

## 2 Discourse analysis and grammar

'All right, so far,' said the King; and he went on muttering over the verses to himself. "'We know it to be true'" – that's the jury, of course – "If she should push the matter on" – that must be the Queen – "What would become of you?" – What, indeed?'

Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter we shall start on familiar ground. Much of the discussion will use terms that are common in language teaching: *clause*, *pronoun*, *adverbial*, *conjunction*, and so on, and we shall be using them in familiar ways. But we shall attempt to relate them to a probably less familiar set of terms: *theme*, *rheme*, *reference*, *anaphoric* and so on, in order to make the link between grammar and discourse. Nothing we shall say will undermine the importance of grammar in language teaching; on the contrary, this chapter takes as a basic premise that without a command of the rich and variable resources of the grammar offered by a language such as English, the construction of natural and sophisticated discourse is impossible. But we shall be arguing that structuring the individual utterance, clause and sentence, structuring the larger units of discourse and creating textual coherence are ultimately inseparable. We shall be looking at what discourse analysts can tell us about contextualised uses of structures and grammatical items, and considering whether grammar teaching needs to broaden or shift its orientations to cover significant areas at present under-represented in grammar teaching. We begin by looking at grammatical cohesion, the surface marking of semantic links between clauses and sentences in written discourse, and between utterances and turns in speech.

### 2.2 Grammatical cohesion and textuality

Spoken and written discourses display grammatical connexions between individual clauses and utterances. For our purposes, these grammatical links can be classified under three broad types: *reference* (or *co-reference*; see Brown and Yule 1983: 192), *ellipsis/substitution*, and *conjunction*.

#### 2.2.1 Reference

Reference items in English include pronouns (e.g. *he*, *she*, *it*, *him*, *they*, etc.), demonstratives (*this*, *that*, *these*, *those*), the article *the*, and items like *such a*. A complete list is given in Halliday and Hasan (1976: 37–9).

The opening lines of a famous English novel, *Jude the Obscure*, by Thomas Hardy, show different types of reference at work:

(2.1) *The schoolmaster was leaving the village, and everybody seemed sorry. The miller at Cresscombe lent him the small white tilted cart and horse to carry his goods to the city of his destination, about twenty miles off, such a vehicle proving of quite sufficient size for the departing teacher's effects.*

The italicised items *refer*. For the text to be coherent, we assume that *him* in 'lent *him* the small white tilted cart' is *the schoolmaster* introduced earlier; likewise, *his* destination is the schoolmaster's. Referents for *him* and *his* can be confirmed by looking *back* in the text; this is called *anaphoric* reference. *Such a* also links back to *the cart* in the previous sentence. The novel opens with *the schoolmaster* leaving *the village*. Which schoolmaster? Which village? On the previous page of the novel, the two words *At Marygreen* stand alone, so we reasonably assume that *Marygreen* is the name of *the village*, and that the character is (or has been) schoolmaster of that village. We are using more than just the text here to establish referents; the author expects us to share a world with him independent of the text, with typical villages and their populations (*everybody*), their schoolmasters and millers. References to assumed, shared worlds outside of the text are *exophoric* references. Because they are not text-internal, they are not truly cohesive, but because they are an equally important part of the reader/listener's active role in creating coherence, they will be included in our general discussion of factors which contribute to 'textuality', that is, the feeling that something is a text, and not just a random collection of sentences.

Now consider this example of reference with the pronoun *they*:

(2.2) They pressed round him in ragged fashion to take their money.  
Andy, Dave, Phil, Stephen, Bob.

(Graham Swift, *The Sweet Shop Owner*, Penguin Books Limited, 1983: 13)

In this particular text, neither anaphoric nor exophoric reference supplies the identity of *they*; we have to read on, and are given their identities in the

second sentence. Where referents are withheld in this way, we can talk of *cataphoric* reference. This is a classic device for engaging the reader's attention; referents can be withheld for quite long stretches of text.

#### LOOKING BACKWARD: ANAPHORIC REFERENCE

Exercises which involve looking back in texts to find the referent of, for example, a pronoun, have long been common in first and second language teaching and testing. Usually items such as *he/she* or *them* can be decoded without major difficulty; other items such as *it* and *this* may be more troublesome because of their ability to refer to longer stretches of text and diffuse propositions not necessarily paraphrasable by any direct quotation from the text. Problems can also arise where lower-level learners are so engaged in decoding the individual utterance, clause or sentence that they lose sight of the links back to earlier ones. But evidence of *local* difficulties hindering global processing at given points in the unfolding discourse should not automatically be read as inherent difficulties with processing at the discourse level. Only if intervention at the local level fails to solve larger processing problems might we begin to consider intervention in the form of training 'discourse skills' to build up the sort of pragmatic awareness as to how references are decoded, which must, after all, be the basis of effective reading/listening in the learner's first language too. Nonetheless, there will always be cases where first language skills are lacking or undeveloped, and teachers may find themselves having to intervene to make up such shortcomings. That, however, is a problem area beyond the purview of this book.

Grammar teachers have long been aware of recurring interference factors with pronouns and reference, such as the Japanese tendency to confuse *he* and *she*, the Spanish tendency to confuse *his* and *your*, and so on, and there is not much discourse analysts can say to ease those evergreen problems. What can be (and often is not) directly taught about a system such as that of English is the different ways of referring to the discourse itself by use of items such as *it*, *this* and *that*, which do not seem to translate in a one-to-one way to other languages, even where these are closely cognate (cf. German, French, Spanish). Some examples of how reference items refer to segments of discourse follow in (2.3–5); the first is one given by Halliday and Hasan (1976: 52):

- (2.3) It rained day and night for two weeks. The basement flooded and everything was under water. *It* spilt all our calculations.

Here *it* seems to mean 'the events of two weeks', or 'the fact that it rained and flooded', that is, the situation as a whole rather than any one specified entity in that situation.

### Reader activity 1

What does *it* refer to in these short extracts: a noun phrase in the text, or a situation?

1. A pioneering 'school-based management' program in Miami-Dade County's 260 schools has also put some budget, salary and personnel decisions in the hands of local councils, composed largely of teachers. 'It's a recognition that our voices and input are important,' says junior highschool teacher Ann Colman. (*Newsweek*, 17 October 1988: 23)
2. Like the idea of deterring burglars with a big, ferocious hound – but can't stand dogs? For around £45 you can buy an automatic dog barking unit – Guard God, or the Boston Bulldog, both available by mail order from catalogues like the ones you're sent with credit card statements. You plug *it* in near the front door and its built-in microphone detects sharp noises. (*Which?* October 1988: 485)

Matters become more complicated when we look at *this* and *that* in discourse:

- (2.4) You may prefer to vent your tumble dryer permanently through a non-opening window. *This* isn't quite as neat, since the flexible hose remains visible, but *it* does save knocking a hole in the wall. (*Which?* October 1988: 502)
- (2.5) Only a handful of satellite orbits are known to be changing. Such changes are usually subtle and can be detected only by long-term observations. One exception is the orbit of Neptune's large moon Triton, which is shrinking quite rapidly. *That* is because it circles Neptune in the direction opposite to the planet's revolution, generating strong gravitational friction. (*New Scientist*, 23 January 1986: 33)

These are written examples, but speech abounds in the same choices of *it*, *this* and *that*. Surprisingly, conventional grammars do not give satisfactory descriptions of such usage (e.g. see Quirk *et al.* 1985: 868). Discourse analysts have touched upon the area (see Thavennius 1983: 167–9), and the insights of different analysts have a certain amount in common.

It is helpful, for a start, to return to the notion of discourse segments as functional units, rather than concentrating on sentences (or turns in

speech), and to see the writer/speaker as faced with a number of strategic choices as to how to relate segments to one another and how to present them to the receiver. A simple example is Linde's (1979) investigations into how people reacted when asked to describe their apartment. She observed that there were significant differences in the distribution of *it* and *that* in people's descriptions. One room or area was always a current 'focus of attention', i.e. was the entry being talked about, the *topic* of any particular moment; pronominal references to the focus of attention were almost always made with *it*, while references across different focuses of attention used *that*:

(2.6) And the living room was a very small room with two windows that wouldn't open and things like that. And *it* looked nice. *It* had a beautiful brick wall.

(2.7) You entered into a tiny little hallway and the kitchen was off *that*.

Extract (2.6) is all within one focus of attention (the living room), while (2.7) refers across from one focus (the kitchen) to another (the hallway).

This is not to say Linde's conclusions solve the whole of the discourse reference problem; it is simply to make the point that many unanswered grammatical questions can be resolved at the discourse level, and that much good discourse analysis recognises the links between discourse organisation and grammatical choice. As such, discourse-level investigations are often invaluable reading for teachers looking for answers to grammatical problems.

An example of an error in discourse reference from a non-native speaker may help us to resolve the still unconcluded issue of *it*, *this* and *that*. The writer is giving a chapter-by-chapter summary of his university dissertation, starting with the introduction:

(2.8) Introduction: It traces the developments in dialectology in recent years.  
(Author's data 1989)

English here demands '*This* traces ...' or the full noun phrase *The Introduction* repeated. Neither *it* nor *that* will do. It seems that *it* can only be used when an entity has already been marked as the focus of attention, usually by using a deictic word (such as *a*, *the*, or *my*, or *this/that*), so that versions such as (2.9–11) are acceptable:

(2.9) The introduction is lengthy: it covers 56 pages.

(2.10) This introduction is fine. It is brief and precise.

(2.11) My introduction was too short. It had to be rewritten.

We can now conclude that *it* cannot be used to refer back to an entity unless it is already the focus of attention, but *this*, as in the corrected version of

(2.8), *can* make an entity into the focus of attention and create new foci of attention as the discourse progresses. *That*, as in Linde's explanation, can be used to refer across foci of attention, and, as is suggested by (2.5), can push a proposition out of central focus and marginalise it in some way.

The discussion of this one question of discourse reference has been lengthy in order to exemplify the type of approach discourse analysts take to grammar, in that they look for patterned recurrences across different data and try to relate the separate levels of analysis in a meaningful way. Individual grammatical choices are seen as significant in the staging and organisation of the discourse as a whole, and not just as local problems to be resolved within the bounds of the capital letter and the full stop. And the same approach is valid not only for questions of reference, as we shall see when we look at word order and tense and aspect choices.

### Reader activity 2

Collect some examples of *it*, *this* and *that* used as discourse reference items after the fashion of the examples discussed in this section (any English-language newspaper should provide plenty of data). Do they fit the general conclusion drawn above as to their usage in discourse? If not, try to 'rewrite' the rule.

#### LOOKING OUTWARD: EXOPHORIC REFERENCE

We have mentioned the possibility of referring 'outward' from texts to identify the referents of reference items when backward or anaphoric reference does not supply the necessary information. Outward, or exophoric reference often directs us to the immediate context, as when someone says 'leave it on the table please' about a parcel you have for them. Sometimes, the referent is not in the immediate context but is assumed by the speaker/writer to be part of a shared world, either in terms of knowledge or experience. In English the determiners often act in this way:

(2.12) *The government* are to blame for unemployment.

(2.13) She was using one of *those strimmers* to get rid of the weeds.

It would be odd if someone replied to (2.12) with the question 'Which government?'. It is assumed by the speaker that the hearer will know which one, usually 'our government' or 'that of the country we are in / are talking about'. The same sort of exophoric reference is seen in phrases such as *the Queen*, *the Pope*, *the army*, and in sentences such as 'We always take the

car since we can just put *the* kids, *the* dog and *the* luggage into it.' A learner whose L1 has no exact equivalent to English *the* may need to have this central use of the article taught explicitly. On the other hand, speakers of languages with extended use of definite articles to cover general nouns in situations where these would not be marked as definite in English sometimes produce utterances which, to the English ear, seem to be making exophoric reference, such as 'Do you like the folk music?' when no music is to be heard (cf. 'Do you like folk music?').

Exophoric reference (especially in the press) is often to a 'world of discourse' connected with the discourse of the moment, but not directly. British popular newspaper headlines sometimes make references such as 'That dress. Queen scolds Princess Di'. Here the reader is assumed to have followed certain stories in the press, and the reference is like a long-range anaphoric one, to a text separated in time and space from the present. Native speakers often have difficulties with such references even if they have only been away from the papers and radio or television for a week or two; the foreign learner may experience even greater disorientation.

An example of a text referring to such an assumed shared world is extract (2.14), which talks of 'the entire privatisation programme'; readers are assumed to know that this refers to the British government's self-off in 1989 of the entire public water service into private hands:

(2.14) Eighty per cent of Britain's sewage works are breaking pollution laws, according to a report to be published this week.

The cost of fulfilling a government promise to clean them up will run into billions, and put *the entire privatisation programme* at risk.

(*The Observer*, 4 December 1988: 3)

Exophoric references will often be to a world shared by sender and receiver of the linguistic message, regardless of cultural background, but equally often, references will be culture-bound and outside the experiences of the language learner (e.g. British references to *the City*, *the Chancellor*, and so on). In these cases the learner will need to consult some source of encyclopaedic information or ask an informant. This aspect of language learning is a gradual familiarisation with the cultural context of L2. Language teachers and materials writers will need to monitor the degree of cultural exophoric references in texts chosen for teaching to ensure that the referential burden is not too great.

## Reader activity 3

Find exophoric references in the following extract and consider whether they are likely to create cultural difficulties for a learner of English.

## King trial jury adjourns with transcript

Dennis Johnson

THE JURY in the trial of three people accused of conspiring to murder the Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr Tom King, adjourned last night after more than seven hours' deliberation.

They spent the night within Winchester crown court buildings, where the trial is taking place. Five hours after they retired to consider their verdict, the judge recalled them to answer a question they had put to him in a note.

That question was "Can we convict if we think the information

collecting was for several purposes, or does the one whole aim have to be murder?"

The judge said the Crown had to prove an agreement to murder so that the jury was sure. It was not sufficient to prove it as a possibility or probability, but it must be proved beyond reasonable doubt.

(from *The Guardian*, 27 October 1988, p. 20)

Exophoric reference directs the receiver 'out of' the text and into an assumed shared world. This idea of a *shared world* overlaps with the idea of a shared world built up by sender and receiver as any discourse unfolds and for this reason, some linguists see no real distinction between anaphoric and exophoric reference (e.g. Brown and Yule 1983: 201), since both proceed on the basis of an assumption by the sender that the receiver is, at any point in time, availed of all the knowledge necessary to decode any reference items. But for practical purposes the distinction may be a useful one to retain as it enables us to evaluate to what extent any discourse is self-contained, supplying its referents internally, or to what extent it depends heavily on external, culture-specific real-world referents.

### LOOKING FORWARD: CATAPHORIC REFERENCE

Consider these opening lines of a news article:

(2.15)

She claims Leo Tolstoy as a distant cousin. Her grandfather was Alexei Tolstoy – the famous 'Red Count' who sided with Lenin's revolutionaries. Now, Taryana Tolstaya has put pen to paper, in her case to demonstrate that someone from the family can write compactly. In her stories of ten to twelve typewritten pages, '1

somehow try to show the whole life of a person from birth to death,' she says.

(*Newsweek*, 21 September 1987: 12)

We do not establish who *she* is until the second sentence. Forward-looking or cataphoric reference of this kind often involves pronouns but it can involve other reference items too, such as the definite article:

(2.16)

The trip would hardly have been noteworthy, except for the man who made it. In mid-July a powerful American financier flew to Mexico City for a series of talks with high-level government officials, including President Miguel de la Madrid and his finance minister, Gustavo Petricoli.

(*Newsweek*, 21 September 1987: 44)

Both examples of cataphoric reference were found in the same issue of *Newsweek*, which underlines the most characteristic function of cataphoric reference: to engage and hold the reader's attention with a 'read on and find out' message. In news stories and in literature, examples of cataphoric reference are often found in the opening sentences of the text.

### Reader activity 4

Identify the cataphoric reference item and its referent in this extract:

It has often been compared to New Orleans's Mardi Gras as an outdoor celebration. Certainly New York's Mulberry Street and surrounding blocks have been as crowded over the last few days as Royal and Bourbon Streets in the French Quarter are for the Mardi Gras. More than three million people are estimated to have celebrated the 61st annual Feast of the San Gennaro down in Greenwich Village since it began on Thursday.

(*The Guardian*, 15 September 1987: 23)

Cataphoric reference is the reverse of anaphoric reference and is relatively straightforward, but language learners may lack awareness or confidence to put it into use in constructing texts, and may need to have the feature explicitly taught or exercised. There is, too, the danger of its overuse or its use in unnatural contexts. As always, it is a question of training the learner to observe features of language above sentence level where these might not necessarily be automatically transferred from L1, especially since, in English, reference often involves the definite article and demonstratives, which do not translate easily into many other languages.

### 2.2.2 Ellipsis and substitution

Ellipsis is the omission of elements normally required by the grammar which the speaker/writer assumes are obvious from the context and therefore need not be raised. This is not to say that every utterance which is not fully explicit is elliptical; most messages require some input from the context to make sense of them. Ellipsis is distinguished by the *structure* having some 'missing' element. If two people have to stack and label a pile of items and one says to the other 'you label and I'll stack', the fact that *label* and *stack* are usually transitive verbs requiring an object in the surface structure is suspended because the context 'supplies' the object. Another way of saying this is, of course, that structures are only fully realised when they need to be, and that ellipsis is a speaker choice made on a pragmatic assessment of the situation, not a compulsory feature when two clauses are joined together.

We shall concentrate here on the type of ellipsis where the 'missing' element is retrievable verbatim from the surrounding text, rather in the way that anaphoric and cataphoric references are, as opposed to exophoric references. For example:

(2.17) The children will carry the small boxes, the adults the large ones.

where 'will carry' is supplied from the first clause to the second. This type of main-verb ellipsis is anaphoric; in English we would not expect:

(2.18) \*The children the small boxes, the adults will carry the large ones.

though some kind of analogous structure does seem possible in Japanese (see Hinds 1982: 19 and 48). Ellipsis as a notion is probably a universal feature of languages, but the grammatical options which realise it in discourse may vary markedly. For instance, English *does* have the kind of cataphoric ellipsis suggested by our rejected example (2.18), but usually only in front-placed subordinate clauses (see Quirk *et al.* 1985: 895):

(2.19) If you could, I'd like you to be back here at five thirty.

English has broadly three types of ellipsis: nominal, verbal and clausal. Nominal ellipsis often involves omission of a noun headword:

(2.20) Nelly liked the green tiles; myself I preferred the blue.

The Romance and Germanic languages have this kind of nominal ellipsis and it should not present great difficulties to speakers of those languages learning English.

Ellipsis within the verbal group may cause greater problems. Two very common types of verbal-group ellipsis are what Thomas (1987) calls *echoing* and *auxiliary contrasting*. Echoing repeats an element from the verbal group:

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- (2.21) A: *Will* anyone be waiting?  
B: Jim *will*, I should think.

Contrasting is when the auxiliary changes:

- (2.22) A: *Has* she remarried?  
B: No, but she *will* one day, I'm sure.

Thomas also makes the point that in English, varying degrees of ellipsis are possible within the same verbal group:

- (2.23) A: Should any one have been told?  
B: John | should.  
| should have been.

These variants are not directly translatable to other languages and will have to be learnt.

With clausal ellipsis in English, individual clause elements may be omitted; especially common are subject-pronoun omissions ('doesn't matter', 'hope so', 'sorry, can't help you', etc.). Whole stretches of clausal components may also be omitted:

- (2.24) He said he would take early retirement as soon as he could and he has.

For this type of sentence, many languages will require at the very least some kind of substitute for the main verb and an object pronoun such as to produce a form roughly equivalent to 'He said he would take early retirement as soon as he could and he *has done it*'.

Ellipsis not only creates difficulties in learning what structural omissions are permissible, but also does not seem to be readily used even by proficient learners in situations where native speakers naturally resort to it (see Scarcella and Brunak 1981).

## Reader activity 5

Identify examples of ellipsis in these extracts:

1. Most students start each term with an award cheque. But by the time accommodation and food are paid for, books are bought, trips taken home and a bit of social life lived, it usually looks pretty emaciated.

(Advertisement for Barclays Bank, *University of Birmingham Bulletin*, 5 December 1988: 5)

2. 'You like watching children . . . ?' her tone seemed to say: 'You're like a child yourself.'  
'Yes. Don't you?' His check was full of cheese sandwich. She

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didn't answer; only looked at the swings with anxiety.  
'I sometimes wish,' he said, trying hard to empty his mouth, 'I could join in myself.'  
'But you wouldn't?'  
'Why not?'

He saw the sudden challenge in her eyes. And was that a smile somewhere in that held-aloft face?

'Well, if you feel that way . . . ?'  
'— why don't you?'  
'Why don't I?'

(Graham Swift, *The Sweet Shop Owner*, Penguin Books Limited, 1986: 27)

Other aspects of ellipsis that are difficult for learners occur in the area where ellipsis overlaps with what is often treated under the *grammar of coordination* (e.g. 'goats' milk and (goats') cheese', 'he fired and (he) missed the target', etc.). Once again, specific rules of realisation may not overlap between languages.

Substitution is similar to ellipsis, in that, in English, it operates either at nominal, verbal or clausal level. The items commonly used for substitution in English are:

*One(s)*: I offered him a seat. He said he didn't want one.

*Do*: Did Mary take that letter? She might have done.

*So/not*: Do you need a lift? If so, wait for me; if not, I'll see you there.

*Same*: She chose the roast duck; I chose the same.

Most learners practise and drill these items in sentence-level grammar exercises. They are not easily and directly translatable to other languages. Many common, everyday substitutions tend to be learnt idiomatically (e.g. responses such as 'I think/hope so'). While it is easy to formulate basic rules for substitution, at more advanced levels of usage, subtleties emerge that may be more difficult to explain and present. For example, there are restrictions on reduced forms which might otherwise cause stress to fall on the substitute *do*, which is normally never prominent when it stands alone, as opposed to auxiliary *do* in ellipsis, which can be stressed (e.g. 'Did you win?' 'Yes, I DID!').

- (2.25) A: Will you unlock the gate?  
B: I HAVE done already.

\* I've DONE already.

Where the speaker does wish to give prominence to the substitute *do*, then so is used as well:

- (2.26) I went to lock the gate. When I got there, I found somebody had already DONE so.

Our examples of ellipsis and substitution have included a number of spoken exchanges. This is because ellipsis and substitution assume a lot from the context; they proceed on the basis that omitted and substituted elements are easily recoverable, and are therefore natural in speech situations where a high degree of contextual support is available. We shall return to them briefly in section 5.9, when we discuss what constitutes natural speech.

It is sometimes difficult to separate the various types of cohesion, and it may seem questionable at times why linguists separate such words as the pronoun *it* and the substitute *one*. There are reasons for such categorisations: for example, substitutes can be modified ('a red one', 'the one in the corner') and as such are true substitution, while pronouns, unable to be modified in this way, (\*'a red it', \*'the it in the corner') *co-refer* but do not really *substitute* for noun phrases. However, in language teaching, there may be good reasons to bring different categories together, for instance, to contrast backward reference to an indefinite antecedent ('Do you need a pencil? Yes, I need one.') with reference to a definite antecedent ('Do you need the pencil? Yes, I need it.').

### Reader activity 6

The sentence below occurred in a letter of reference for someone applying for a job, written by a non-native speaker. What mistake has the writer made, and what explanation might a language teacher offer to help the writer avoid the error in future?

If you require further information on the applicant, I would be pleased to do so.

(Author's data 1989)

### 2.2.3 Conjunction

We include conjunction here in our discussion of grammatical contributions to textuality even though it is somewhat different from reference, ellipsis and substitution. A conjunction does not set off a search backward or forward for its referent, but it does presuppose a textual sequence, and signals a relationship between segments of the discourse.

Discourse analysts ask the same sorts of questions about conjunctions as they do about other grammatical items: what roles do they play in creating discourse, do the categories and realisations differ from language to

language, how are they distributed in speech and writing, what restrictions on their use are there which are not reflected purely through sentence analysis, and what features of their use are inadequately explicated in conventional grammars?

In fact it is not at all easy to list definitively all the items that perform the conjunctive role in English. Single-word conjunctions merge into phrasal and clausal ones, and there is often little difference between the linking of two clauses by a single-word conjunction, a phrasal one, or a lexical item somewhere else in the clause, a fact Winter (1977) has pointed out. For example, (2.27–30) signal the cause–consequence relation in several ways:

- (2.27) He was insensitive to the group's needs. *Consequently* there was a lot of bad feeling. (single word conjunction)
- (2.28) He was insensitive to the group's needs. *As a consequence* there was a lot of bad feeling. (adverbial phrase as conjunction)
- (2.29) *As a consequence* of his insensitivity to the group's needs, there was a lot of bad feeling. (adverbial phrase plus nominalisation)
- (2.30) The bad feeling was *a consequence* of his insensitivity to the group's needs. (lexical item within the predicate of the clause)

There are clearly differences in the way the speaker/writer has decided to package the information here. Note how (2.29) and (2.30) enable the information to be presented as one sentence, and how (2.30) enables the front-placing of 'bad feeling', a feature we shall return to in section 2.3 below. A true discourse grammar would examine the options for using 'X is a consequence of Y', as opposed to 'Y occurred; as a consequence, X occurred'. We would almost certainly find ourselves in the realm of information structure and the speaker/writer's assessment of what needed to be brought into focus at what point, and so on (see the discussion of theme and theme below).

Halliday (1985: 302–9) offers a scheme for the classification of conjunctive relations and includes phrasal types as well as single-word everyday items such as *and*, *but*, *or*, etc. Here is a simplified list based on Halliday's three category headings of *elaboration*, *extension* and *enhancement*:

Type	Sub-types	Examples
elaboration	apposition clarification	in other words or rather
extension	addition variation	and/but alternatively
enhancement	spatio-temporal causal-conditional	there/previously consequently/in that case

The full list appears in Halliday (1985: 306), and contains over forty conjunctive items; even that is not exhaustive. So the task for the language teacher is not a small one. However, when we look at natural data, especially spoken, we see that a few conjunctions (*and*, *but*, *so*, and *then*) are overwhelmingly frequent. We can also observe the wide use of *and*, where the reader/listener can supply additive, adversative, causal and temporal meanings, depending on contextual information, as in (2.31–34):

- (2.31) She's intelligent. And she's very reliable. (additive)  
 (2.32) I've lived here ten years and I've never heard of that pub.  
 (adversative: *but* could substitute)  
 (2.33) He fell in the river and caught a chill. (causal)  
 (2.34) I got up and made my breakfast. (temporal sequence)

Equally, the possible choices of conjunction will often overlap in meaning, with little overall difference:

- (2.35) A: What about this meeting then?  
 B: I may go, and I may not; it all depends.  
 or  
 but  
 though  
 then

### Reader activity 7

Look at the text on the opposite page and find conjunctions linking sentences to one another. Using the simplified categorisation below, based on Halliday and Hasan (1976), can you say what type of conjunctive relation is being signalled in each case?

Categories:

1. Additive (e.g. *and*, *in addition*)
2. Adversative (e.g. *but*, *however*)
3. Causal (e.g. *because*, *consequently*)
4. Temporal (e.g. *then*, *subsequently*)

Wind power. Wave power. Solar power. Tidal power.

Whilst their use will increase they are unlikely to be able to provide large amounts of economic electricity. Generally, the cost of harnessing their power is huge.

However, there is a more practical, reliable and economical way of ensuring electricity for the future.

And that is through nuclear energy.

It's not a new idea, of course. We've been using nuclear electricity for the last 30 years.

In fact, it now accounts for around 20% of Britain's electricity production. And it's one of the cheapest and safest ways to produce electricity we know for the future.

What's more, world supplies of uranium are estimated to last for hundreds of years, which will give us more than enough time to develop alternatives if we need to.

So, while some people might not care about their children's future. We do.

(Advertisement for British Nuclear Forum from *The Guardian*, 7 October 1988, p. 17)

When we look at a lot of natural spoken data, we find the basic conjunctions *and*, *but*, *so* and *then* much in evidence, and used not just to link individual utterances within turns, but often at the beginning of turns, linking one speaker's turn with another speaker's, or linking back to an earlier turn of the current speaker, or else marking a shift in topic or sub-topic (often with *but*). In this sense, the conjunctions are better thought of as *discourse markers*, in that they organise and 'manage' quite extended stretches of discourse.

An interesting example of differences in data comes from Hilsdon (1988). She compared spoken discourse of adult native speakers, young native speakers and Zambian young adult learners of English, and found in her Zambian subjects almost a complete absence of the use of *and* and *but* in the characteristic ways we have just described that native speakers use them. The reasons for this otherwise very common feature of spoken discourse in her Zambian data may be cultural, Hilsdon suggests.

*Because* is very frequent in spoken English, not just to express the cause-effect relationship, but also to express the reason relationship and as a speech-act marker signalling a 'this is why I am saying this' function, as in remarks such as 'this one's better quality, because we'll have to get one that will last', where the quality of the item being discussed is not an effect of the speaker's need to buy durable goods, but is simply a justification for making the remark. Firth (1988) made a study of the distribution of such 'reason' markers in the speech of a mixed native and non-native speaker group. He found that the non-native speakers exclusively used *because* to signal the reason/justification relation, while the native speakers varied the



signal, using *because*, 'cos, like and see, as in this extract from a conversation about smoking in public places:

- (2.36) A: Once you start infringing upon the benefits of the other people, that's when your personal right is lost . . . just like, y'know, you have rights but yet y'know you can't kill anybody . . . because obviously it's infringing upon somebody else's rights . . . you don't need a majority for something to go wrong, you only need a small minority . . . see, that's where I mean that's just not right . . . 'cos smoke just fills the room.

(Firth 1988)

Differences in performance data of these kinds are often the reason why even quite advanced-learner output can seem unnatural. One of the major contributions of discourse analysis has been to emphasise the analysis of real data, and the significance in communicative terms of small words such as common everyday markers. In previous linguistic approaches these were too often dismissed as unimportant features of 'performance' which distracted from the business of describing underlying 'competence'.

### Reader activity 8

Consider the following conversational extract from the point of view of the use of common, everyday conjunctions. What roles do they play in organising and managing the discourse?

(A and B have been recounting a series of stories to C about getting lost while driving.)

- A: And another time, I forget where the village was, but there was a sharp turn at the end of this village, and we says to him 'You turn left here', so he turned left, into a school yard.  
 B: Up a road into a school yard . . . [they were all following me.  
 A: [It wasn't so bad that, but they all followed behind us you see.  
 B: Them that were behind me followed me.  
 C: Yeah.  
 B: See I should have gone on another [twenty yards.  
 A: [But it was getting back into the traffic stream that was the difficulty.  
 B: I should have gone a few yards further on and then turned left.  
 C: Aye, aye.  
 B: There's a T-road.  
 A: Oh.  
 B: And you see with them saying 'turn left'.  
 C: Yeah (laughs).  
 (Author's data 1989)

In this section we have considered devices under a general heading of grammatical cohesion and textuality. Other grammatical choices at the clause level have implications for the organisation of the overall discourse, not least the *ordering* of elements in clauses and sentences, and it is to this we now turn.

### 2.3 Theme and rheme

Most learners, when learning the grammar of a foreign language, spend time assimilating the structure of clauses in that language, i.e. where subjects, objects and adverbials are placed in relation to the verb, and what options are available for rearranging the most typical sequences. Discourse analysts are interested in the implications of these different structural options for the creation of text, and, as always, it is from the examination of natural data that patterns of use are seen to emerge. Some of the structural options frequently found in natural data are ignored or underplayed in language teaching (especially those found in spoken data, which are often dismissed as degraded or bad 'style'), probably owing to the continued dominance of standards taken from the written code. If the desire is to be faithful to data, grammar teaching may have to reorient some of its structural descriptions, while others already dealt with in sentence-level exercises may be adequately covered in traditional teaching and simply adjusted to discourse-oriented approaches.

English is what is often called an 'SVO' language, in that the declarative clause requires a verb at its centre, a subject before it and any object after it. This is simply a labelling device which enables comparisons to be made with declarative realisations in different languages, some of which will be 'VSO' or 'SOV' languages. This pattern is often recast in English, not least in interrogative structures, where the verbal group is split by the subject ('Does she like cars?'), and in cases where the object is brought forward:

- (2.37) *The Guardian*, Joyce reads. OSV *Object-fronted*

There are in English a variety of ways in which the basic clause elements of *subject*, *verb*, *complement/object*, *adverbial* can be rearranged by putting different elements at the *beginning* of the clause, as illustrated in (2.37) to (2.42). These ways of bringing different elements to the front are called *fronting devices*.

- (2.38) Sometimes Joyce reads *The Guardian*.

ASVO *Adverbial-fronted*

- (2.39) It's *The Guardian* Joyce reads.

It + be + C/O + SV *It-theme*, or *delft* (*The Guardian* here seems to operate simultaneously as complement of *is* and as object of *reads*)

## 2 Discourse analysis and grammar

- (2.40) What Joyce reads is *The Guardian*.  
Wh- + SV + be + C/O Wh-pseudo-cleft
- (2.41) She reads *The Guardian*, Joyce.  
S(pronoun) VO(S(noun)) Right-displaced subject
- (2.42) Joyce, she reads *The Guardian*.  
S(noun) S(pronoun) VO Left-displaced subject

Structures such as (2.41) and (2.42) are far from infrequent in spoken data, but are often, for no obvious reason, not presented in books claiming to describe grammatical options for the learner. Other variations of word order are also present in data, though some types may be rarer (e.g. complement-fronting: 'rich they may be, but I don't think they're happy'). If we look again at our examples from the point of view of how the information in them is presented, we can see how different options enable us to focus on or highlight certain elements: (2.37) seems to be saying something 'about' *The Guardian* rather than 'about' Joyce; (2.41) and (2.42) seem to be telling us something 'about' Joyce. This 'aboutness' is the sort of notion discourse analysis are concerned with, for it is a speaker/writer choice made independently of the propositional content of the message; the speaker/writer decides how to 'stage' the information, where to start, so to speak, in presenting the message.

In English, what we decide to bring to the *front* of the clause (by whatever means) is a signal of what is to be understood as the *framework* within which what we want to say is to be understood. The rest of the clause can then be seen as transmitting 'what we want to say within this framework'. Items brought to front-place in this way we shall call the *themes* (or *topics*) of their clauses. In what has been called the Prague School of linguistics, the relationship of the theme to the rest of the sentence is viewed as part of *communicative dynamism*, that is the assessment of the extent to which each element contributes to the development of the communication (see Firbas 1972). Alternatively, the theme can be seen as the 'point of departure' of the message (Halliday 1985: 38). For the moment, we shall take as the theme of a clause the subject noun-phrase, or, if this is not initial, then we shall include whatever comes before it. It seems that first position in the clause is important in many of the world's languages, and that creating a theme in the clause is a universal feature, though its realisations may vary from language to language.

### Reader activity 9

Check that you are familiar with the devices for varying word order listed above in examples (2.37–42) by subjecting these two sentences to as many of them as possible (an example is given):

## 2.3 Theme and rheme

- Bob takes the children out every Saturday.  
Example: Bob, he takes the children out every Saturday. (left displacement)
- The gardener wants to cut down those bushes this spring.

We now turn to the relationship between these in-clause structures and the construction of text. There are clearly restrictions on where and when these devices may be used when they occur in real discourse. Both (2.43) and (2.44) sound odd:

(2.43) Q: What time did you leave the building?

A: What I did at five thirty was leave the building.

(2.44)

Dear Joan,

Me, I'm sitting here at my desk writing to you. What's outside my window is a big lawn surrounded by trees and it's a flower bed that's in the middle of the lawn. When it was full of daffodils and tulips was in the spring. Here you'd love it. It's you who must come and stay sometime; what we've got is plenty of room.

Love, Sally

(2.43) is peculiar because 'leaving the building' is already 'given' in the question; it is therefore odd that it should be 'announced' again in the answer. (2.44) contains a string of grammatically well-formed sentences but it is highly unlikely that such a welter of low-frequency clause patterns would occur in one small piece of text. Moreover, it sounds as if the postcard writer is answering questions nobody has actually ever asked, such as 'Isn't it a pond that's in the middle of the lawn?' 'No, it's a flower bed that's . . .', or else implicit contrasts are being suggested without any apparent motivation: 'here you'd love it', as opposed to 'somewhere where you might hate it'. Let us try getting rid of all the fronting devices and rewriting our postcard with subjects initial in every clause:

(2.45)

Dear Joan,

I'm sitting here at my desk writing to you. A big lawn surrounded by trees is outside my window and a flower bed is in the middle of the lawn. It was full of daffodils and tulips in the spring. You'd love it here. You must come and stay sometime; we've got plenty of room.

Love, Sally

We probably now feel that the text is bland, a sort of flat landscape in which each bit of information is doled out without any overall sense of direction or organisation, and with equal weight given to all the elements of the message. Language teachers might recognise in this jejune version some of the characteristics of low-level learners' early attempts at letter- or

essay-writing, hampered by impoverished grammatical resources, or the lack of confidence to transfer features from L1. What is missing from our postcard are strategic decisions to 'stage' the information and to put it into a discourse framework with the foregrounding of certain elements, such as is found in natural discourse. A third version, with discriminating use of fronting, seems more natural:

- (2.46) Dear Joan,  
I'm sitting here at my desk writing to you. Outside my window is a big lawn surrounded by trees, and in the middle of the lawn is a flower bed. It was full of daffodils and tulips in the spring. You'd love it here. You must come and stay sometime; we've got plenty of room.

Love, Sally

In any spatial description of this kind, spatial orientation of the reader/listener is important, and writers/speakers naturally give prominence to this function. The second sentence in (2.46) does this by front-placing location adverbials. The remaining sentences are neutral, with subjects in initial position. Linde and Labov's (1975) data of people describing their apartments also contain frequent front-placings of spatial adverbials, revealing the speakers' staging strategies.

In spoken narratives and anecdotes, speakers will often front-place key orientational features for their listeners. These are most obviously time and place markers ('once upon a time', 'one day', 'then, suddenly', 'at the corner', 'not far from here', etc.), but may also be foregrounding of key participants and information about them felt to be important for the listener. This is particularly noticeable in left-displaced structures, which are extremely common when a participant is being made the focus of attention as a main actor in the subsequent discourse, as in these extracts:

- (The extracts are from anecdotes about coincidences and from ghost stories.)
- (2.47) And the fellow who rang up from Spain that night, he's coincidence-prone . . .
- (2.48) That couple that we know in Portsmouth, I don't hear of her for months, and then, . . .  
(Author's data 1989)

But another version of left-displacement is also common: when one participant is mentioned in the theme-slot, but only to provide a link with a new participant who will take the stage in the story (see (2.49) and (2.50)). The speaker can thus create a new topic or sub-topic framework, by activating different elements of the context, and using the theme-slot as one way of making a subject what we have called the 'focus of attention', the particular topic being addressed at any one time. Here are some examples from data:

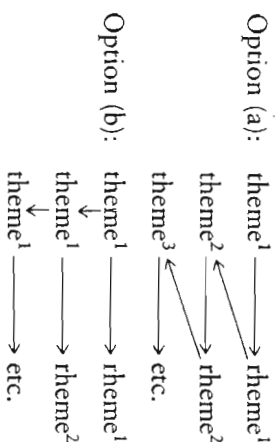
- (2.49) One of the men, his wife was a swimming instructor, and she said to me . . .

- (2.50) This friend of mine, her son was in hospital, and he'd had a serious accident, and he . . .  
(Author's data 1989)

Concentrating on the themes (or topics) of clauses does not tell us much about the rest of the clause, which may be called the *rheme* or *comment* of the clause. In fact, when we look at themes and rhemes together in connected text, we see further patterns emerging. We can divide our postcard text into themes and rhemes:

- |                              |  |                             |
|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| <i>theme (topic)</i>         |  | <i>rheme (comment)</i>      |
| 1. I                         |  | 'm sitting here . . .       |
| 2. Outside my window         |  | is a big lawn . . .         |
| 3. In the middle of the lawn |  | is a flower bed.            |
| 4. This bed                  |  | was full of daffodils . . . |
| 5. You                       |  | 'd love it here.            |
| 6. You                       |  | must come and stay;         |
| 7. We                        |  | 've got plenty of room.     |

Two different options can be seen to be realised here: (a) the *rheme* of sentence 3 contains an element (the flower bed) which becomes the *theme* of sentence 4; (b) the *theme* of sentence 5 is the same as the theme of sentence 6. These two textual options may be expressed thus:



We can see these options at work in real texts:

- (2.51) As you will no doubt have been told, we have our own *photographic club* and *darkroom*. *The club* is called 'Monomano' and there is an annual fee of £5. *The money* goes towards replacing any equipment worn out by use, or purchasing new equipment. Monomano runs an annual *competition* with prizes, judging being done and prizes awarded at the garden party in the summer term. Besides *the competition*, we also have talks and/or film shows during the other terms.

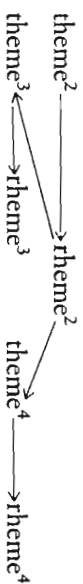
(Advertisement for student camera club; author's data)

Extract (2.51) reflects option (a) quite strongly, where elements of rhemes become themes of subsequent sentences (relevant items are in italics). The next extract chooses predominantly option (b):

- (2.52)
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>I am</b><br>Claudia Cassaigne<br><b>I live</b><br>rue Martel, Paris<br><b>I work</b><br>in the centre of Paris<br><b>I like</b><br>Classical ballet<br>English humour<br>Cooking Chinese food<br>Drinking Champagne<br>Keep fit exercises<br>Tall men with green eyes<br>Dressing up in the evening | <b>I hate</b><br>Being badly dressed<br>Being broke<br><b>My perfume is</b><br>Feminine<br>Light<br>Very chic<br>For the evenings<br>Cavale. C'est Moi |
|--|--|

(from *Cosmopolitan*, September 1985, p. 5)

Looking back at the camera club text, we see that sentences 2, 3 and 4 are slightly more complex than was suggested. The rheme of (2) contains *two* elements (*Monomanor* and £5) which are taken up as themes in the two separate subsequent sentences, giving us the pattern:



This third option is a hierarchical pattern. For further examples and discussions of theme–rheme patterns see Daneš (1974).

But are these patterns not simply questions of ‘style’ or ‘rhetoric’? In a way, they are, inasmuch as they are not truly structural, since no combinations are specifically forbidden by *rule*, and indeed, some of what was traditionally relegated to rag-bag categories such as ‘style’ has been taken over as the province of discourse analysis. It is hoped that the discussion so far has indicated the importance of thematisation as a means of creating topic frameworks and as an example of audience orientation. Further investigation would probably also discover links between certain patterns of theme and rheme and particular registers (e.g. many advertising texts use the option of returning to the same theme, usually the product name).

## Reader activity 10

Which pattern(s) of theme and rheme sequencing are predominant in these extracts? Consider too the author’s choice in terms of topic frameworks, and the purpose and register of the texts.

1.

### Cost of acid cleanup doubles

Fred Pearce

BRITAIN’S privatised electricity industry will face a bill for cleaning up acid pollution from its power stations that is more than double that so far admitted. The cost of meeting an EEC directive to combat acid rain, approved by ministers in June, will approach £3 billion, according to consultants who recently presented a study on strategies to reduce acid pollution to the Department of the Environment (DoE).  
The study forms part of a broad review

(from *New Scientist*, 22 October 1988, p. 29)

2. The brain is our most precious organ – the one above all which allows us to be human.  
The brain contains 10 billion nerve cells, making thousands of billions of connections with each other. It is the most powerful data processor we know, but at the same time it is incredibly delicate. As soft as a ripe avocado, the brain has to be encased in the tough bones of the skull, and floats in its own waterbed of fluid. An adult brain weighs over 3lb and fills the skull. It receives one-fifth of the blood pumped out by the heart at each beat.  
The brain looks not unlike a huge walnut kernel: it is dome-shaped with a wrinkled surface, and is in two halves joined in the middle. Coming out from the base of the brain like a stalk is the brain stem. This is the swollen top of the spinal cord, which runs on down to our ‘tail’. Parts of the brain stem control our most basic functions: breathing, heart beat, waking and sleeping.

(from *The Observer*, 16 October 1988, p. 2)

Patterns of sequencing of theme and rheme are tendencies rather than absolutes. Very few texts (except perhaps highly ritualised ones such as religious litanies) repeat the same thematising patterns endlessly. We have suggested that low-level learners might be trapped in unnatural patterns owing to limited grammatical resources or lack of confidence in a new L2, but most advanced learners are likely to have a good feel for creating topic frameworks and orienting their audience. The grammatical structures that are underplayed in grammar books (e.g. left displacements, object-fronting) may be produced unconsciously by learners, but awareness and monitoring on the part of teachers is necessary to ensure that natural production using the wide resources of the grammar is indeed taking place.

So far, we have concentrated on thematising in clauses, but it should not be forgotten that sequencing choices of clauses within sentences, and sentences within paragraphs are of the same, discourse-related type. For instance, it has been observed that first sentences often tell us what the whole paragraph is about, a macro-level front-placing of an element signalling the framework of the message. Such sentences are often called *topic sentences*, and are considered important for skills such as skimming. It is often possible, just by reading the first sentence, to state what a paragraph is about (the paragraph theme), though it is not possible to state what the text is *saying* about its theme (the paragraph theme). However, this does seem to be an oversimplification, and many paragraphs have initial sentences that do *not* tell us what the paragraph is about. Jones and Jones's (1985) study of cleft and pseudo-cleft sentences in discourse shows that the presence of a cleft structure, even if not paragraph-initial, is often a more reliable signal of paragraph topic, and anyway, relatively little is known about why writers make paragraph divisions where they do.

Finally, ideally, we should also consider sentences that contain more than one element other than the subject brought to front place, such as this very sentence you are reading. The first fronted element (*finally*) organises the text sequentially and tells you that the section is coming to a close (a *textual* function); *ideally* signals my attitude towards what I have to say, and has an *interpersonal* function. The next element, *we*, is part of the *content* or *ideational* meaning of the message, or, as Halliday (1985: 56) calls it, the *topical* theme. The unmarked (most frequent) order for complex themes can thus be stated as *textual* + *interpersonal* + *ideational*:

Themes	Textual	Interpersonal	Ideational
Examples	moreover likewise for instance	frankly obviously personally	Joe Smith ... burglars ... I ...

(Adapted from Halliday 1985: 53-4)

A natural example of this ordering is seen in this sentence from a student essay on language and gender:

- (2.53) Conversely, possibly, females felt more at ease responding to a non-specific female address.

(Author's data 1989)

The notion of theme and how it is realised in English is an area where grammatical structure and discourse function seem most closely allied, and, if discourse analysis is to have an influence on how language is taught, then ways of presenting variations in clause structure in relation to discourse functions may be a good place to start. In the past, emphasis on invented sentences and on writing (in both theoretical and applied linguistics) has led to the relegation to the fringes of some structures found in natural talk. But natural data show that variations of standard SVOA order *are* much more frequent than might be thought. Furthermore, languages vary in how they deal with thematisation: Japanese has a particle *wa*, widely used to topicalise elements in clauses (Hinds 1986: 157), and Tagalog (the language of the Philippines) apparently topicalises at the end of clauses (Greider 1979). Other languages are similar to English; Duranti and Ochs (1979) give examples of left-displacement in Italian speech and discuss its functions in discourse management. Mixed nationality groups of learners may therefore present a variety of problems at various levels, just as is the case in conventional grammar teaching.

## 2.4 Tense and aspect

A great deal of attention has recently been paid to the relationship between tense-aspect choices and overall discourse constraints. By examining natural data, discourse analysts are able to observe regular correlations between discourse types and the predominance of certain tense and aspect choices in the clause. Equally, the emphasis in discourse analysis on interactive features of discourse such as speaker/writer perspective and standpoint, and the focusing or foregrounding of certain elements of the message, has led to reinterpretations of conventional statements about tense and aspect rules.

An example of the first type of approach is Zydaitis (1986), who looked at a number of text types in English where present perfect is either dominant or in regular contrast with past simple. Zydaitis observed that three basic functions of the present perfect, all under the general heading of *current relevance*, frequently recur over a wide range of text types. He names these functions: (1) conveying 'hot news', (2) expressing experiences, and (3) relating to present effects of changes and accomplishments.

'Hot news' texts are mostly found in broadcast and written news reports,

but are also common in everyday speech. An example (taken from British television news) is: 'The government *has announced* a multi-million pound scheme to retrain the unemployed, but union chiefs *have pledged* all-out opposition to it.' This choice of tense and aspect will occur time and time again, and can be tapped as a rich source of illustrative material for language teaching (see for example, Swan and Walter 1990: 50, who use just such news events to illustrate present perfect usage). Letters-to-the-editor and agony-column letters, Zydattis claims, contain frequent present perfects performing the 'experiences' and 'changes and accomplishments' functions. In 'hot news' texts, present perfect regularly contrasts with past simple in the same text, where the topicalising sentence uses present perfect, while the details of the narrative are in past simple, for example: 'A British firm *has landed* a huge shipping contract in Brazil. The deal *was signed* at a meeting today in London.' Biographical sketches and obituaries are also a source of this shift of tense. Zydattis lists many text types which seem to have such correlations. The usefulness of such investigations is not that they necessarily tell language teachers anything they did not already know or might conclude from intuition, but that they offer a short-cut to useful data sources and statistical back-up to intuition.

In specialist and academic texts such as scientific articles, correlations are often observable between discourse segments and tense and aspect choices. Medical research articles in journals such as the *British Medical Journal*, for instance, regularly use past simple in the *abstract* section, and shift to predominantly present perfect in the *introduction* section, at the end of which there is a shift back to past simple where the discourse begins its 'narrative' of the particular research experiment reported. Also in academic texts, one finds interesting correlations between the tenses used to cite other authors and the current author's standpoint: one might compare alternative citations such as 'Johnson (1975) suggests/has suggested/suggested/had suggested that . . . .'

### Reader activity 11

Consider this sentence taken from the *end* of an essay by a learner of English. In what way is her use of tense and aspect inappropriate? How would you correct it and what rule or guideline could you give her regarding tense and aspect in different sections of academic essays?

#### Conclusion

In this essay, I try to discuss the different types of information which the matrices give about words. Also some other information which matrices can convey are suggested in the last section.

(Author's data 1989)

A particular day-to-day context worth noting is the telling of stories, jokes and anecdotes. Schiffrin's (1981) data shows regular correlations between discourse segments and tense and aspect choices. Schiffrin considers principally the shifts from 'historic' present (i.e. using the present tense to describe actions and events in the past) to past simple in English oral anecdotes. She takes a model of narrative based on Labov (1972), in which the main elements are *orientation* (establishing time, place and characters), *complicating actions* (the main events that make the story), *resolution* (how the story reaches its end), and *evaluation* (comments on the events). Historic present tense verbs cluster in the *complicating action* segments, and, within those segments, particularly in the *middle* of the segment, and not typically in the initial or final clause. Historic present is also sometimes accompanied by changes from simple to progressive aspect where the time sequence seems to be broken and a particularly strong focus is given to actions. In the following extract, the speaker is recounting a ghost story; note the shifts in tense and aspect at crucial junctures:

(2.54)

- A: Not all that long since, perhaps ten years ago, this friend of mine, her son was in hospital, and he'd had a serious accident and he was unconscious for a long time . . . anyway, she went to see him one day and she said 'Has anybody been to see you?', and he says 'No, but a right nice young lady came to see me,' he said, 'she was lovely, she stood at the foot of me bed, you know, she . . . had a little word with me.' Well eventually he came home, and they'd a lot of the family in the house, and Emma, this friend of mine, brought these photographs out, of the family through the years, and, passing them round, and he's looking at them and he said 'Oh! that's that young lady that came to see me when I was in bed.' She'd died when he was born . . . so.

B: Good God.

A: He'd never seen her.

B: No . . . heavens.

(Author's data 1989)

Note how 'he *says*' prefaces the significant event of the appearance of the 'lady'. Historic present occurs again, accompanied by progressive aspect (*he's looking*) at the highest moment of suspense in the tale.

In Schiffrin's data, historic present often occurs in segments where the episodes are understood by the listener as occurring in sequence and in the time-world of the story; therefore, to some extent, the grammatical marking of pastness may be considered redundant. Schiffrin compares these segments of narratives with sports commentaries, recipe commentaries (the speaker describing the process as it happens) and magicians' commentaries on their tricks. The historic present in anecdotes is really an 'internal evaluation device', focusing on the events that really 'make' the story.

The data for tense and aspect we have looked at can all be interpreted in the light of the speaker/writer's perspective and as projections of shifting perspectives. The tenses and aspects do not seem so much strictly bound to time as to issues such as the sender's purpose, the focus on different elements of the message, and the projection of a shared framework within which the receiver will understand the message.

Tense and aspect vary notoriously from language to language and are traditional stumbling-blocks for learners. The classic 'aspect' languages such as the Slavic tongues make choices of *perfective* and *imperfective* aspects which are quite at odds with the English notion of describing past events in terms of 'now-relevance' (present perfect) and 'break with the present' (past simple). However, some features, for example the use of historic present in anecdotes, seem widely distributed across languages (in Europe the Nordic and the Romance languages share this feature). Whether or not such features are transferred by learners without difficulty is another matter, and one worthy of close observation. Certainly in the genre-specific occurrences such as the medical articles discussed above, learners sometimes experience difficulties or show unawareness of the conventions of the genre.

## 2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has taken a selection of grammatical concepts and has attempted to show how discourse analysis has contributed to our understanding of the relationship between local choices within the clause and sentence and the organisation of the discourse as a whole. When speakers and writers are producing discourse, they are, at the same time as they are busy constructing clauses, monitoring the development of the larger discourse, and their choices at the local level can be seen simultaneously to reflect the concerns of the discourse as an unfolding production, with an audience, whether present or projected. A discourse-oriented approach to grammar would suggest not only a greater emphasis on contexts larger than the sentence, but also a reassessment of priorities in terms of what is taught about such things as word order, articles, ellipsis, tense and aspect, and some of the other categories discussed here.

If grammar is seen to have a direct role in welding clauses, turns and sentences into discourse, what of words themselves? What role does *vocabulary choice* play in the discourse process? It is to this question that we turn next.

### *Further reading*

The most detailed work on grammar above clause level is Halliday (1985), but some prefer to treat this as a reference work rather than as reading. Monaghan (1987) is an interesting, though sometimes difficult, collection of papers on different aspects of grammar and discourse.

For a detailed description of cohesion in English, Halliday and Hasan (1976) is unsurpassed, though Hasan's (1984) revision of lexical cohesion should also be taken into account.

The room descriptions in Dutch in Ehrlich and Koster (1983) contain further examples comparable to Linde's.

Another interesting study of substitution is Jordan (1986).

Ellipsis in conversation is examined in detail in Ricento (1987).

More on expressing cause in conversation may be found in Schiffrin (1985a).

On the question of the significance of front position in the clause in the world's languages, see Fuller and Gundel (1987).

For word-order phenomena in various selected languages, see Givón (1984).

On front-placing in Spanish see Rivero (1980), and for French, see Barnes (1985).

Kies (1988) contains a good discussion on variations of word order in English data.

Discussion of the different theme-theme patterns can be found in Daněš (1974), and further discussion of theme in P. H. Fries (1983).

For the distribution of theme-theme patterns in written texts, see Eiler (1986) and Francis (1989).

Topic sentences in paragraphs are discussed by Grellet (1981: 96-8).

A good general survey of different treatments of 'given' and 'new' in relation to theme and rheme may be found in Allerton (1978).

A combined investigation of present progressive, deictic *that* and pronominalisation in spoken technical discourse can be found in Reichman-Adar (1984).

For more on tense in learned citations, see Riddle (1986).

Aspect in the Slavic languages is exemplified in Hopper (1979 and 1982) with reference to Russian discourse.

Aspect and discourse in French is dealt with by Monville-Burston and Waugh (1985) and Waugh and Monville-Burston (1986).

At the more advanced level, the papers in Schopf (1989) on tense in English are worth pursuing.