Chapter 2

Grammatical Metalanguage

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to a metalanguage—a language to describe language. For many of you, the words in our metalanguage will be familiar, and you may wish only to skim this chapter. For some of you, this chapter provides an initial exposure to some common linguistic terminology, and you may need to study it more closely in order to become familiar with the new terms. Learning the vocabulary of any new language, however, takes time. Be patient. These new terms will become more meaningful as you encounter them in context throughout the book as you explore the grammatical structures of English.

Some ESL/EFL teachers choose not to use grammatical terminology with their students, feeling that it presents an additional learning burden. Other teachers find that by using the terminology, they can call their students' attention to certain aspects of English grammar more efficiently; thus, they conclude that students' time spent learning the terms is a worthwhile investment. Then, too, some teachers find that their students are more fluent in the metalinguistic terms than they are! As we stated in the previous chapter, we do not want to give the impression that knowing the terms is knowing the grammar. Nevertheless, for teachers, knowing the terms can be helpful in several respects.

First of all, the terms provide a discourse, a way of talking about grammar, that helps in the conceptualization of grammar. Use of the terms also serves a referential function, providing a means to identify these concepts when referring to them subsequently. Finally, by learning the metalinguistic terms, teachers will have better access to the many linguistic resources available to them apart from this text.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the three levels of grammar we address in this book: subsentential, sentential, and suprasentential levels. We use this ternary hierarchy in introducing the metalinguistic terminology in this chapter.

Subsentential Terminology

Three Criteria: Semantic, Structural, and Functional

It may surprise some readers to learn that even identifying standard parts of speech is an enterprise fraught with difficulty. Consider, for example, the standard definition of a noun with which many of you are familiar: "A noun is the name of a person, place or thing." This definition works for the nouns *Kevin*, *Cincinnati*, and *eraser*, but it becomes problematic when we think about a word such as *blue*. Those of you conversant with part-of-speech terms may immediately identify *blue* as an adjective since it is a descriptive word. But one could

argue that *blue* is the name of a "thing"—a color—and is, therefore, rightfully a noun. The structural or descriptive grammarians, eschewing such traditional *semantic,* or meaning-based, definitions of nouns as the one just given, chose instead to identify word classes through their *structural,* or formal, characteristics: their position in a sentence, adjacent function words, if any, and their constituents. For instance, common nouns in English typically occupy positions such as the following and are preceded by function words such as *the* or *their.*

The _____ was very amusing.
Did you notice their _____?

As for the constituents of nouns, a simple noun like *book* is a minimal unit; there is no way to break it down further. As such, we say it has one *morpheme.* A noun like *books,* on the other hand, has two morphemes, *book* and the grammatical morpheme *-s.*

There are two grammatical morphemes that can be used to mark nouns in English. Countable nouns have plural inflections to distinguish between "one" and "more than one" (*boy* vs. *boys*), and all nouns can have possessive inflections (*girl* vs. *girl's*) to signal possession or a number of other meanings (see Chapter 16). In addition to plural and possessive grammatical morphemes, English nouns often have derivational morphemes that mark nouns derived from other parts of speech (see Chapter 3). For example, adding *-ness* to the adjective *sad* gives us the noun *sadness.* There are several dozen noun derivational morphemes, although some are used only in a few words, such as *-dom* as in *kingdom* and *wisdom* (Roberts 1958), whereas others like *-ness* are frequent and productive.

Not surprisingly, relying on structural criteria for identifying nouns can create problems. Not all nouns have distinctive noun-like morphemes, and even when they do, the words don't always function as nouns; for example, *wilderness* does not function as a noun in the compound *wilderness park.* Furthermore, many of the words without distinctive morphology would also appear to belong to more than one part of speech, such as *fly* as a noun or a verb and *orange* as a noun or an adjective.

Due to the inadequacy of identifying parts of speech based upon semantic and structural criteria, a third criterion is sometimes employed. Known as a *functional* criterion, it defines a part of speech by the grammatical function it plays in a sentence. For example, from a functional perspective, a noun is a part of speech that can serve as a subject of a verb in a sentence. Thus, in the following sentence we know in part that the word *glass* is a noun because it is the subject of the verb *is.*

The glass is dirty.

The problem here is that a noun such as *glass* can precede a verb and yet not function as subject, but rather can function as an adjective without changing its form (cf. its adjective form, *glassy*) as in

The glass ashtray is dirty.

As can be seen, then, none of these definitions are complete by themselves. They all direct attention to different characteristics of nouns: their common meaning, their form/position, and their grammatical function. It is therefore better to think of a particular part of speech as being determined by a cluster of criteria. Most linguists now acknowledge that it is not simple to define even the most elemental building blocks of grammar, the parts of speech. A further complication for ESL/EFL students is that sometimes there are cross-linguistics differences in parts of speech, for example, the English adjective *tall*

has a noun equivalent in many West African languages. Some linguists would even say that categorizing a word as a noun or a verb is impossible in isolation, apart from the discourse in which it occurs (Hopper and Thompson 1984). Teachers should take heart from the observation, though, that most learners have no difficulty identifying parts of speech inductively when they have become familiar with a variety of typical examples. Ironically, it is not the recognition of a word's part of speech that appears to be problematic—it is the definition of the parts of speech that is elusive. In order to be as thorough as possible, we use all three criteria in defining the following parts of speech.

Parts of Speech

The parts of speech are usually grouped into two categories: the major and minor word classes. The major word classes—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs—are termed "major" because they carry most of the content or meaning of a sentence. Such classes are also "open" in that new words are added as they are coined. The other category, the minor word classes, plays a more structural role in a sentence and each of its classes is more "closed," in that normally no new words are added. Classes in this category include, but are not limited to, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, pronouns, determiners, and conjunctions. These words are sometimes also called "structure" words or "function" words, or even "functors." To contrast the two categories, notice the difference between the following two sentences:

With the function words (content words deleted):
The ____ *for* ____ *the* ____ *in the* ____.

With the content words (function words deleted):
___ broom ___ sweeping ___ floor belongs ___ closet.

Clearly, the central message can be grasped better when the content words are left in than when only the function words remain.

However, it is prudent to be cautious here too. As you saw just a moment ago, grammatical definitions are often not so airtight as they first seem. This observation holds here, too, in the division between the two word classes. To start with, the minor word classes do convey some meaning. Furthermore, not all the major word classes are truly open. Only certain adverbs can be added to the adverb class, namely the "manner" adverbs, which usually end in *-ly;* however, other types of adverbs are rather closed to new members. Then, too, as you have already observed, many words appear to belong to more than one category. A word like *few,* for instance, may function as a determiner (*There were few objections*) or a pronoun (*There were few*), both minor word classes. In spite of these concessions, we will retain the convenient division here and describe the major word classes first, followed by the minor ones.

Nouns

As we have already treated nouns earlier when illustrating the three criteria of defining parts of speech, much of what follows will either recapitulate or expand upon the earlier discussion. The notional, or semantic, definition of a noun is as you have seen—a noun is the name of a person, place, or thing. Some linguists add "or idea" to account for abstract nouns such as *democracy, environment,* and *life.*

As we also noted earlier, nouns have endings or derivational morphemes that formally indicate that a word is a noun; recall the *-ness* of *sadness.* They also have grammatical

morphemes or inflections for plural and possessive. In terms of their position, they are frequently preceded by determiners, such as articles.

As pointed out earlier, nouns serve functionally as subjects of verbs. They can also, however, be:

direct objects of verbs: *He watered his lawn.*
subject noun predicates:[1] *We are all learners.*
object noun predicates: *They elected Ann president.*
indirect objects of verbs: *Ann gave the people confidence.*
appositives: *Albany, capital of New York, is located on the Hudson River.*
objects of prepositions: *Troy is also located on the Hudson River.*
vocatives: *Let me tell you, my friend, grammar is just plain fun!*

Not all these labels may be familiar, but your intuitions alone should be enough to convince you of the multiple functions that nouns fulfill.

Another fact worth knowing about nouns is that there are three types. By far the most frequent in occurrence are *common nouns,* or nouns referring to a kind of person, thing, or idea. Common nouns themselves are divisible into two subcategories: *count* nouns, which take the plural inflection (e.g., *farmers*), and *mass,* or *noncount,* nouns, which don't (e.g., *air*).[2] In contrast to common nouns are *proper nouns,* or names for unique individuals or places (e.g., *Kevin; Cincinnati*). Proper nouns can be singular or plural (*Kevin Smith* vs. *the Smiths*). A small number of nouns that refer to groups are called *collective nouns.* Collective nouns seem to differ from other nouns in readily being able to take either singular or plural verb forms, depending on the interpretation given to the noun—that is, whether it is seen as a unit (*The family is together again*) or as a collection of individuals (*The family are all coming for the weekend*).

To conclude this section on nouns, we should note that gender is not an important feature of English grammar as it is in other languages. Gender is only marked in certain pairs of English nouns (e.g., *actor/actress; host/hostess; widow/widower*) and is evident in some personal pronouns such as *she* versus *he* and *him* versus *her.*

Verbs

The notional, or semantic, definition of a verb is that it is a word that denotes an action or state of being. Verb morphology in English is richer than noun morphology. Four inflections can be used with English verbs:

1. *-s* of third person singular present tense verbs: *Sue jogs every day.*
2. *-ed* of past tense verbs: *She jogged yesterday.*
3. *-en* of the past participle: *He has seen the movie three times already.*
4. *-ing* of the present participle: *I am teaching three courses this term.*

In terms of their position, verbs follow nouns and may be followed in turn by adjectives, adverbs, or other nouns, as depicted in the following sentences:

	}	_____ cautious.
The authorities	}	_____ carefully.
	}	_____ the plan.

Functionally, adding a verb to a noun is enough to complete a sentence:

Pauline snores.

We discuss a number of different semantic verb types in Chapter 7. Here we simply categorize verbs by what follows them syntactically. According to Chalker (1984), there are six types:

intransitive verbs, which take no following object: *Mavis smokes.*
transitive verbs, which require an object: *Doug raises llamas.*
ditransitive verbs, which take two objects (indirect and direct): *I handed Flo the fax.*
linking verbs, where what follows the verb relates back to the subject: *We are teachers.*
complex transitive verbs, where what follows the object relates to the object: *They considered the project a waste of time.*
prepositional verbs, which require a prepositional phrase to be complete: *Steve glanced at the headlines.*

Two qualities verbs have are tense and aspect. We devote an entire chapter to discussing these characteristics of verbs; therefore, at this point let us simply note that *tense* traditionally refers to the time of an event's occurrence (hence the present, past, or future tenses), while a typical *aspect* distinction denotes whether or not the event has occurred earlier (perfect aspect) or is still in progress (progressive aspect). To illustrate aspect, compare the following two sentences, where the *have* verb + the past participle of the first sentence signals that the action is complete and the *be* verb + the present participle of the second sentence shows the action is in progress, i.e., uncompleted:

John *has written* his term paper.
Now he *is studying* for his final exams.

To conclude our discussion of verbs, we should point out that verbs, too, are marked for number, but only with subjects in the third person singular in the present tense or with the verb *be*. In such instances, subject-verb agreement occurs, and the verb is marked to agree with the singular or plural subject noun. For example:

present tense, subject in third person singular	*be* verb agreement with subject
Josh *loves* chocolate.	I *am* surprised that you said that.
She *mows* the lawn on Saturdays.	Jack *is* making the punch.
	We *are* baking brownies.
	Lloyd *was* absent.
	They *were* frightened by the storm.

We investigate subject-verb agreement in more detail in Chapter 4.

Adjectives

The semantic definition of an adjective is that it describes or denotes the qualities of something. Adjectives commonly occur between a determiner and a noun, or after *be* or other linking verbs, although they can also follow a noun. Many adjectives have no typical form, but certain derivational morphemes are associated with adjectives, such as *-able* (like*able*), *-ish* (child*ish*), *-ful* (thought*ful*) and *-y* (lazy) (Chalker 1984).

English adjectives do not agree in number or gender with nouns as they do in some other languages; however, certain of them have inflectional morphemes for comparative and superlative forms such as *happy, happier, happiest.*

The function of adjectives is to modify or complement nouns. There are two adjective types: *attributive*, which precede nouns, and *predicative*, which follow linking verbs.

attributive: *The old bucket sprang a leak.*
predicative: *He became angry at the very thought.*

The semantic contrast between attributive and predicative adjectives is discussed in Chapter 20.

Adverbs

Adverbs modify verbs and contribute meaning of various sorts to sentences. Particularly common are adverbs of direction, location, manner, time, and frequency.

direction: *Jim pointed there.*
location: *Isabel shops locally.*
manner: *The choir sang joyfully at the ordination.*
time: *Soon Rachel will retire.*
frequency: *We visit our friends in Detroit occasionally.*

As you can see, adverbs are quite flexible in terms of their location. They can occur in a sentence finally, medially, and initially. *Manner* adverbs are the only ones with distinctive inflections; they usually take the *-ly* ending.

The primary function of adverbs is to modify verbs, as in the previous examples, but they may also modify a whole sentence, as in the following:

Fortunately, they arrived home before too much damage had been done.

Traditional grammars also distinguish adverbs of *degree,* which modify adjectives and other adverbs.

It is *too* early to plant a garden.
Ben was *very* late to school.

In our grammar, such modifiers are called *intensifiers* because they signal the degree of intensity of the following word.

Finally, we should note that many phrases and clauses can occupy the same position in a sentence as single-word adverbs and can convey the same meaning as adverbs. Due to their function in the sentence, these multiword constructions are called *adverbials.* For example:

direction: *Jim pointed at the constellation Pisces.*
location: *Isabel shops at the mall.*
manner: *The choir sang as if it was especially inspired.*
time: *Next year Rachel will retire.*
frequency: *We visit our friends in Detroit every once in a while.*

The above discussion of adverbs and adverbials concludes our survey of the major parts of speech. What follows is a more abbreviated introduction to some of the members of the minor word classes.

Pronouns

Pronouns refer to or replace nouns and noun phrases within a text (e.g., "*my aunt, she* . . .") or as direct reference to an outside situation (e.g., in response to sudden loud noise, I can say, "*What was that*?"). They occupy the same position as a noun or noun phrase does. There are many different kinds of pronouns: subject (*I, you, he, she, it, we, they*), object (*me, you, him, her, it, us, them*), reflexive (*myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, themselves*), possessive (*mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs*), demonstrative (*this, that, these, those*), and others. The forms within each category are distinguished by number, person (first, second, and third), gender, and in the case of the demonstratives, by number and proximity. (See Chapter 16 for a fuller discussion.)

Determiners

Older grammars make no special reference to determiners, incorporating them into the adjective word class. We will use the term *determiner* to refer to that special class of words that limit the nouns that follow them. Various types of words fit into this category: articles (*the, a(n)*), demonstratives (*this, that, these, those*), and possessive determiners (*my, your, his, her, its, our, their*), to cite the major ones.[3] They precede an adjective if one is present; otherwise, they are positioned directly in front of a noun.

I put *my* backpack on *the* front porch, and now I can't find it.

Prepositions

Prepositions connect words to other parts of a sentence and have a close relationship with the word that follows, which is usually a noun. Together a preposition and noun comprise a prepositional phrase. Prepositions are usually one word (*in, to, at*), but sometimes can be two or three (*out of, on top of*). Prepositions prototypically signal spatial relationships, but certain prepositions can also signal the grammatical category of *case,* which is often displayed in other languages through morphological means. Case depicts the role relationship between words. For example:

dative case: Marge gave a donation *to* charity. (The preposition *to* marks the dative ("receiver") function of *charity.*)

ablative case: The charity received a donation *from* Marge. (The preposition *from* marks the ablative ("source") function of *Marge.*)

More is said about the way in which prepositions assign case in Chapter 21.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that join. There are *coordinating conjunctions,* such as *and, but,* and *or,* which join elements that are grammatically equal. For example:

Marianne *and* Diane wrote this book.
Diane lives in Vermont, *but* Marianne lives in California.

And there are subordinating conjunctions, which we call *adverbial subordinators,* such as *because* and *although,* which join a subordinate clause to a main one:

It was hard to write a book together *because* they live so far apart.
Although Marianne and Diane live far apart, they are still friends.

We realize that we haven't defined *clause* as yet, but we will do so shortly. However, before doing so, we should briefly deal with one other grammatical concept at the subsentential level, namely *phrase.* A phrase is a group of words that function together. For example, if you were asked to divide the following sentence into phrases, you would probably not do so as follows:

The impatient/customer was acting very/cranky by the/time he was served.

Our grammatical intuitions tell us that these words grouped this way don't work together. Conversely, the following division is much more satisfying:

The impatient customer/was acting very cranky/by the time/he was served.
—or—
The impatient customer/was acting/very cranky/by the time/he was served.

In the last two versions of these sentences, the words between slash marks somehow cluster together better. If we take the last sentence as an example, we have divided it into four grammatical phrases and a clause. What makes *he was served* a clause is the presence

of a subject-verb relationship. Any construction containing a subject-verb relationship is a clause. We have already noted that a noun and a verb together are sometimes sufficient to form a sentence. What is the difference between a clause and a sentence, then? Clauses that stand independently as sentences are called independent, or main, clauses; clauses that cannot are called dependent, or subordinate, clauses. The latter are typically preceded by an adverbial subordinator. Thus, in the sentence *"Although they live far apart, they are still friends,"* the first clause is a subordinate, or dependent, clause, and the second is the main, or independent, clause.

SENTENTIAL TERMINOLOGY

SIMPLE, COMPOUND, AND COMPLEX SENTENCES

A *simple sentence,* then, contains at least one subject and one verb and can stand alone as an independent clause. Notice that in the previous example, *"they are still friends,"* could stand alone as a complete sentence, whereas the first clause, *"although they live far apart,"* would be a sentence fragment.

There are five basic simple sentence patterns in English:

subject + verb	*The building collapsed.*
subject + verb + object	*They bought a new car.*
subject + verb + indirect object + direct object	*She wrote him a letter.*
subject + verb + subject predicate	*Janet's my friend.*
subject + verb + object + object predicate	*She makes me happy.*

In contrast to a simple sentence, a *compound sentence* consists of two or more clauses of equal grammatical importance. As we saw earlier, a coordinating conjunction connects the two clauses:

He went to the party, but I stayed home.

One type of *complex sentence* contains a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. We have just considered one example describing Marianne and Diane. Here is another:

Peggy frequently calls because she wants to stay in touch.

In this sentence the main clause, *"Peggy frequently calls,"* is followed by a subordinate clause, *"because she wants to stay in touch."* As you can see in these examples, subordinate clauses are often, although not always, introduced by an adverbial subordinator.

In the second type of complex sentence, a dependent clause is embedded, or included, in an independent clause. Embedded clauses can take the place of a subject:

That he didn't want to go to the ballet was obvious. (*It* was obvious.)

or an object:

I argued *that it would be a mistake.* (I argued *my position.*)

or even of an adjective:

The person *who was responsible for the accident* fled. (The person *responsible* fled.)

Thus, when we move beyond the simple or monoclausal sentence, three processes are at work: *coordination,* or the joining of two clauses of equal grammatical stature; *subordination* of one clause to another; and *embedding,* when a dependent clause is included within a main or independent clause.

Sentence Moods

English sentences are said to display three main moods—*declarative* (sometimes called indicative), *interrogative,* and *imperative*—and two minor moods: *exclamatory* and *subjunctive.* Mood conveys the speaker's attitude toward the factual content of the sentence. For instance, the subjunctive mood can indicate a speaker's uncertainty or the hypotheticality of the propositional content, or meaning of the clause. In the following sentence, the subjunctive mood is signalled by the use of the base form of the *be* verb, rather than the inflected form *is.*

If that be so, I'll leave now.

It can also indicate that something is contrary to fact, or counterfactual, here signalled by the use of the *be* verb in its third person plural past tense form:

If I were a bird, I wouldn't eat worms.

Four of the five moods have sentence type counterparts (see below), but the subjunctive in English can be marked only by using a different form of the verb from the form ordinarily called for. Usually, the subjunctive uses either the uninflected base form or *were.*

declarative (statement sentence type): *Today is Tuesday.*
interrogative (question sentence type): *What are you going to wear to the party?*
imperative (command sentence type): *Pass the milk, please.*
exclamatory (exclamation sentence type): *What a beautiful autumn it is!*
subjunctive (here realized with the *were* form): *I wish I were going with you.*

It has been said that the three main options in the English mood system correspond to the three main communicative functions of language: telling someone something, asking someone something, and getting someone to do something (Allen and Widdowson 1975:75). We should not lose sight of the fact, however, that a sentence type does not necessarily match its function. It is possible to ask someone to do something using any of the following three types, even though the first is a more indirect way than the other two:

statement: *I am thirsty. I wonder what is in the refrigerator to drink.*
question: *Could you bring something from the refrigerator for me to drink?*
command: *Please bring me something to drink from the refrigerator.*

It should be mentioned that the three main sentence types have negative forms as well:

negative statement: *I am not thirsty.*
negative question: *Couldn't you bring me something to drink?*
negative command: *Don't bring me anything to drink.*

It is interesting to see that among these, the negative question, at least, is still capable of accomplishing the same function as its affirmative counterpart. As we will see later in the book, context will determine when affirmative and negative yes/no questions are used.

Theme/Rheme

English has a fairly fixed word order compared with many other languages; still, some variation is possible. For example:

(a) The Cub Scouts held the carwash despite the rain.
(b) The carwash was held by the Cub Scouts despite the rain.
(c) Despite the rain, the Cub Scouts held the carwash.

The question that should come to mind is this: What is the difference among these three word orders? The sentences appear to have the same propositional content, or core meaning, so what purpose does word order variation serve?

A helpful concept to draw on in answering this question is the distinction that systemic-functional linguistics, following the Prague School of Linguistics, makes between *theme* and *rheme*. According to Halliday (1985:38), the theme provides the "point of departure of the message." In (a), it is the Cub Scouts; in (b), the carwash; and in (c), the rain. In other words, the theme provides the framework for interpreting what follows. What follows is the rheme, the remainder of the message in the clause.

English, then, typically uses word order to assign the roles of theme and rheme. Since English is a grammatical subject-predicate language—that is, every English sentence is composed of two major constituents, a *subject* and a *predicate*—it is commonly the case that the subject in English will be the theme and the predicate the rheme, as in (a) and (b) (we explicate (c) later).

The Cub Scouts	held the carwash despite the rain.
The car wash	was held by the Cub Scouts despite the rain.
subject	predicate
(here the theme)	(here the rheme)

Other languages use different means for making the theme-rheme distinction. For example, Japanese and Tagalog mark the theme with special particles. In Chinese, referred to as topic-comment language (see Chapter 5), the topic establishes that with which the clause is concerned,[4] but does not necessarily correspond to a grammatical subject:[5]

My back,	it hurts.
topic	comment

Since English does not strictly forbid such word orders, in speech at any rate, and since English even has other topic-like ways of establishing the theme (e.g., *As for fundraising, I prefer bake sales to carwashes*), Chinese and Japanese speakers will need a great deal of practice with subject-predicate sequences in order to avoid overusing such structures in English (Lock 1996).

MARKEDNESS

As we have just seen, English too, can thematize something other than the subject. Such is the case with (c) above, where the adverbial prepositional phrase *despite the rain* is the theme. Linguists use the term *marked* to refer not only to such instances of thematization of nonsubjects but also to refer to any exceptions from what is very typical, very predictable. It is perhaps better to think of markedness as a continuum from structures that are unmarked, meaning that they are typical, to highly marked structures that are exceptional.

VOICE

We have not yet accounted for the difference between sentences (a) and (b) above. Both sentences have subjects that are themes; both have the same propositional content or core meaning. The difference between the two lies in their *voice*. Sentence (a) is in the active voice; sentence (b) is in the passive voice. Voice is another linguistic device that languages employ to allow for different constituents to function as themes. In the active voice the subject functions as the theme and is most often the actor or agent of some action, as *the Cub Scouts* in our example. In the passive voice, the thing acted upon by the agent—*the*

carwash—has been made the theme. There are other differences between (a) and (b) as well, and these are dealt with in detail in Chapter 18 on the passive voice. For our purposes here, it will suffice to say that the selection of the passive over the active allows the speaker or writer to thematize noun phrases other than agents.

Suprasentential Terminology

So far we have been discussing terms that are useful for describing subsentence and sentence-level phenomena. We turn now to introducing terminology that applies to the suprasentential, or discourse, level of language.

Backgrounding and Foregrounding

It has been observed that in a discourse narrative, certain sentences provide *background* information while others function in the *foreground* to carry the main storyline. What often distinguishes one from another are their verb tenses. For instance, in the following narrative, the past tense is used for the foregrounded information, the present tense for the background.

> Yesterday I went to the market. It has lots of fruit that I like. I bought several different kinds of apples. I also found that plums were in season, so I bought two pounds of them. . . .

In this bit of discourse, the forgrounded past narrative is interrupted by the second sentence with a present tense verb. This sentence provides information, here a statement about the market, that is general background information to the story.

Cohesion

Another quality of English grammar at the suprasentential level that we might illustrate with this simple narrative is the fact that texts, units of spoken or written language at the suprasentential level, have an organizational structure of their own. It is not possible to put the second sentence first in the above narrative, for example, and have it mean anything. For the most part, we can no more move sentences around in a paragraph (unless we alter them in some way) than we can move words around in a sentence without making some other modifications.

Five linguistic mechanisms that Halliday and Hasan (1976) point to in order for texts to have *cohesion* or structure at the level of discourse are the following:

reference: *The boy wanted a new bike. One day he . . .* (*he* refers back to the boy)
ellipsis: *A: Who wrote the letter?*
B: Marty. (The response *Marty* elliptically signals that Marty wrote the letter.)
substitution: *I plan to enter college next year. If I do, . . .* (*do* substitutes for *enter college*)
conjunction: *Peter needed some money. He, therefore, decided to get a job.* (*therefore* makes explicit the causal relationship between the first and second sentences)
lexical cohesion: (here through synonymy): *He was grateful for the money he had been given. He slipped the coins into his pocket and hurried down the street.* (*Coins* refer back to *money.*)

Register

Another concept that applies at the suprasentential level is *register.* We used the word *register* in this book earlier to mean the level of formality of language. While this is true enough, it is something of a simplification. According to systemic-functional linguistics

(Halliday 1994), register actually involves three variables: field, tenor, and mode. *Field* refers to the social activity in which the language is being used and what is being talked about. Field is reflected in choices of content words. *Tenor* is concerned with the roles and relationships of interlocutors. For example, one's choice of sentence type to express a request—declarative, interrogative, imperative—would be conditioned by the nature of the relationship between the person making the request and the person being asked to fulfill it. The *mode* refers to the channel of communication, whether the language is written or spoken and, with regard to the latter, whether it is face to face or more remote. Cohesive ties in a text, among other things, will be affected by mode.

GENRE

A closely aligned linguistic concept to register is *genre*. Genre, too, refers to linguistic variation. Rather than variation due to level of formality, however, the variation is due to the communicative purposes to which the language is put. For example, the language used in a scientific research paper is different from that in a recipe or a letter of recommendation. They differ in their patterns of words, structures, and voice. For instance, in the interest of leaving no room for ambiguity, a legal document is often characterized by "very long sentences containing numerous and elaborate qualifications (all those elements beginning *notwithstanding, in accordance with, without prejudice to,* etc.)" (Swales 1990:63). Teachers whose job it is to teach English for special or academic purposes know full well the challenge of teaching students the necessary patterned structure of a particular genre. It might be said that professional training (including becoming ESL/EFL teachers) involves learning to speak and write a particular genre so that one can join a particular discourse community as a full-fledged member.

GIVEN/NEW

We conclude this discussion of suprasentential features by revisiting the theme-rheme distinction, which was introduced earlier. While theme-rheme has to do with the structure of clauses, there is a close relationship between this pair and the way information is distributed among sentences in a text. A common pattern of development in written texts is to introduce new information first in the rheme of one clause and then to treat it as given information in the theme or themes of a subsequent clause(s). *Given* information is that which is assumed by the writer to be known by the reader. This assumption is made either because the given information has been previously mentioned or because it is in some way shared between the writer and reader. *New* information, on the other hand, is "newsworthy"—not something the writer can take for granted that the reader knows.

Take, for example, the first five sentences that begin the previous paragraph. The words *theme-rheme distinction* occur in the rheme of the first sentence. They are echoed in the theme of the second sentence. In the rheme of the second sentence, the notion of *texts* is introduced and mentioned again in the theme of the third sentence. In the rheme of the third sentence, the concept of given information is introduced. Given infomation is treated in the theme of the fourth sentence. In the rheme of the fourth sentence, the words *which is assumed by the writer* occur. The theme of the fifth sentence picks up on this rheme by referring to *this assumption.* In this way, the information flows from rheme to theme, from sentence to sentence, from new to given.

The tendency to place new information toward the end of a clause is called *end focus.* End focus occurs in spoken discourse as well, although speakers have other means at their disposal in speech for flagging new information. Information units in the spoken language are defined by the tone group. Each tone group has a syllable made prominent by pitch movement.

I went to the movies with LUcy.

One syllable in each tone group, the tonic syllable, functions to focus the attention of the listener. While the focus is typically at the end, it need not be.

I went to the MOvies with Lucy.

However, when the prominent syllable is in nonfinal position, one typically interprets the stress as contrastive, that is,

I went to the MOvies with Lucy. (not to the concert)

But while given/new and theme/rheme are related, they arise from a different perspective. Halliday (1985:278) puts it this way:

> The Theme is what I, the speaker, choose to take as my point of departure. The Given is what you, the listener, already know about or have accessible to you. Theme + Rheme is speaker-oriented, while Given + New is listener-oriented.
>
> But both are, of course, speaker-selected. It is the speaker who assigns both structures, mapping one on to the other to give a complete texture to the discourse and thereby relate it to its environment.

The speaker's (writer's) choices are thus predicated on what has gone before and what is to come. In this way, the structure of a single sentence both contributes to and depends on the physical context in which it occurs and the discourse around it. As you will see throughout this book, discourse and grammar have this symbiotic relationship in that grammar with lexis (words) is a resource for creating discourse, while the discourse context shapes grammar to accomplish very specific communicative goals.

Conclusion

This chapter by no means previews all the terms that you will find in this book. Its purpose is to lay a foundation upon which you can build. We regularly add terms to those we have introduced here. As we do so, we revisit what has been introduced here and provide you with opportunities to reinforce the understanding you have thus far acquired.

Exercises

Test your knowledge of what has been introduced.

1. Write an original sentence or short text that illustrates each of the following concepts. Underline and label the following pertinent word(s) in your sentence.

a. noun	**e.** pronoun	**i.** phrase/clause	**l.** coordination	**o.** genre
b. verb	**f.** determiner	**j.** subject/predicate	**m.** subordination	**p.** register
c. adjective	**g.** preposition	**k.** simple sentence	**n.** embedding	**q.** given-new
d. adverb	**h.** conjunction			

2. Identify the part of speech (noun, verb, determiner, etc.) of each word in the following sentences. Use semantic, structural, and functional criteria as necessary.
   a. John and Paul were fighting.
   b. John gave Paul a black eye.
   c. The principal sent them to his office immediately.

3. List the three major moods in English and write a sentence that corresponds to each type.
4. Illustrate the fact that a pragmatic function, such as a request, doesn't always correspond to a particular sentence type.
5. Give an original example for each of the five ways that Halliday and Hasan (1976) give to describe cohesion in discourse.
6. It is said that the theme is less important than the rheme in terms of its information-bearing status. Explain why this is so.

Test your ability to apply what you know.

7. Rearrange the sentences in the following short text. What other types of changes do you need to make to re-create the coherence of the original?

> There are only two ways to get to Culebra. One is to fly from San Juan. The other is to take a ferry from Fajardo. Unless, of course, you know someone with a boat. If you do, it will be easy.

8. Choose one of the following genres: a newscast, a newspaper article, or an advertisement in a newspaper or on the radio or television. Can you identify any special grammatical or lexical features of the genre you have chosen?
9. Discuss the following in terms of their themes:
   a. Out of nowhere came a giant blue heron.
   b. I was given a gold pen by my parents at graduation.
   c. Concerning homework, I don't believe in it.
10. It is said that language acquirers, whether acquiring their native language (Gruber 1967) or their second language (Givón 1979), go through an initial stage in which all of their utterances are of a topic-comment structure. This has been reported to be true regardless of the type of native or target language. Collect some beginning learner speech data and see if you find this to be the case as well. Consult Fuller and Gundel (1987) for some more background.

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Endnotes

1. In traditional terms, these have been called subject complements, and for the next function, object complements. However, we refer to them as *subject and object noun predicates,* reserving the term *complement* for embedded clauses of various types (see Chapter 31 on complementation).

2. Actually, nouns have more flexibility in number than this traditional distinction reveals (Reid 1991). See Chapter 4 for further discussion.

3. Here we deal with one type of determiner, core determiners. Other types are introduced in Chapter 16.

4. Although similar, theme and topic are somewhat different concepts (see Fries 1996).

5. Some languages, such as Japanese and Korean, readily use both options—subject/predicate and topic/comment.