrow sense, that is, "basic French" based on research on spoken French conducted at the request of the French Ministry of Education by UNESCO with the collaboration of the Centre d'Etude du Français Élémentaire at l'Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud in 1947. The committee presided over by M. Marcel Abraham<sup>1</sup> with 30 other education administrators and language professors formed the special commission. The committee authorized M. G. Gougenheim to be in charge of the Centre d'Etude du Français Élémentaire which was established at l'Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud for the purpose. M. A. Sauvageot was the first to suggest the idea of investigating everyday spoken French and the method of recording conversations. M. R. Michea, another member of the committee, contributed a large part of the theory from his wide experiences in dealing with modern languages. The

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<sup>1</sup>Lists of the names and positions of the committee members may be found in *Le Français Élémentaire*, a document from the French Ministry of Education, published by Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique 29, rue d'Ulm, Paris (V<sup>e</sup>), 1955, pp. 15-18.

committee recorded 163 conversations of 16 topics on tapes. The topics were furnished by students with the help of university authorities.<sup>1</sup>

The work was completed and described by M. G. Gougenhelm, M. R. Michea, M. P. Rivenc and M. A. Sauvageot in "L'Elaboration du Français Elémentaire" Didier, Paris, 1956.

Another committee was appointed by the Ministry of Education to put what had been found in the form of a textbook. M. P. Guberina and M. P. Rivenc were in charge of this. The book, entitled "Voix et Image de France," was completed in 1958. It was copyrighted by the Centre d'Etude du Français Elémentaire. Each lesson has one topic which is based on dialogues, vocabulary and structures from the research in 1947. In the research, emphasis has been placed in terms of the frequency of occurrence of items in order to guide teachers overseas in their teaching.

This study will be based on a modern theory of grammar originally proposed by N. Chomsky of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and usually designated as the theory of grammatical transformations. Although this theory is of very recent origin, it is not unfamiliar to Thai scholars.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, pp. 7-18.

Recently Dr. Chalao Chaiyaratana and Dr. Udom Warotamasikhadit have written dissertations dealing with Thai syntax based on this linguistic theory. Dr. Chalao's work is an outline of a comparative syntactic study of Thai and English; Dr. Udom's work is on Thai syntax.

The objective of this thesis is to analyse the structure of French questions and to set up transformation rules to account for the grammatical structure of these questions. Although studies of French syntax have been made, the author is unable to find in any bibliography reference to a study of French questions using a transformational grammar approach.

The corpus of data will be from language books based on the research on spoken French described above and other similar works, such as:

Voix et Image de France, le Centre d'Étude du Français Élémentaire de l'École Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud, 1958.

G. Mauger et G. Gougenheim, Le Français Élémentaire, Débutants 1<sup>er</sup> et 2<sup>e</sup> livret, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1960.

Jean Sarment, Le Pêcheur d'Ombres, a French play in Representative Plays from the French Theatre of Today, Harvitt, D. C. Heath and Company, 1940.



The following terms are used in this study:

Utterance<sup>1</sup>: Any stretch of speech by one person before which there was silence on his part and after which there was also silence on his part.

Questions: Utterances that signal structural meaning which stimulate oral responses to the particular devices.

Question utterance: (Structural meaning) → oral response.

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<sup>1</sup>C. C. Fries, The Structure of English (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), p. 23.