# Introducing Functional Grammar

Third Edition

Geoff Thompson

# Introducing Functional Grammar

*Introducing Functional Grammar*, third edition, provides a user-friendly overview of the theoretical and practical aspects of the systemic functional grammar (SFG) model.

No prior knowledge of formal linguistics is required as the book provides:

- An opening chapter on the purpose of linguistic analysis, which outlines the differences between the two major approaches to grammar – functional and formal.
- An overview of the SFG model – what it is and how it works.
- Advice and practice on identifying elements of language structure such as clauses and clause constituents.
- Numerous examples of text analysis using the categories introduced, and discussion about what the analysis shows.
- Exercises to test comprehension, along with answers for guidance.

The third edition is updated throughout, and is based closely on the fourth edition of Halliday and Matthiessen's *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. A glossary of terms, more exercises and an additional chapter are available on the companion website at: www.routledge.com/cw/thompson.

*Introducing Functional Grammar* remains the essential entry guide to Hallidayan functional grammar, for undergraduate and postgraduate students of language and linguistics.

**Geoff Thompson** is Honorary Senior Fellow at the School of English, University of Liverpool, UK.

## Related titles include:

**Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar, Fourth Edition**
*M. A. K. Halliday and C. M. I. M. Matthiessen*
ISBN 978 0 415 826 280 (hbk)
ISBN 978 1 444 146 608 (pbk)

**The Functional Analysis of English, Third Edition**
*Meriel Bloor and Thomas Bloor*
ISBN 978 0 415 825 931 (hbk)
ISBN 978 1 444 156 652 (pbk)

# Introducing Functional Grammar

## Third edition

*Geoff Thompson*

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in Great Britain 1996
Second edition published 2004 by Hodder Education
Third edition published 2014
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 1996, 2004, 2014 Geoff Thompson

The right of Geoff Thompson to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice*: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*
Thompson, Geoff, 1947-
Introducing functional grammar / Geoff Thompson. -- 3rd ed.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Functionalism (Linguistics) I. Title.
P147.T48 2013
415--dc23
2013006800

ISBN: 978-0-415-82630-3 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-4441-5267-8 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-0-203-43147-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Saxon Graphics Ltd, Derby

# Contents

*Foreword* *ix*
*Acknowledgements* *xi*

**1 The purposes of linguistic analysis** **1**
1.1 Starting points 1
1.1.1 Going in through form 2
1.1.2 Going in through meaning 6
1.2 Language, context and function: a preliminary exploration 11
Exercise 12

**2 Identifying clauses and clause constituents** **14**
2.1 Breaking up the sentence – and labelling the parts 14
2.1.1 Recognizing constituents 15
2.1.2 Structural and functional labels 18
2.2 Ranks 21
Exercises 26

**3 An overview of Functional Grammar** **28**
3.1 Three kinds of meaning 28
3.1.1 The three metafunctions 30
3.1.2 Three kinds of function in the clause 32
3.1.3 Three kinds of structure in the clause 34
3.1.4 Showing the options: systems networks 35
3.1.5 A fourth metafunction 38
3.2 Register and genre 39
3.2.1 Register (and the corpus) 40
3.2.2 Genre 42
Exercises 44

**4 Interacting: the interpersonal metafunction** **45**
4.1 Introduction 45

4.2 Roles of addressers and audience 46
4.3 Mood 50
4.3.1 The structure of the Mood 50
4.3.2 Identifying Subject and Finite 51
4.3.3 Meanings of Subject and Finite 53
4.3.4 Mood in non-declarative clauses 56
4.3.5 Mood in text 60
4.3.6 The Residue 62
4.3.7 Modal Adjuncts 65
4.4 Modality 68
4.4.1 Modality and polarity 68
4.4.2 Types of modality 70
4.4.3 Modal commitment 72
4.4.4 Modal responsibility 73
4.4.5 Modality in text 77
4.5 Appraisal 79
4.6 Interaction and negotiation 84
4.7 Interaction through text 85
Exercises 88

**5 Representing the world: the experiential metafunction 91**
5.1 Introduction 91
5.2 Transitivity: processes and participants 94
5.2.1 Material processes 95
5.2.2 Mental processes 97
5.2.3 Relational processes 101
5.2.4 Verbal processes 105
5.2.5 Other types of processes 109
5.2.6 Other participant roles 111
5.2.7 Circumstances 114
5.2.8 Transitivity in text 117
5.3 More complex aspects of transitivity 119
5.3.1 More on material processes 120
5.3.2 More on mental processes 121
5.3.3 More on relational processes 122
5.3.4 Processes in verbal group complexes 128
5.3.5 Participants in causation 129
5.4 Transitivity patterns in text 131
5.4.1 Analysing transitivity in clauses and in text 131
5.4.2 Comparing transitivity choices in different registers 133
5.5 Ergativity 139
Exercises 142

**6 Organizing the message: the textual metafunction – Theme** **145**
6.1 Introduction: making messages fit together 145
6.2 Theme 147
6.3 Identifying Theme 148
6.3.1 Theme in declarative clauses 148
6.3.2 Theme in non-declarative clauses 150
6.4 Special thematic structures 153
6.4.1 Thematic equatives 153
6.4.2 Predicated Theme 155
6.4.3 Thematized comment 156
6.4.4 Preposed Theme 158
6.4.5 Passive clauses and Theme 158
6.5 Theme in clause complexes 159
6.6 Multiple Theme 161
6.6.1 Conjunctions in Theme 161
6.6.2 Conjunctive and modal Adjuncts in Theme 162
6.6.3 Textual, interpersonal and experiential elements in Theme 163
6.6.4 Interrogatives as multiple Themes 165
6.7 Some issues in Theme analysis 165
6.7.1 Existential 'there' in Theme 165
6.7.2 Interpolations in Theme 166
6.7.3 Preposed attributives 167
6.7.4 Theme in reported clauses 167
6.7.5 Theme and interpersonal grammatical metaphor 168
6.8 Theme in text 171
6.8.1 An illustration of Theme in text 172
6.8.2 Other ways of exploring thematic choices 174
6.8.3 Theme in different registers 177
6.9 A final note on identifying Theme 180
Exercises 181

**7 Clauses in combination** **185**
7.1 Introduction 185
7.2 Units of analysis 186
7.3 Types of relations between clauses 187
7.3.1 Logical dependency relations 188
7.3.2 Logico-semantic relations 193
7.4 Expansion 194
7.4.1 Elaborating 194

7.4.2 Extending 196
7.4.3 Enhancing 198
7.4.4 Internal and external expansion 200
7.5 Projection 201
7.5.1 Quotes and reports 202
7.5.2 Facts 205
7.5.3 Projection in text 207
7.6 Clause complexing 208
7.6.1 An overview 208
7.6.2 Clause complexing and register 210
Exercises 212

**8 Organizing the message: the textual metafunction – cohesion 215**
8.1 Cohesion and coherence 215
8.2 Reference and ellipsis 216
8.2.1 Reference 217
8.2.2 Ellipsis 220
8.3 Conjunction 225
8.4 Cohesion and register 228
Exercises 232

**9 Grammatical metaphor 233**
9.1 Introduction 233
9.2 Grammatical metaphor 234
9.3 Experiential and logical metaphors 238
9.4 Interpersonal metaphors 246
9.5 Textual metaphor 251
9.6 A cautionary note 252
Exercises 252

**10 Implications and applications of Functional Grammar 255**
10.1 Three-dimensional analysis of texts 255
10.2 A summary review of Functional Grammar 262
10.3 Using Functional Grammar 264
10.4 Closing 266

*Answers to exercises 267*
*Further reading 297*
*References 302*
*Index 307*

# Foreword

This book arises directly from my experiences in introducing Functional Grammar to a number of different groups of students, teachers and researchers. Like any model that attempts to offer a global view of how language works, Functional Grammar is complex, and students may be understandably daunted not only by the seemingly abstruse explanations but simply by the amount of new terminology. What I have tried to do is to set out the approach from the point of view of readers who are not familiar with this way of looking at language, and who may, indeed, have little background in linguistic analysis generally. This involves describing the theoretical and practical aspects of the Functional Grammar model in as accessible a way as possible; but it also involves trying to make clear the reasons why the model is as it is, at all levels – from why a functional approach is adopted to why one particular analysis of a wording is preferable to another.

Throughout, the book tries to help readers to see that, on the whole, Functional Grammar explanations in fact correspond to things that they already know intuitively about language, and that the 'jargon' is merely necessary in order to systematize this knowledge. The constant aim is, without underestimating the initial difficulties, to encourage readers to realize that the fundamental assumptions of the model have an appealing simplicity and an intuitive validity. Once that step is achieved, it becomes easier to cope with the inevitable complexity of the details, and to see beyond the terminology to the important and useful insights offered by the approach.

The debt owed, at each stage of the conception and execution of this edition, to Michael Halliday's work – especially his *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985, second edition 1994, third edition with Christian Matthiessen 2004, fourth edition with Christian Matthiessen 2013) – will be obvious, even if it has not been feasible to signal explicitly all the points which are taken from that source. The book is consciously modelled on the *Introduction*, covering much of the same ground, though not necessarily in the same order or from exactly the same perspective. Many of the major revisions in this third edition are designed to reflect the changes in the fourth edition of *IFG*; others, particularly the choice of texts to analyse, derive from my own teaching of the subject and the ways in which my understanding of the concepts has developed. One way in which the present book can be used – which reflects its origins in the courses that I have taught – is as a preparation for reading Halliday's work. It can also be read as an independent introduction to the approach; but I hope that in either case it will

tempt readers to go on to explore in greater depth the writings of Halliday and his colleagues.

In addition to the intellectual inspiration provided by Michael Halliday, the book naturally owes a great deal to many other people, of whom I am particularly grateful to the following. To my past and present colleagues in the former Applied English Language Studies Unit at Liverpool – above all, Flo Davies, who first encouraged me to start teaching Functional Grammar, and who was a constant source of ideas, insights and argument during our time as colleagues. To my students at the University of Liverpool, especially those on the MA programmes in Applied Linguistics and TESOL, and on the undergraduate Grammar in Discourse module; and to students and staff in universities in Argentina, Austria, Brazil, China, Colombia, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Venezuela and Wales, who at various times kindly allowed me to indulge my enthusiasm for SFG: they all had different parts of the material in the book tried out on them, and their difficulties, comments and insights helped me to think through and clarify ideas that I had sometimes taken for granted. To Naomi Meredith, Christina Wipf Perry and Eva Martinez at Arnold, who provided encouragement and advice for the two previous editions of the book; to Lucy Winder and Lavinia Porter at Hodder Education, who were very patient with me as I missed several deadlines; and to Sophie Jaques and Louisa Semlyen at Routledge, who had the unenviable task of taking over the publication of the book at a late stage. I owe an unusual debt to those colleagues in the School of English at Liverpool who made early retirement an attractive option, leading to the situation in which I had time to devote to this new edition. And, above all, I am grateful to Susan Thompson, who is, happily for me, always available to argue over interpretations and explanations, to identify confusions and evasions, and to suggest alternative ways of understanding or expressing the ideas; and who puts up with my endless hours in my study working on this book and other projects. As before, the completion of this edition owes a great deal to her.

# Acknowledgements

The publishers wish to express gratitude for permission to include extracts from the following copyright sources in the book:

Ellis Peters and Macmillan London Limited for an extract from *Monk's-Hood*, 1980 (p.13); Addison Wesley Publishing Company, Inc. for an extract from *University physics*, H.D. Young, 8th edition, 1992 (p.13); Elizabeth Jennings and André Deutsch Ltd for an extract from 'Song to Autumn' (from *A Way of Looking*, 1955) (p.13); Anne McLaren for an extract from 'Gender, religion and early modern nationalism: Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots and the genesis of English anti-Catholicism', *American Historical Review* 107/3: 739–767, 2002 (p.27); Hearst Communications for an extract from *Good Housekeeping* December 2011 (p.43); the UCL Survey of English Usage for an extract from the ICE-GB corpus (p.60); A.J. Mayne *et al.* for an extract from 'Statistical analysis of adsorbates', *Surface Science* 348: 209–225, 1996 (p.76); Chris Butler for an extract from 'Multi-word sequences and their relevance for recent models of Functional Grammar', *Functions of Language* 10/2: 179–208, 2003 (p.77); Peter Trudgill for an extract from 'Standard English: what it isn't', in T. Bex and R.J. Watts (eds), *Standard English: the widening debate*. London: Routledge, 117–128, 1999 (p.85); Doris Lessing and Jonathan Cape Ltd.for an extract from *The good terrorist,* 1985 (p.94); Michael Jackson and Dorling Kindersley for an extract from *Michael Jackson's Malt Whisky Companion*, 3rd edition, 1994 (p.117); Delia Smith and BBC books for an extract from *Delia Smith's Christmas*, 1990 (p.118); the *Guardian* and John Vidal for an extract from 'Last month was the hottest June recorded worldwide, figures show', 16 July 2010 (p.118); Ian McEwan and Jonathan Cape for an extract from *Atonement*, 2001 (p.119); the *Daily Mail* and Jenny Hope for an extract from 'Peace in the bedroom', 30 September 1998 (p.133); W. Lassig *et al.* for an extract from 'Topical therapy of allergic rhinitis in childhood', *Current Medical Research and Opinion* 3/7: 391–395, 1996 (p.133); CUP and Charles Barber for an extract from *The English Language: A historical introduction*, CUP, 1993 (p.172); Consumers' Association and Hodder & Stoughton for an extract from *The Which? book of do-it-yourself*, 1981 (p.174); Loma Linda University for an extract from 'The Adventist Health Study: Findings for cancer', available at http://www.llu.edu/public-health/health/cancer.page (p.177); Samuel Morison and Little Brown for an extract from *The two ocean war*, 1963 (p.183); Susan Hunston for an extract from 'Lexis, wordform and complementation pattern: a corpus study', *Functions of Language*

10: 31–60, 2003 (p.213); the estate of Iris Murdoch and Chatto & Windus for extracts from *The Philosopher's Pupil*, 1983 (p.221); Prentice Hall, Inc. and Anthea Maton *et al*. for an extract from *Prentice Hall Science: Evolution*, 1992 (p.228); Guardian News & Media Ltd, for an extract from the editorial 'Bankers' bonuses: 'Tis the season to be jolly', from the *Guardian*, Friday 26 November 2010 (p.232); The Nemours Foundation/KidsHealth for an extract from http://kidshealth.org/kid/watch/er/cuts.html (p.238); T. W. Stief for an extract from 'Inhibition of thrombin generation in recalcified plasma', *Blood Coagulation & Fibrinolysis*, 18: 751–760, 2007 (p.238); Churchill Livingstone for an extract from R. McRae, *Clinical orthopaedic examination*, 3rd edition, 1990 (p.253).

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders but if any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

The author is also grateful to Sultan Al-Sharief and Angela Reid for kindly providing textual data and allowing it to be used in this book.

# 1 The purposes of linguistic analysis

## 1.1 Starting points

A man is driving through a part of the country he doesn't know, and he gets lost in what looks to him like the middle of nowhere, completely deserted. Finally, he sees an old man working in a field, and he stops the car and calls out to him, 'Excuse me, how do I get from here to ...?' (the town depends on which country you hear the story in). The old man thinks for a while, and then he says, 'Well, if I were you I wouldn't start from here.'

What I want this story to highlight is the fact that where you can get to – in language description as in anything else – depends a great deal on where you start from; and that starting from the wrong place may make it much more difficult to get to the desired kind of destination. In the second half of the last century, there built up an immensely influential view of what the study of language should involve which insists that there is only one proper place to start – from a view of language as an abstract set of generalized rules detached from any particular context of use. It would be possible to ignore this view and simply start with the approach that I will be setting out in the book – based on a view of how language functions as a system of human communication. However, a comparison of different possible approaches will help us to understand better not only the destinations that each approach allows us to head for but also the reasons why we might choose one of the approaches in preference to another. Therefore, in this chapter I will briefly outline the approach that was dominant, attempting to show why it was so attractive but also showing why an increasing number of linguists have come to feel that it does not make it easy for us to talk about many of the most central features of language. I will then go on to introduce an alternative approach which takes full account of those features, and which offers a more appropriate place to start from if we are interested in language in use.

We can begin by looking informally at a bit of language, selected more or less at random. This comes from an advertisement aimed at attracting people to take up nursing as a career. Before reading on, can you decide what aspects of the sentence you might want to consider in providing a linguistic description of it?

Of course, you're unlikely to be attracted to nursing because of the money.

When I have asked students to do this kind of preliminary analysis, some (often those who have learnt English as a foreign language and therefore have more background in traditional grammatical parsing) break it up into its components as far as they can (this is in fact trickier than it might look). They label the parts of the sentence using terms like Subject and Verb, or non-finite verb and prepositional phrase. They may comment on the fact that 'to be attracted' is a passive form, and that the understood Subject is 'you', carried over from the Subject of the preceding verb '(a)re'. Some mention that the structure 'be unlikely to be attracted' is not possible in their own language and that, in a way, it is an illogical structure (since it is not 'you' who are 'unlikely', but 'you being attracted to nursing'). What they are essentially focusing on is what the different parts of the sentence are and how they fit together – in other words, the form.

Most students for whom English is their mother tongue, on the other hand, focus on issues such as who exactly 'you' is (since the writer is not addressing anyone face to face), and why the writer assumes this about 'you' so confidently ('Of course'). Some pick up on 'you're unlikely to', which softens the possible arrogance of the writer telling 'you' about 'your' own feelings; others comment on the implication that 'you' are likely to be attracted to nursing for other reasons apart from money; and a few wonder why the writer decided not to say 'nursing is unlikely to attract you'. What all these points have in common is that they are concerned with the function of the sentence, what the writer's purpose is in writing the sentence – in other words, with the meaning. Underlying the points, though not usually made explicit, is also the idea of choice: that there are potentially identifiable reasons why the writer is expressing the message in this particular way rather than in other possible ways.

Both of these ways of looking at the sentence tell us something useful about it, and, in the informal descriptions given here at least, there is a good deal of potential overlap. Any full analysis of the sentence will inevitably need to take account of both the meaning and the form (and of the links between them). However, in order to make the analysis fairly rigorous rather than just an unordered list of points about the sentence, we need to decide on a reasonably systematic method; and in practice this involves choosing between form and meaning as our starting point. This may at first seem simply a difference in emphasis, but, if carried through consistently, each approach in fact ends up with a strikingly different kind of description of language.

### *1.1.1 Going in through form*

The most fully developed and influential version of the approach through form is that proposed by Noam Chomsky and his followers, originally known as the TG (Transformational–Generative) approach, although a number of variations have

developed from that starting point. Chomsky insisted that linguistics should go beyond merely describing syntactic structures, and aim to explain why language is structured in the way it is – which includes explaining why other kinds of structures are *not* found. He argued that, in order to do this adequately, it was essential to make language description absolutely *explicit*. Although the aim of TG was not to produce a computer program that could generate language, it was computers that provided the driving metaphor behind the approach. A computer is wonderfully literal: it cannot interpret what you mean, and will do exactly – and only – what you tell it to do. Therefore instructions to the computer have to be explicit and unambiguous: this includes giving them in exactly the right order, so that each step in an operation has the required input from preceding steps, and formulating them so as to avoid triggering any unwanted operations by mistake. TG set out to provide rules of this kind for the formation of grammatically correct sentences. (Note that the following outline describes TG in its early form. The theory has changed radically since the 1960s, becoming more abstract and more powerful in its explanatory force; but the basic concerns, and the kind of facts about language that it attempts to explain, have remained essentially the same.)

In setting up its rules, TG started from another deceptively simple insight: that every verb has a Subject, and that understanding a sentence means above all identifying the Subject for each verb. In English, Subjects normally appear in front of the verb, so it might be thought that identifying them would be too easy to be interesting. However, there are many cases where the Subject does not appear in the 'right' position – or does not appear at all (we have already seen that the Subject of 'to be attracted' has to be carried over from a different verb). We are so skilled at understanding who does what in a sentence that we typically do not even notice that in such cases we have to interpret something that is not explicitly said. One well-known example used by Chomsky was the pair of sentences:

John is eager to please. John is easy to please.

These appear, on the surface, to have the same structure; but in fact we understand that in the first case it is John who does the pleasing (i.e. is the understood Subject of 'to please'), while in the second it is an unnamed person or thing (and 'John' is understood as the Object of 'to please'). This game of 'hunt the Subject' can become even more complex and exciting – the kind of (invented) sentence that made TG linguists salivate with delight is the following:

Which burglar did the policeman say Mary thought had shot himself?

Here, we understand that the Subject of 'had shot' is 'which burglar' – even though there are two other possible nouns that are candidates for the Subject role ('the policeman' and 'Mary') in between. Adding to the excitement is the fact that we also understand that 'himself' refers to the burglar, even though 'the policeman' is closer in the sentence; whereas, if we replaced it with 'him', it might refer to the policeman or another male person, but it could not refer to the burglar.

But how do we understand all this? And how can the linguist show, in an explicit way, what it is that we actually understand? One problem is that, in order to label part of the sentence as 'Subject', we have first had to identify that part as having a particular relation to the verb (the 'doer' of the verb rather than the Object or 'done-to'): in other words, we have actually jumped over the initial stage. That means that our description is not in fact fully explicit. We need to work with labels that tell us what each constituent is in itself, not what it does in the sentence. At the same time, we also need to show where each constituent fits in the basic structure. Chomsky's famous first rule captured this:

$S \rightarrow NP \quad VP$

This is a non-verbal (and thus apparently less ambiguous) way of saying that every sentence in a language consists of a noun phrase followed by a verb phrase – if it does not show these features it is not a grammatically acceptable 'sentence'. It has to be borne in mind that S actually refers to a clause rather than what is traditionally called a sentence (in some later versions of the approach, the label 'IP', standing for inflectional phrase, was used instead); and VP here includes everything in the clause apart from the first NP. Translated into over-simple functional terms, it means in effect that every clause must have a verb and every verb must have a Subject. Using this rule, the underlying meanings of our 'burglar' example can be set out as follows, with each of the three clauses in the sentence labelled as an S (the inverted commas round the words signal that we are dealing with the abstract concepts that the words refer to rather than the words themselves):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| $S_1 \rightarrow$ | NP | VP |
| | ['the policeman'] | ['did say' (something)] |
| $S_2 \rightarrow$ | NP | VP |
| | ['Mary'] | ['thought' (something)] |
| $S_3 \rightarrow$ | NP | VP |
| | ['which burglar'] | ['had shot himself'] |

Note that this analysis also begins to elucidate why 'himself' refers to the burglar. When the Object of a verb refers to the same entity as the Subject, a reflexive pronoun is normally used: compare 'Mary washed her' and 'Mary washed herself'.

As the final S above suggests, the VP element does not only include the verb but any other elements that depend on the verb. We can therefore go on splitting the clause elements into their component parts until we reach the basic constituents (essentially words, though with some exceptions). This splitting up must, however, be done in the correct sequence in order to show the dependencies between different parts of the clause correctly. For example, two (simplified) further rules are:

$VP \rightarrow V \quad NP$
$NP \rightarrow Det \quad N$

The first rule allows us to show that some verb phrases consist of a verb and a noun phrase (a noun phrase in this position is traditionally called the Object). This accounts for the VP in $S_3$ above:

| VP → | V | NP |
|---|---|---|
| | ['had shot'] | ['himself'] |

The second rule allows us to analyse within the noun phrase, and to show that it may consist of a determiner (e.g. 'the') and a noun (e.g. 'policeman').

However, we have not yet dealt with the VP in $S_1$ or $S_2$. This will allow us to show how $S_{1-3}$ combine into the sentence as we actually see it. Although the operation is immensely complex in practice, it is simple in theory: it turns out that we can identify not only a finite set of explicit rules governing the possible combinations (the complexity comes especially from the interaction between the rules), but, more crucially, an even more restricted set of underlying regularities in the type of rules that are possible. The crucial rule that we need to add is:

VP → V S

This rule means that verb phrases may include not only a verb (V) but also another S (this is technically known as recursion: a clause appears where the Object might be). This may be easier to grasp if we revise the analysis of our example to take these new rules into account:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $S_1$→ | NP | VP → | [V | S] |
| | ['the policeman'] | | [['did say'] | ['$S_2$']] |
| $S_2$→ | NP | VP → | [V | S] |
| | ['Mary'] | | [['thought'] | ['$S_3$']] |
| $S_3$→ | NP | VP→ | [V | NP] |
| | ['which burglar'] | | ['had shot'] | ['himself'] |

I have concentrated so far on the Subject in the clauses, but exactly the same kind of analysis can be done for Objects and other clause constituents that appear in the 'wrong' place or that govern the form and interpretation of other constituents (as 'which burglar' governs the interpretation of 'himself'). What are the $S_{1-3}$ underlying this version of the example?

Which burglar did the policeman say Mary told him she had shot?

It is perhaps surprising that, using such apparently marginal examples, the approach should have thrown so much light on how sentences are structured; and yet the insights gained have been extensive and in some ways revolutionary. For our present purposes, however, it is less important to look at these discoveries in any detail than to consider where the approach leads us. The first thing to say is that this approach is almost exclusively interested in what we can call '**propositional meaning**' – the

'content' of the sentence (note that, from this point, bold typeface will be used when an important technical term is introduced). The following two sentences have exactly the same propositional content and therefore the same analysis in terms of Ss:

| The burglar had shot himself. | | Had the burglar shot himself? | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $S_1$→ | NP | VP → | [V | NP] |
| | ['the burglar'] | | ['had shot'] | ['himself'] |

The difference in surface form ('The burglar had' vs. 'Had the burglar') results from rules that allow the auxiliary 'did' to appear in front of the NP as the S transforms into the sentences. On the other hand, the fact that a statement and a question serve entirely different functions in communication is regarded as irrelevant in the grammatical analysis – it is taken into account in a different part of the linguistic description (though there was relatively little interest in developing that part within the approach). Chomsky made a principled decision to exclude how we use sentences in communication (e.g. as statements or questions): the model is not designed to show, for example, that one sentence functions as the answer to a preceding question. The aim is to discover the rules that govern how constituents can be put together to form grammatically correct sentences, and to formulate these rules in as general a way as possible (ideally, so that they apply to all human language rather than just individual languages); therefore each sentence is analysed in complete isolation, both from other sentences and from the situations in which it might be used. This limitation is self-imposed because generative linguists feel that it is only worth describing those aspects of language that can be described 'scientifically' (i.e. with absolute explicitness). The ways in which language is used are thought to be, unfortunately, too messy and are therefore ignored, at least until someone can find a way of describing them according to scientific general laws.

But if the road towards an examination of use is blocked off, where else can we go from this starting point? The answer is inwards, into the brain. The fact that we as language users can handle the complex relations between Ss and clauses/sentences – i.e. we can identify the separate constituents in the sentence and assign them to their correct place in the structure of the appropriate S – tells us, it is argued, a great deal about how our brains must work. At the same time, the fact that we do not need to be explicitly taught how to do this means that we must in some way be born with the required mental capacities. Thus a rigorously formal approach to the description of language leads us towards neurology and genetics. Clearly, these are fascinating and worthwhile areas, but they do involve giving up any idea of looking at language in use. In fact the logic of Chomsky's approach leads him to argue in *On Nature and Language* (2002: 76) that 'language is not properly regarded as a system of communication. It is a system for expressing thought, something quite different.'

### *1.1.2 Going in through meaning*

It may well be possible, and intellectually productive, to view language, as the generative approach does, as a system of abstract rules that are applied in order to end

up with a grammatically acceptable sentence; but there are grave doubts about whether this view captures to any useful extent what goes on when users actually produce or understand language. More importantly, there is little doubt that it does not reflect how the users themselves view language. They respond above all to the meanings that are expressed and the ways in which those meanings are expressed. For the user, despite the clear similarities in terms of propositional content, the following sentences have very different meanings because they are designed to elicit different responses from the addressee (acknowledging, agreeing/confirming or informing):

Colds last seven days on average.
Colds last seven days on average, don't they?
Do colds last seven days on average?

Similarly, there are important differences between the following sentences because of the speaker's choice of a formal or colloquial wording:

Would you mind helping me with this?
Can you gissa hand [= give me a hand]?

The syntactic underpinning in the examples above is of course essential in expressing the different meanings, but only as a tool that enables what most people see as the primary function of language – communicating meanings in particular contexts – to be carried out. As always, the exact nature of the tool used depends on the task in hand. In linguistic terms, we can express this as the assumption that, if we start from the premise that language has evolved for the function of communication, this must have a direct and controlling effect on its design features – in other words, the form of language can be substantially explained by examining its functions. Of course, we need to take into account the constraints of the 'raw materials': the pre-determined (genetic) characteristics of the human brain that allow or encourage certain kinds of language forms, and disallow or discourage other kinds. Generative approaches provide a possible way of investigating those characteristics (though their validity has been increasingly questioned). But they clearly represent only half the story: we still need to examine the formative influences of the uses to which language is put. (We can see the contrast between the two approaches as a reflection of the old dichotomy of nature vs. nurture – and, as always, the answer is most likely to lie in a combination of both.)

What happens, then, if we head in the other direction and (like language users) start from meaning? The meanings that we may want to express, or the uses to which we may want to put language, are clearly 'messy': they appear so varied and so dependent on the infinite range of different contexts that it is difficult at first to see how we might impose some order on them. However, if we look at the grammatical options open to us, we can in fact relate those options fairly systematically to different kinds of meanings. Let us take just two examples of areas that we will examine in more detail later. We can relate the presence of modal verbs to (amongst other things) expressing the speaker's feeling that what they are saying needs to be

negotiated with the addressee. In the following example, the speaker evaluates 'this seeming strange at first' as only potentially valid ('may') to show awareness of the fact that s/he cannot be sure whether it does seem strange to the addressee:

This *may* seem strange at first.

And we can relate the ordering of parts of the clause to the speaker's desire to signal how this message fits in with the preceding message(s). Compare what comes first in the second sentences in each of these pairs (and think about why the order is different, and whether the second sentences could be swapped):

What is a platelet? *A platelet* is a disc-shaped element in the blood that is involved in blood clotting.
One kind of blood cell is a disc-shaped element that is involved in blood clotting. *This* is called a platelet.

It may seem odd (note my use of 'may' to avoid imposing this opinion on you!) to say that ordering in the clause has 'meaning'; but it is only odd if we restrict meaning to 'propositional meaning' – which, as I have suggested, is a narrower definition than we want. If we take meaning as being the sum of what the speaker wants the hearer to understand – in other words, if we equate the **meaning** of a sentence with its **function** – then understanding how the present message fits in its context is clearly part of the meaning, just as the difference between a statement and a question is part of the meaning.

In describing the various kinds of meanings in this fairly general way (e.g. 'signalling how this message fits in with the preceding message(s)'), we are already beginning to set up categories of functions that we perform through language; and we can then go back to texts to see if there are other grammatical features that seem to be performing the same kind of function. But we are still in danger of ending up with a fairly random-seeming list of functions. Is there any way of arriving at an even more generalized grouping of meaning types, so that we can start to explain why we find the particular kinds of functions that we do? For this, we need to step back and, rather than looking at language structures, think about what we do with language. In the broadest terms, we use language to talk about things and events ('It's raining') and to get things done ('Sit down'). As we shall see, these are not mutually exclusive (the command 'Sit down' involves reference to the particular event of sitting rather than any other; and telling someone that it's raining has the effect of changing their knowledge): indeed, the basic principle is that every time we use language we are doing both simultaneously. We will also see that we need to add a third major function, a kind of language-internal 'service function'; but, having simply established here that it is possible to identify a very small number of broad functions, we can leave further specification until, in Chapter 3, we start exploring how these major functions can be used to illuminate and explain the choices that are available in language.

I have at several points used the term '**choice**' in discussing meanings. If we want to examine what a piece of language is intended to do (i.e. its function), we cannot

avoid thinking in terms of choice. Clearly, speakers do not go round producing de-contextualized grammatically correct sentences: they have reasons for saying something, and for saying it in the way they do. To take a simple example, if you want to find out some information you are most likely to ask a question rather than make a statement; and, at a more detailed level, you are more likely to use an informal wording if you are talking to a friend rather than a formal one:

What the hell was that noise?

But note that, in describing the example in this way, we have in fact set up two sets of context-dependent choices: question vs. statement, informal vs. formal. If you have reasons for doing (saying) one thing, the implication is that you could have done (said) something else if the reasons (the context) had been different.

Functional Grammar sets out to investigate what the range of relevant choices are, both in the kinds of meanings that we might want to express (or functions that we might want to perform) and in the kinds of wordings that we can use to express these meanings; and to match these two sets of choices. In order to identify meaning choices, we have to look outwards at the **context**: what, in the kind of society we live in, do we typically need or want to say? What are the contextual factors that make one set of meanings more appropriate or likely to be expressed than another? But at the same time we need to identify the linguistic options (i.e. the lexical and structural possibilities that the language system offers for use), and to explore the meanings that each option expresses. These are complementary perspectives on the same phenomenon: one, as it were, from the bottom up – from wording to context – and the other from the top down – from context to wording. Looking from the bottom up, the use of the 'the hell' in the question above means – i.e. has the function of expressing – informality (amongst other things): in other words, one thing that our grammatical description must account for is the lexical and structural means by which different degrees of formality are expressed. Looking from the top down, the fact that the speaker is talking to a friend makes appropriate the use of informal wordings: in other words, we need a description of the social context which includes degrees of familiarity between people interacting with each other as a relevant factor influencing their language choices.

Note that the use of the term 'choice' does not necessarily imply a conscious process of selection by the speaker: what we aim to uncover through a functional analysis are the meaning-wording options that are available in the language system and the factors that lead the speaker to produce a particular wording rather than any other in a particular context (in some ways, it would almost be as true to talk of the wording choosing the speaker). In writing this book, there are certain choices that I am very aware of making – e.g. I have consciously set out to sound 'interactive' in this book, and so I sometimes address 'you' directly rather than always avoiding this by using passives, etc. (both options are possible in a textbook, whereas in academic journal articles, for example, direct address to the reader as 'you' is very rare indeed). But there are many 'choices' that I am constrained to make by the kind of context in which I am using language: for example, it is very unlikely that I will use the structures

associated with swearing, except perhaps in quotes. It is only in consciously trying to imagine the 'wrong' choices that such choices even present themselves as possible: but the choice not to swear has nevertheless been made (or, rather, made for me). These are deliberately crude examples; but the principle applies in every detail of the wordings that I 'choose'.

One important implication of the functional view of language is that context and language are interdependent. This might seem too strong a way of putting it: it looks as though language could be seen as dependent on context. For example, a teacher may ask 'display' questions to which s/he already knows the answer, and to evaluate the answer given by a pupil as correct or not:

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher: | What is the woman wearing on her head? |
| Student: | A hat? |
| Teacher: | A hat, yes. |

One could assume that this is 'allowed' because of the classroom context, where the teacher has a particular kind of authority; but it is equally true to say that, by speaking in this way, the teacher and student are contributing to creating the context as being that of a classroom interaction. If the same teacher behaved like this with the same student when they happened to meet in the street, it would almost certainly be inappropriate because it would project the context as if it were the classroom. Similarly, if a TV journalist interviewing a government minister asked a display question and evaluated the minister's answer as correct, it would sound odd precisely because it would conjure up the wrong context, with the wrong relationship between the two speakers. We can use the term '**construe**' to talk about this kind of reflexivity. The question and evaluation of the response construe a classroom context: that is, they simultaneously reflect and construct that context. To take a different example, 'the glass broke' construes a slightly different view of events from 'I broke the glass' (hinging on the question of agency – see Chapter 5).

At a broader level, our experiences in the world clearly influence what we normally talk about and the way we talk about it. For example, we constantly adjust the way we talk to the person we are speaking to so as to take into account what we think they already know, and to negotiate our moment-by-moment relationship with them (as I am doing with you – note how I have chosen to use the more interactive 'we' here rather than, say, 'speakers'); and the lexical and grammatical resources of the language therefore offer ways of conducting this negotiation. At the same time, the way we normally talk about these experiences (and the way we hear other people talk about them) influences the way we see them: for example, we generally accept without conscious query the fact that advertisers talk about their products as solutions to our problems (as opposed to talking about our willingness to pay for the products as the solution to the advertisers' problems, which is at least equally valid a view).

By formulating our approach to linguistic description in the kind of terms used above – choices amongst relevant options in context – we are deliberately opening up the path towards grammatically based text analysis (where '**text**' means any instance of language in use): at each stage, we can ask why the writer or speaker is

expressing this particular meaning in this particular way at this particular point. I mentioned earlier that generative approaches take linguistics towards biology; functional grammar takes it towards sociology: the systematic study of relevant features in the culture and society that form the context in which language is used, and which are at the same time constructed by the way in which language is used. Both approaches, through form and meaning, ask essentially the same question about language: how can we explain why language has the main features that it does? But whereas the form-based approach finds the answer in the way our brains are structured, the meaning-based approach finds it in the way our social context is structured. (Of course, the different answers depend very largely on the fact that each approach takes a different view of the 'main features' that need to be explained.) Although our focus in the rest of the book will be on choices within the grammatical systems, we shall be regularly looking outwards towards the wider contextual factors that are construed by these choices.

## 1.2 Language, context and function: a preliminary exploration

If it is true that language and context are inextricably linked, any naturally occurring stretch of language should, to a greater or lesser extent, come trailing clouds of context with it: we should be able to deduce a great deal about the context in which the language was produced, the purpose for which it was produced, and the reasons why it was expressed in the way it was. (This is why formal linguists generally prefer invented examples: a pseudo-sentence like the burglar example above is designed to give no clues about 'distracting' elements such as who might have uttered these words, in what circumstances or why.) We can check this context-embeddedness of real language in a preliminary way by looking at a simple example. I have deliberately chosen one that conjures up a very clear context; but can you go from that to explain as much as possible about the language choices in terms of who the interactants are and what the speaker's purposes are? My commentary follows, but you will find it useful to try your own analysis before reading it.

> Once upon a time, there was a big, bad bear.

The context is obviously a fairy story, probably told by an adult to a young child. This is most clearly signalled by 'Once upon a time', which is used almost only in fairy stories (so much so that, if used in another context, it conjures up the very specific fairy-tale context, however fleetingly). The individual story teller hardly needs to 'choose' this opening: he knows that this is how fairy stories start. However, it is worth considering why this type of narrative should have such an immediately recognizable opening. One important factor is the addressee: a relatively unsophisticated language user, for whom very clear signals of purpose are necessary. The conventional opening signals something like: 'I'm not going to tell you to do anything; I'm not going to scold you; all you need to do is to sit back and enjoy the story that is coming up.' In addition, although the expression belongs grammatically to the group of adverbials that specify time ('Once', 'Yesterday', 'Three years ago',

etc.), it clearly does not in fact specify a real time. It thus signals that the narrative is a fictional one rather than, say, an account of what the teller did last year.

The clause structure ('there was ...') is an existential one (see 5.2.5). It introduces one of the main characters without saying that the bear was involved in any particular action – the action will presumably start in the next clause. Thus it stages the information, building up the story in increments that are manageable to the inexperienced language processor to whom the story is addressed. What we are told about the bear apart from its existence is that it is big and bad. The alliteration is obviously striking here: it appeals to children's pleasure in incidental patternings of sound, rather like wordplay at a more sophisticated level (in many adult texts we are more likely to rewrite something to remove alliteration if it happens to occur). At the same time, it serves to reinforce the non-real, poetic nature of the story, perhaps reducing the potential scariness of the animal (cf. the effect of 'an enormous, savage bear'). It is also worth commenting on the fact that the speaker evaluates the character as he introduces it. In sophisticated narratives such as novels, we expect to be skilfully guided towards an evaluation of characters without having the author's evaluation thrust upon us; but here the child is told in advance that the bear is bad. The adult takes on the responsibility of setting out the required set of values for the child, partly no doubt as a reflection of his assessment of the child's restricted ability to do the necessary inferencing for himself. In addition, the evaluation opens up generic expectations of how the story will unfold: the bear will somehow cause problems for the good characters who will appear in a moment, but will in the end be defeated. Children learn very rapidly to recognize conventional story lines, as long as the signals are clear enough.

These are only some of the main points that can be made about how this piece of language works in its context – I have not, for example, touched on the broader issues of the role of story-telling in the socialization of children. I have deliberately outlined the points as informally as I can; but what I hope the discussion shows is the kind of features that we want to be able to discuss in a more formalized way. The grammatical system that we set up should provide categories that relate to the communicative purposes and choices that we have identified. In the rest of the book, I shall be setting out a functional approach based closely on Michael Halliday's work, which allows us to do this in a systematic and satisfying way.

- Refer to Exercise 1.1.

---

## Exercise 1.1

Analyse the following extracts in the same way as the fairy-story opening: identify as much as you can about the context from which the extract comes, and discuss any features of the wording (lexis and structure) that you can relate to that context. The lexis will often provide the easiest clues, but try to go beyond that to identify other features as well.

1. Day return to Liverpool, please.
2. Appearances can be deceptive. But not in this case. The new Mercedes E-class looks different. And is different. It has the most aerodynamic body we've ever built. The best in its class.
3. Well you see she wrote this letter saying that she'd been ringing and what we couldn't understand when we spoke to Liz was she knew you were going to Peru and she knows you don't put the cats in the cattery when you go away so it was obvious where we were.
4. Old Brother Rhys was sitting up beside his neatly made bed, not far from the fire, nodding his ancient, grey-tonsured head. He looked proudly complacent, as one who has got his due against all the odds, stubbly chin jutting, thick old eyebrows bristling in all directions, and the small, sharp eyes beneath almost colourless in their grey pallor, but triumphantly bright.
5. While this handbook will give intending applicants the information they need, students must, in order to obtain up-to-date, full and official information about entrance requirements and courses, write direct to the institutions of their choice at least a year before they hope to begin their studies, so that they will have decided to which institutions they wish to seek admission, and obtained the necessary application form, well before the closing date for receipt of applications.
6. To make brown rolls divide the dough into 18 equal portions – each should weigh about 50g (2 oz). On an unfloured surface roll each piece of dough into a ball inside your cupped hand. Press down hard at first, then ease up to shape them nicely.
7. In Section 37-2 we found the directions of maximum and minimum intensity in a two-source interference pattern. We may also find the intensity at *any* point in the pattern. To do this, we have to combine the two sinusoidally varying fields (from the two sources) at a point $P$ in the radiation pattern, taking proper account of the phase difference of the two waves at point $P$, which results from the path difference.
8. But I am carried back against my will into a childhood where autumn is bonfires, marbles, smoke; I lean against my window fenced from evocations in the air. When I said autumn, autumn broke.

# 2
# Identifying clauses and clause constituents

## 2.1 Breaking up the sentence – and labelling the parts

At this stage, it is possible that the framework that I have set out in Chapter 1 will strike you as rather abstract, and the full implications of adopting the functional approach may not be easy to grasp. There is something of a Catch-22 situation: you can only really understand each aspect of an approach when you have a general framework into which you can fit the various aspects as they are introduced; but you cannot get a firm grip of this framework until you understand most of the aspects. This means that you may find it useful to re-read Chapter 1 after reading the rest of the book (and, anyway, in the final chapter I will come back to some of the themes in the light of the intervening discussion).

In the present chapter I want to turn to some more concrete preliminaries: the ways in which we can split up the sentence into parts, so that we can later go on to look at the particular functions that each part serves. As well as reviewing the different kinds of elements that make up sentences, one of the main purposes of the chapter is to go rapidly over the basic terminology that I will be using. Technical terms that are specific to Hallidayan Functional Grammar, or which are used in a special sense, will be defined and explained as they are introduced in the book. However, there are other terms that I will be assuming are familiar to you – but which I will look at briefly in this chapter, just so that we can confirm that we are on common ground. If you have done grammatical analysis before, you will probably find that most of this chapter tells you nothing new, and you can safely skim through it rapidly (but check section 2.2 on ranks, which organizes the familiar topics in a possibly unfamiliar way). If you are not familiar with grammatical analysis, you may find some of this chapter hard going – but it is a necessary foundation for what follows.

The focus of this book is on clauses and the elements that make up clauses, which is why I will only look briefly in this chapter at the way in which these smaller

elements themselves are made up. However, it should be borne in mind that a full account of the grammar of English would include a good deal of discussion of the structure of nominal groups, for example. My main interest is in analysing how clauses function in texts. It would be equally possible, and useful, to write a book looking 'downwards' from the clause at all details of the smaller elements – but that would be a different book.

### *2.1.1 Recognizing constituents*

As a start, I assume that you will be familiar with the main terms for word classes: **noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, auxiliary verb, modal verb, pronoun** and **conjunction**. I also assume that you will be able to recognize them in text. For example, the following sentence includes at least one example of each of the nine word classes listed above. Can you identify them before reading on?

When you are learning about basic law, you will usually find it relatively easy.

Here are the examples of each:

- noun: 'law'
- verbs: 'learning', 'find'
- adjectives: 'basic', 'easy'
- adverbs: 'usually', 'relatively'
- preposition: 'about'
- auxiliary verb: 'are'
- modal verb: 'will'
- pronouns: 'you', 'it'
- conjunction: 'when'.

I also assume that you will be able to recognize when there might be some doubt about which class a word belongs to. For example, in what ways might there be some hesitation over labelling the word class of the highlighted words in the following examples?

> I heard a *car* door slam.
> Other visitors, *however*, regret the lack of a residents' lounge.
> Heller's music was new. *So* were many of the piano works composed by Schumann.
> We came about nine years *ago*.

I am less interested here in deciding on a 'right' label than in showing that there are areas of uncertainty; but, for the record, these are my comments on the underlined words. 'Car' is a noun, but modifying another noun ('door') in a way that seems more typical of an adjective. 'However' is generally classified as an adverb, mainly because adverb is the rag-bag category where words get put if they do not fit anywhere else. 'So' is a pro-form (like a pro-noun), standing in for part of the clause:

it may be called an adverb in grammar books, for the same negative reason as 'therefore'. And 'ago' belongs in a class of its own, since it behaves like no other word in English – it can be described as a postposed adverb.

Moving up from individual words, we will be dealing with **groups**. You will find the analyses in the main part of this book easier to follow if you are familiar with the idea that the words in a clause can often be grouped together into separate components of the clause each consisting of more than one word. For example, we can split the following sentence into three groups, each consisting of two or three words, which represent the elements of the 'doer', the 'action' and the 'done-to' being talked about:

[The little girl] [had eaten] [all the porridge].

Here 'the little girl' and 'all the porridge' are nominal groups (i.e. groups centred around a noun – 'girl' and 'porridge'), while 'had eaten' is a verbal group. Can you identify the parallels between the following sentences in terms of groups?

Charity is business.
This comfortable family-run old farmhouse on the unspoilt southern shore of Ullswater has been a long-time favourite of Guide readers, particularly walkers and climbers.
One aspect of Trollope's reputation that can find no place in the present study is his fame as a writer of travel books.

Although you may not have recognized this at first, each of the four sentences consists of three groups: the middle group in each case comprises a form of the verb 'be' ('is', 'has been', 'is'); everything before the verbal group forms a single nominal group, and so does everything after it. Nominal groups can become very complex, and you may sometimes find it hard to work out where they end. It is usually easy enough to identify the noun at the centre of the group, but the group may include a long **Postmodifier**: this is the part of the nominal group that follows the noun. In the following versions of two of the examples above, the nominal groups are in square brackets, the central noun is in bold and the postmodifiers are in italics.

[This comfortable family-run old **farmhouse** *on the unspoilt southern shore of Ullswater*] has been [a long-time **favourite** *of Guide readers, particularly walkers and climbers*].
[One **aspect** *of Trollope's reputation that can find no place in the present study*] is [his **fame** *as a writer of travel books*].

I will come back to this point in 2.1.2 below, when I look at the nominal group in more detail, and in 2.2, when I discuss the phenomenon of embedding.

One distinction within groups that we need to make is that between **finite** and **non-finite verbal groups** (these are sometimes confusingly referred to as finite and non-finite verbs). This distinction will be discussed briefly in 4.3.6, but it is important particularly in relation to clauses (see next paragraph). A finite verbal group is

traditionally defined as one that shows tense, whereas a non-finite group does not. In the following example, 'was leaning' is finite, and 'listening' is non-finite:

> She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something.

Tense is often shown in the auxiliary rather than in the main verb, as in '*was* leaning': note that 'leaning' and 'listening' are identical in terms of their form. This helps to explain why I have said that finiteness is a property of the group rather than just of the verb. Can you identify the verbal groups in the following sentences and decide if they are finite or non-finite? Are there any doubtful cases?

> She would start with them, ticking off their names after each call.
> Bogart did his best to put her at ease by joking with her.
> The jobs pay £350 a week and have been created as the plant gears up for the production of new V8 engines for a range of Jaguar cars to replace the ageing XJS.

The clear cases are as follows:

- Finite groups: 'would start'; 'did'; 'pay', 'have been created', 'gears up' (a phrasal verb).
- Non-finite groups: 'ticking off' (another phrasal verb); 'to put'; 'joking'; 'to replace'.

There is one potentially doubtful case: 'ageing'. 'Adjectives' like this derived from a non-finite verbal form have an uncertain status between verbs and adjectives, but for most purposes they are best taken as adjectives.

Following from this point about verbal groups, I will also be assuming on the whole that you can identify the boundaries of clauses. For our purposes, a **clause** is (potentially) any stretch of language centred around a verbal group. Thus, the following example has four clauses:

> The author met her husband in the 1940s, married him in India and lived there before settling in Canada in 1955.

You might like to verify this by identifying the verbs and then marking the clause boundaries. Sometimes it is said that a clause must have a finite verbal group and that, if there is a non-finite group, we call it a phrase. However, in Hallidayan grammar clauses may be either finite or non-finite, depending on whether the verbal group is finite or non-finite. Can you therefore identify the clause boundaries in the three sentences above that we analysed for finite and non-finite verbal groups?

You should find two clauses in the first sentence (one finite, one non-finite), three in the second (one finite, two non-finite), and four in the third (three finite, one non-finite). But what about this sentence – how many clauses are there in this?

> Today, however, she is struggling to finish a sentence, because she is crying.

It seems clear that there are two clauses here, but the first one seems to include two verbal groups, one finite ('is struggling') and one non-finite ('to finish'). However, they are not analysed as two clauses: instead they form one complex verbal group. This point will be discussed further in Chapter 5. And what about the following sentence (which you saw above)?

> One aspect of Trollope's reputation that can find no place in the present study is his fame as a writer of travel books.

Here, we have a clear finite clause 'that can find no place in the present study', but it is 'inside' something that we have already identified as a single nominal group. This is in fact an embedded clause – a concept that will be discussed more fully in 2.2 below.

So far we have simply counted the clauses in a sentence; but we can also look at the relations between the clauses. There are traditional distinctions between **main (independent)** and **subordinate clauses**, and between **coordination** and **subordination**. We can illustrate these distinctions with the following sentence:

> Aunt Julia smiled broadly and murmured something about compliments as she released her hand from his grasp.

Here we have two coordinated main clauses '... smiled ... and murmured ...', and a subordinate clause 'as she released ...' Can you identify the main and subordinate clauses in the examples below? And can you see any differences in the various cases of coordination?

> Bedrooms are individually decorated, and while you are having dinner your room is tidied and the beds are folded down.
> Although the back door of the cottage could be locked and they had left her the key, an intruder could easily break in through a window.

In the first example, you should find three coordinated main clauses and one subordinate clause ('while ...'); and in the second, one main clause and two coordinated subordinate clauses ('Although ... and ...'). One thing that the analysis shows is that coordination can occur at different levels: between either main clauses or subordinate clauses, and between either finite clauses or non-finite clauses. This is a point we will come back to in Chapter 8.

- Refer to Exercise 2.1.

### *2.1.2 Structural and functional labels*

So far in this chapter, I have avoided using some terms that you might have expected to see, like Subject and Object. This is deliberate, because it is essential in a functional approach to have different sets of labels according to whether we are describing the structure of a stretch of language or its function. Most of the rest of the book focuses

on functional labels, for obvious reasons, so I will not spend long on them here; but it will be useful at this point to set out the distinction as clearly as possible. To show the difference, how can you label the following bit of language?

their subsequent affair

You should be able to see that it is a nominal group; but is it Subject or Object? The answer, of course, is that it can be neither until it is used in a clause; and in a clause it can be either:

*Their subsequent affair* climaxes in a showdown across the House divide. [= Subject]
The death of his children overshadows *their subsequent affair*. [= Object]

It can also form part of a different type of clause constituent, an Adjunct (part of the clause that tells us circumstances like when, where, how or – as in the example below – why the event happens):

She got a divorce *because of their subsequent affair*.

As you will see, we are making a distinction between what it is (a nominal group) and what it does (e.g. Subject in the clause). Its structural label remains the same, whereas its functional label is dependent on the grammatical context in which it appears.

One image that you may find it useful to keep in mind as you do analyses is that of **slots** and **fillers**. We can see the clause as having a number of functional slots, such as Subject, which can be filled by elements (groups) with certain kinds of structural qualities. For example, the Subject and Object slots are normally both filled by a nominal group; and so on. We can show this as in Figure 2.1 for the sentence:

He had paid his bill very casually.

| **types of group** ⇓ | *nominal group (NG), e.g.* [1] He [2] his bill | *verbal group (VG), e.g.* had paid | *adverbial group (AG), e.g.* very casually | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **clause functions** | NG [1] Subject | VG Predicator | NG [2] Object | AG Adjunct |

*Figure 2.1* Functional slots and structural fillers

One reason for using this approach is that it allows us to show how the functional slots may in fact be filled by different structural constituents. Most obviously, the Adjunct slot is often filled by a prepositional phrase rather than an adverbial group:

He had paid his bill *by credit card*.

But we can also find, for example, the Subject slot sometimes filled by an adverbial group or an embedded clause:

> *Tomorrow* is another day.
> *To lose one parent* may be regarded as a misfortune.

The traditional labels for the functional slots in the clause give the abbreviation SPOCA: Subject, Predicator, Object, Complement, Adjunct. (Sometimes 'Verb' is used instead of Predicator, but that is mixing a structural label with the functional ones.) In traditional terms, as we have seen above, the Object is the entity that the Subject 'does' the Predicator to. The 'Complement' is used to label a nominal or adjectival group that refers to the same entity as the Subject, or describes the Subject – the Predicator in these cases is a linking verb such as 'be':

> The first prize is *a trip to the Bahamas*.
> In the end, the choice became *pretty clear*.

An Adjunct is typically an adverbial group or a prepositional phrase giving some kind of background information about the event or state expressed by the Predicator. Just to check, can you label the functional parts of these clauses?

> Charity is business.
> On the first day I wept bitterly.
> She released her hand from his grasp.
> In 1969, schools which were based in the town were reorganised.
> Their subsequent affair climaxes in a showdown across the House divide.

The analyses are: SPC; ASPA; SPOA; ASP; SPA.

Although we will not be focusing directly on groups in the rest of the book, it is worth mentioning that we can also analyse nominal groups in functional terms. Nominal groups can be divided into three main functional components: (Premodifier) Head (Postmodifier). The brackets here indicate that two of these components are not always present; but, just as a clause must have a Predicator, so a nominal group must have a Head. Table 2.1 shows the various possibilities from the example sentences above. As can be seen, the Premodifier is simply anything that comes before the Head in the nominal group, and the Postmodifier is anything that follows the Head. The Premodifier includes determiners (such as 'a' and 'the'), adjectives (e.g. 'subsequent') or nouns premodifying the Head (e.g. 'credit'). The main options for the Postmodifier are prepositional phrases (e.g. 'across the House divide') and embedded clauses (e.g. 'which were based in the town'): there will be more on this in 2.2 below.

In Chapter 4, I will be setting out a slightly modified version of the clause labels given above; but, more importantly, I will be introducing a range of other types of functional labels, reflecting the fact that clauses do not express only one kind of meaning (or perform only one kind of function). To reiterate what I have emphasized