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# Approaches to Discourse

Deborah Schiffrin

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# 2 Definitions of Discourse

## 1 Introduction

In chapter 1, I introduced six approaches to discourse analysis and outlined my plan for describing and comparing these approaches in parts II and III of the book. In this chapter, I consider three different definitions of discourse and introduce several basic issues that underlie the descriptions of, and comparisons among, the approaches.

Two paradigms in linguistics provide different assumptions about the general nature of language and the goals of linguistics (section 2).[1] These paradigms are sometimes differently labelled: what Newmeyer (1983) calls a formalist paradigm is similar to Hymes's (1947b) structuralist paradigm and to what Hopper (1988) calls *a priori* grammar; the functionalist paradigm is sometimes also called emergent (Hopper) or interactive (Mey et al. 1992). The two paradigms make different background assumptions about the goals of a linguistic theory, the methods for studying language, and the nature of data and empirical evidence. These differences in paradigm also influence definitions of discourse: a definition derived from the formalist paradigm views discourse as "sentences" (section 3), a definition derived from the functionalist paradigm views discourse as "language use" (section 4). A third definition of discourse attempts to bridge the formalist–functionalist dichotomy (section 5). The relationship between structure and function in general is an important issue that is related to other issues central to discourse analysis (section 6).

## 2 Formal and functionalist paradigms

Discourse is often defined in two ways: a particular unit of language (above the sentence), and a particular focus (on language use; see Schiffrin 1987a: 1).

These two definitions of discourse reflect the difference between formalist and functionalist paradigms. After briefly reviewing the two paradigms, I discuss discourse as structure (section 3) and discourse as function (section 4).[2]

Hymes (1974b: 79) suggests that the following qualities contrast structural (i.e. formalist) with functional approaches.

| "Structural" | "Functional" |
| --- | --- |
| Structure of language (code) as grammar | Structure of speech (act, event) as ways of speaking |
| Use merely implements, perhaps limits, may correlate with, what is analyzed as code; analysis of code prior to analysis of use | Analysis of use prior to analysis of code; organization of use discloses additional features and relations; shows code and use in integral (dialectical) relation |
| Referential function, fully semanticized uses as norm | Gamut of stylistic or social functions |
| Elements and structures analytically arbitrary (in cross-cultural or historical perspective), or universal (in theoretical perspective) | Elements and structures as ethnographically appropriate ("psychiatrically" in Sapir's sense) |
| Functional (adaptive) equivalence of languages; all languages essentially (potentially) equal | Functional (adaptive) differentiation of languages, varieties, styles; these being existentially (actually) not necessarily equivalent |
| Single homogeneous code and community ("replication of uniformity") | Speech community as matrix of code-repertoires, or speech styles ("organization of diversity") |
| Fundamental concepts, such as speech community, speech act, fluent speaker, functions of speech and of languages, taken for granted or arbitrarily postulated | Fundamental concepts taken as problematic and to be investigated |

Leech (1983: 46) suggests other ways that formalism and functionalism are "associated with very different views of the nature of language," including the following:

1 Formalists (e.g. Chomsky) tend to regard language primarily as a mental phenomenon. Functionalists (e.g. Halliday) tend to regard it primarily as a societal phenomenon.

2 Formalists tend to explain linguistic universals as deriving from a common genetic linguistic inheritance of the human species. Functionalists tend to explain them as deriving from the universality of the uses to which language is put in human society.
3 Formalists are inclined to explain children's acquisition of language in terms of a built-in human capacity to learn language. Functionalists are inclined to explain it in terms of the development of the child's communicative needs and abilities in society.
4 Above all, formalists study language as an autonomous system, whereas functionalists study it in relation to its social function.

At the risk of great simplification, we can say that functionalism is based on two general assumptions: (a) language has functions that are external to the linguistic system itself; (b) external functions influence the internal organization of the linguistic system. These shared assumptions contrast functionalism with approaches that are not concerned with how external processes impinge upon language (or view such a relationship as irrelevant to the goals of linguistic theory). They also contrast functionalism with the views of earlier linguists who largely restricted their analyses to functions *within* the linguistic system (e.g. Sapir's view that speech sounds are functionally organized did not go outside of language *per se*) and with the views of contemporary linguists who view functions as the role a category may play within a sentence (e.g. relational grammar: Perlmutter 1983) and/or as mathematical representations from names to values (e.g. lexical-functional grammar: Kaplan and Bresnan 1982).

Formalist views, on the other hand, argue that although language may very well have social and cognitive functions, these functions do not impinge upon the internal organization of language. Newmeyer (1983) captures these qualities in two defining characteristics: *autonomy* and *modularity*. First, autonomy (p. 2):

> the grammar of a language is characterized by a formal autonomous system. That is, the phonology, syntax, and those aspects of meaning determined by syntactic configuration form a structural system whose primitive terms are not artifacts of a system that encompasses both human language and other human facilities or abilities. (Emphasis in original)

The formal autonomy of the grammar, however, does not prevent intersection with other modules: surface features of phonology, syntax, and semantics can result from the interaction of the "formal grammar" module with other equally autonomous modules, each governed by its own set of principles. Such modules might include perceptual psychology, physiology, acoustics, conversational principles, and general principles of learning and concept formation. (See also Newmeyer 1991, and comments on that paper in Harris and Taylor 1991.)

Although scholars often articulate formalist/functionalist differences in terms that are mutually exclusive, Bates and MacWhinney (1982) suggest that differences within the functionalist paradigm bring functionalism either closer to, or further from, the formalist assumptions of autonomy and modularity. The most radical functionalist position, for example, would be that external functions (such as communicative concerns) define primitive categories, such that there would be no need to posit independently definable, autonomous grammatical categories (Bates and MacWhinney 1982: 188), e.g. DuBois's (1987) suggestion that ergativity is discourse based (also Hopper and Thompson 1980). A more conservative position would allow an interaction between form and function, such that external functions would work in tandem with the formal organization inherent in the linguistic system – influencing it at certain points in the system, but not fundamentally defining its basic categories. (This actually seems to be the position taken by Newmeyer (1983), although he presents his work as a strong defense of formal theory.)

Related to the difference in the degree to which external functions condition the system is a difference in the degree to which the linguistic system itself is open to functional influences. An extremely useful way of differentiating degrees of openness of the system is Bates and MacWhinney's (1982: 178–90) differentiation of four levels of correlation between form and function. The weakest correlation (a diachronic form–function relation) requires minimal assumptions about how open the system is to functional influence (and further suggests that certain points are only open for limited time periods, i.e. when in change). The strongest correlation (a form–function relation in adult competence) entails maximal assumptions about the openness of the system to functional influence.

The two definitions of discourse prevalent in the field reflect the differences between formalist and functionalist paradigms. After describing these definitions in the next two sections, I suggest an alternative definition that attempts to avoid some of the pitfalls of taking either a strong formalist or strong functionalist approach to the definition of discourse.

## 3 Discourse: language above the sentence

The classic definition of discourse as derived from formalist (in Hymes's 1974b terms, "structural") assumptions is that discourse is "language above the sentence or above the clause" (Stubbs 1983: 1). Van Dijk (1985: 4) observes: "Structural descriptions characterize discourse at several levels or dimensions of analysis and in terms of many different units, categories, schematic patterns, or relations." Despite the diversity of structural approaches noted by van Dijk, there is a common core: structural analyses focus on the way different units function in relation *to each other* (a focus shared

with structuralism in general (e.g. Levi-Strauss 1967; Piaget 1970), but they disregard "the functional relations with the context of which discourse is a part" (van Dijk 1985: 4). Since it is precisely this relationship – between discourse and the context of which discourse is a part – that characterizes functional analyses, it might seem that the two approaches have little in common.

Structurally based analyses of discourse find *constituents* (smaller linguistic units) that have particular *relationships* with one another and that can occur in a restricted number of (often rule-governed) *arrangements* (cf. Grimes 1975; Stubbs 1983: chapter 5). In many structural approaches, discourse is viewed as a level of structure higher than the sentence, or higher than another unit of text. Z. Harris (1951) – the first linguist to refer to "discourse analysis" – claimed explicitly that discourse is the next level in a hierarchy of morphemes, clauses, and sentences. Harris viewed discourse analysis procedurally as a formal methodology, derived from structural methods of linguistic analysis: such a methodology could break a text down into relationships (such as equivalence, substitution) among its lower-level constituents. Structure was so central to Harris's view of discourse that he also argued that what opposes discourse to a random sequence of sentences is precisely the fact that it has structure: a pattern by which segments of the discourse occur (and recur) relative to each other.

Harris's approach sought to be a theoretical and methodological extension of linguistic structuralism, not only because it extended the notion of linguistic unit to another level, but also because it was methodologically dependent upon lower-level structural analyses for the identification of higher-level constituents: the constituents of discourse were morphemes and morpheme sequences (words, phrases) that were themselves identifiable through "any grammatical analysis" of a sentence (p. 1). In addition, the only type of structure admissible into analysis was what could be investigated by inspection of the data without taking into account other data, e.g. speakers, context, meanings. However, Harris's intention was that the regular recurrence of constituents would correspond to a semantic interpretation for the discourse – a hope that was quite consistent with the structural focus (at lower levels) on morphemes as sound/meaning correspondences.

Although structural approaches have been modified by Harris himself (e.g. Harris 1988) and by others (e.g. Grimes 1975; Polanyi 1988), what is still critical to structural views of discourse is that discourse is comprised of *units*. Although Harris's unit was the morpheme (and their combination into sentences), more recent approaches have identified the clause (e.g. Linde and Labov 1985), the proposition (e.g. Grimes 1975; Mann and Thompson 1988), or the sentence (see below) as the unit of which discourse is comprised. Some scholars also differentiate sources of "connectedness" within discourse and assign different roles to different units. Holker (1989), for example, suggests that the linguistic structures of an expression, including both form-based (morphological and syntactic) and meaning-based (referential and conjunctive)

relations, create connexity and cohesion. (Coherence, however, would be a result of the interpreter's knowledge about states of affairs mentioned in a text.) Other structural approaches search for multi-based and/or diversified units: Polanyi (1988), for example, allows structures to be comprised of units as varied as sentences, turns, speech actions, and speech events.

Consistent with the definition of discourse as language "above the sentence," many comtemporary structural analyses of discourse view the sentence as the unit of which discourse is comprised. Yet several problems stem from the reliance of definitions and analyses on the smaller unit of "sentence."

One immediate problem is that the units in which people speak do not always seem like sentences. Research by Chafe (1980, 1987, 1992), for example, suggests that spoken language is produced in units with intonational and semantic closure – not necessarily syntactic closure. Some scholars also believe that the grammarian's focus on sentences stems from the value that we – as members of a literate culture – place on written language (Harris 1980; Hopper 1988). If we were to focus solely on spoken language, we would be more likely to view language in terms of intonation units that reflect not underlying grammatical structures, but underlying focuses of consciousness in which information is organized (Chafe 1987).

Support for this view is often found by examining the transcript of a stretch of speech and noting that the intonational breaks do not always correspond to syntactic boundaries. In (1), for example, we find chunks of speech that do not fit our traditional notions of sentencehood:

(1) You can run a hou- whatcha- now whatcha you can- ran a house- you can run a house a- and *do* the job, which is important, y' can't y- a man can't do it himself, and a woman can't do it himself w- if y' want it to be successful. In most cases.

Of course it is possible to transcribe (1) in a way that would make it *look* more like a sentence, e.g. by applying editing rules to the non-fluencies and false starts (Labov 1966; but see Taylor and Cameron 1987: chapter 7). Nevertheless, one could still argue that the use of a transcription system that builds upon graphic punctuation symbols does not really capture the way words and expressions actually cluster together in spoken language (e.g. G. Brown 1977). Even more critically, one could argue that the use of such devices forces us to think of such chunks as sentences, rather than as providing an accurate representation of how speakers themselves produce language, e.g. as intonationally packaged foci of consciousness (Chafe 1987), as rhetorical amalgamations of clauses (Cumming 1984), in collaboration with interlocutors (Goodwin 1979). To reflect such concerns, some discourse analysts try to exclude from their transcription systems those conventions of punctuation (e.g. period, commas, capital letters) that are used in written language to indicate syntactic structure or closure, or to use such devices to capture aspects of speech production (see appendix 2).

The reliance on sentence as the unit of which discourse is comprised is theoretically problematic in other ways. Bloomfield (1933: 170) defined a sentence as "an independent linguistic form not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in some larger linguistic form." However, the view that discourse is a level of structure higher than sentences – more precisely, that discourse is a structure within which sentences are embedded – sometimes ends up challenging the view that sentences have grammatical autonomy and closure. Many analysts focus upon how syntactic properties of clauses or sentences contribute to (or, alternatively, are influenced by) higher-level structures of a text (e.g. Prince 1986; Ward et al. 1991). Interestingly, however, such analyses sometimes end up arguing that what, at first, seemed to be relatively static and stable properties of sentence grammar are really dynamic, emergent byproducts of the processes by which people organize information and transfer that information to another (e.g. Fox and Thompson 1990; Givón 1979; see also Goodwin 1979; Schegloff 1979a for proposals that sentences are interactionally constructed). In brief, some analyses end up challenging the very notion that sentences *are* what Bloomfield says they are: they challenge the notion that sentences are independent linguistic forms (for elaboration of this idea see Hopper 1987, 1988). However, if sentences have no existence outside of discourse – if they are created by discourse – then it is confusing (and perhaps even meaningless) to try to define discourse as something larger than the very thing that it creates, i.e. sentences.

Another consequence of the view that discourse is language above the sentence is that we may begin to expect discourse to exhibit a structure analogous to the sentences of which it is comprised – an expectation that may be unwarranted (Stubbs 1983: chapter 5). Take, for example, the sentence grammarian's use of the term "well formed" as it applies to structures. To illustrate, we can take Chomsky's well known example:

(2a) Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.

Although this sentence is meaningless (in the usual sense of meaning, as sense and reference), it is syntactically well formed. In addition to being meaningless, however, (2b) is also syntactically deviant. (Examples and discussion are from Sells 1985: 3–4.)

(2b) *Furiously sleep ideas green colorless.

Note that this distinction reappears even when the words do make conventional sense. Again, Sells's (1985: 3) examples:

(3c) Revolutionary new ideas appear infrequently.
(3d) *Infrequently appear ideas new revolutionary.

Sells (p. 4) makes the following important point:

> the real syntactic truth underlying the contrasts in grammaticality seen above is that while some sequences of the form "Adjective-adjective-noun-verb-adverb" are syntactically well formed in English, sequences of the form "Adverb-verb-noun-adjective-adjective" are not.

Structure in this sense just does not seem to apply to discourse: it is simply not possible to contrast constituent strings of well-formed versus ill-formed discourse in the same way. One reason has to do with our inability to identify units of discourse in a way as clear cut (and mutually exclusive) as our ways for identifying constituents of sentences (e.g. chapter 3). As I discuss in Schiffrin (1988a: 257–9), a related point is that the types of structures identified by discourse analysts have not always been comprised of sentences, or indeed of language units *per se*, e.g. analysts have spoken of action structures and turn structures. Indeed, even units that *might* be defined linguistically are often viewed in terms of their consequences for the interaction between speaker and hearer. For example, even though a question–answer pair may be defined as a semantic sequence in which an incomplete proposition presented by one speaker is completed by another, such a definition is less relevant to the concerns of many discourse analysts than the fact that questions may be used to replicate (or negotiate) social relationships and status (e.g. chapter 5). A related point is that there are several different levels at which discourse analysts have identified structure. Some scholars have observed that entire encounters are framed and bracketed from each other at both their initiation (Collett 1983; Corsaro 1979; Godard 1977; Goffman 1974; Schegloff 1972a; Schiffrin 1977, 1981b) and termination (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Others focus on how single turns at talk are sequenced (Sacks et al. 1974). Included between these extremes is a focus on topic structures (Brown and Yule 1983: chapter 3; Button and Casey 1984; Jefferson 1984; Keenan and Schieffelin 1976), and dialogic pairs (such as question–answer pairs). Because units such as encounters, topics, dialogic pairs, and turns are so different from each other in substance, however, it is not at all clear that they form the sort of hierarchical structures to which linguists are accustomed at other levels of analysis.

One way to try to get around some of the problems just noted is to adopt Lyons's (1977: 385, 387) distinction between system-sentence and text-sentence. System-sentences are "the well-formed strings that [are] generated by the grammar" (p. 387), i.e. they "are abstract theoretical constructs, correlates of which are generated by the linguist's model of the language-system" (p. 622). Text-sentences, on the other hand, are "context-dependent utterance-signals (or parts of utterance-signals), tokens of which may occur in particular texts" (p. 622). Lyons' distinction allows discourse to be comprised of text-sentences rather than system-sentences. And as Lyons (1977: 632) notes, "there is no reason to suppose that system-sentences, as such, play any role in the production and interpretation of utterances" (cf. text-sentences).

Defining discourse as text-sentences helps to capture the sorts of internal dependencies that we expect texts to have. In (4), for example, we see a variety

of ways that the information presented in one sentence presupposes information in another (cf. Halliday and Hasan 1976; Lyons 1977).

(4a) ELLIPSIS
Jim: Where's the milk?
Karen: The milk is on the table.

(4b) NOMINAL ANAPHORA
I saw *that cat* the other day.
*It* was still wandering around without a home.

(4c) TEMPORAL ANAPHORA
We moved here *in 1982.*
We didn't even have jobs *then.*

(4d) REFERENCE
I saw *a robin* the other day.
It was *the first one* I saw this spring.

Viewing the sentences in (4) as text-sentences captures the idea that they are situated in a linguistic unit larger than themselves; furthermore, the fact that they are located in this way allows us to account for some of their internal properties.

Separating text-sentences from system-sentences also allows us to maintain a definition of system-sentences that is even more abstract than Bloomfield's definition. In 1957, for example, Chomsky viewed a sentence as a string of words with an abstract representation mapping sound to meaning; such a representation is derived in a certain way, i.e. generated by rules. Such a definition depends upon a theory of generative grammar: other definitions may be differently attuned to other theories of grammar. If we define discourse in terms of text-sentences, neither the theory dependency nor the level of abstraction of system-sentences is a problem for our definition of discourse. However, we may still end up returning to the problem of circularity noted earlier: defining discourse as comprised of just those constituents (text-sentences) whose definition actually depends on discourse.

We have seen thus far that viewing discourse as a unit above the sentence is not just a definition of discourse, but a way of leading to a particular type of analysis. Although this definition and the analysis to which it leads can be appealing, it also raises some problems. Let me briefly review these problems before turning to another definition of discourse. First, the view of discourse as a unit above the sentence allows one to focus quite easily upon how syntactic properties of clauses or sentences contribute to (or alternatively, are influenced by) higher level structures of a text (e.g. Linde and Labov 1975, Matthiessen and Thompson 1987), e.g. specific properties of sentences, such as word order or typotactic versus paratactic coordination, can be related to the properties of texts. Such analyses, however, often end up deriving the syntax of sentences from the properties of texts and the communicative goals of speakers. As noted earlier, it is somewhat circular to define discourse as something larger than the

lower-level unit that it seems to create. Second, the structural view of discourse places discourse in a hierarchy of language structures, thus fostering the view that one can describe language in a unitary way that continues unimpeded from morpheme to clause to sentence to discourse. This view, however, attributes to discourse the kind of formal regularity often found at lower levels of linguistic description. (Taylor and Cameron 1987 suggest that this is one reason why formalisms may be generally attractive to those searching for patterns.) Thus, the extension of concepts from one level of linguistic description to discourse can actually *perpetuate* the view that discourse is parallel in "kind" to lower level linguistic constituents.[3] But as we noted earlier, this view might not be warranted: not only is it difficult to define a text as well-formed or ill-formed, but discourse structures are not always the sort of hierarchical structures to which linguists are accustomed at other levels of analysis.

Before turning to a functional view of discourse, let us take a sample discourse and see how we might find its structure. This will allow us to focus not just on the conceptual consequences, but also on some of the more specific analytical consequences of a view of discourse couched within a formalist paradigm. Let us consider a hypothetical exchange between two colleagues.

(5) JAN: (a) Are you free for lunch today?
BARBARA: (b) I have to advise students all day.

(5) illustrates an easily recognizable and familiar discourse structure that we will be focusing upon in later chapters of this book: a question–answer pair. We can identify this as a structure because we know the units of which it is comprised ("question," "answer"), we know their relationship to one another (the question opens a proposition that the answer fills), and we know the order in which they must occur (question before answer). But how is it that we actually identify (a) as a question? What is the background knowledge that allows us to hear (or read) a string of words and come up with a label for those words? These are important questions: if we cannot come up with a way of identifying questions – of identifying the initial unit of which the structure is comprised – then we cannot go much further in our analysis of the relationship between the unit "question" and the unit "answer" (e.g. Selting 1992; also see discussion in chapters 3 and 5).

It seems to be quite easy to define (5a) *Are you free for lunch today?* as a question, simply because we can rely on purely formal clues typical of interrogative sentences, e.g. subject–verb inversion. The examples in (6), however, show that this process need not always seem so automatic, simply because it is not always easy to find exactly those criteria that allow utterances to be identified as questions.

(6) (a) You're free for lunch today?
(b) Free for lunch today?
(c) Lunch today?

Utterances (a), (b), and (c) in (6) are not questions by the syntactic criterion noted above. (6a), for example, is clearly a declarative, rather than interrogative, sentence. (6b) and (6c) cannot be unequivocally expanded to interrogatives: we cannot be certain of the fuller sentences underlying the elliptical forms. The fuller form for *Lunch today?* (6c), for example, could be a number of different interrogatives: *Are you free for lunch today?*, *Are you eating lunch today?*, *Do you want to eat lunch today?* Although these examples thus suggest the difficulty of relying upon syntax alone as a cue to utterance identity, they also suggest that we might be able to rely on intonation: note that (a), (b), and (c), are all represented as having final rising intonation – thought to be a frequent prosodic indicator of questions (see discussion in chapter 3).

The example in (7), however, suggests the reverse problem – for it is intonation, but not syntax, that fails to provide a consistent clue to the identity of the utterance as a question. (In keeping with many systems for transcribing conversation (see appendix 2) I am using a period (.) to indicate final falling intonation typical of what we might find with a declarative sentence.

(7) Do you want to have lunch.

Thus, in (7), the word order is typical of interrogatives, but the intonation seems more typical of declarative sentences.

Finally, the utterances in (8) and (9) show neither the syntactic nor the intonational features typical of questions:

(8) (a) I want to ask if you're free for lunch.
(b) I was wondering whether you wanted to have lunch.

(8a) and (8b) might be called indirect questions and they do seem to "do" some of the same things as direct questions (with interrogative syntax), e.g. they elicit a particular kind of information from a respondent. But other utterances also seem to be directed toward the same purpose:

(9) (a) I'm hungry.
(b) Come eat.

Although (9a) and (9b) are clearly not questions according to either our syntactic or intonational criteria, the declarative statement in (9a) and the imperative in (9b) seem to accomplish some of the same things as the questions cited earlier, and could possibly be answered through the same range of responses.

These examples suggest that syntax and intonation are neither necessary nor sufficient criteria for the identification of questions. Although question–answer is an easily recognizable and familiar discourse structure, it turns out to be difficult to provide criteria allowing us to identify as questions all of the many different strings of words that we may intuitively think of as questions.

The problem is that if we cannot come up with a way of identifying the initial unit of which the structure is comprised, then we cannot go much further in our analysis of that structure.

To summarize: we have seen in this section that structurally based definitions of discourse lead to analyses of constituents (smaller units) that have particular relationships with one another in a text and that can occur in a restricted set of text level arrangements. They also try to extend methods of linguistic analysis that have been useful for other levels of linguistic description and/or to rely upon linguistic characteristics of clauses (or sentences) as clues to textual structures. We have also seen, however, that identifying structural constituents of discourse is often a difficult task. The next definition to be considered replaces what is basically a formalist thrust with a functionalist thrust: discourse is language use.

## 4 Discourse: language use

In section 2, I presented several ways that formalist and functionalist views of language differ, and in section 3, I discussed a view of discourse largely compatible with formalist assumptions about language. In this section, I consider a more functionalist view: "the study of discourse is the study of *any* aspect of language use" (Fasold 1990: 65). Another statement of this view of discourse is Brown and Yule's (1983: 1):

> the analysis of discourse, is necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs.

As these views make clear, the analysis of language use (cf. Saussure's parole) cannot be independent of the analysis of the purposes and functions of language in human life. This view reaches an extreme in the work of critical language scholarship, i.e. the study of language, power, and ideology. Fairclough (1989: 23), for example, advocates a dialectical conception of language and society whereby "language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena" (emphasis in original). In Fairclough's view, language and society partially constitute one another – such that the analysis of language as an independent (autonomous) system would be a contradiction in terms (see also Foucault 1982; Grimshaw 1981). Even in less extreme functionalist views, however, discourse is assumed to be interdependent with social life, such that its analysis necessarily intersects with meanings, activities, and systems outside of itself.

A definition of discourse as language use is consistent with functionalism in general: discourse is viewed as a system (a socially and culturally organized way of speaking) through which particular functions are realized. Although formal regularities may very well be examined, a functionalist definition of discourse leads analysts away from the structural basis of such regularities to focus, instead, on the way patterns of talk are put to use for certain purposes in particular contexts and/or how they result from the application of communicative strategies. Functionally based approaches tend to draw upon a variety of methods of analysis, often including not just quantitative methods drawn from social scientific approaches, but also more humanistically based interpretive efforts to replicate actors' own purposes or goals. Not surprisingly, they rely less upon the strictly grammatical characteristics of utterances as sentences, than upon the way utterances are situated in contexts.

Functional analyses may start from one of two directions, roughly paralleling the distinction made by linguists and anthropologists (e.g. Pike 1967) between etic and emic approaches. To take a relatively familiar example, compare phonetics and phonemics. A phonetic analysis provides all the possible distinctions (among means of articulation) irrespective of whether they are actually used in a particular language or a particular utterance. A phonemic analysis, on the other hand, provides only those distinctions that make a meaningful difference to speakers of a particular language (that produce semantically different strings of sounds).

Functional analyses of discourse that start from an etic direction delimit the functions served by a system (such as language or communication) and match particular units (such as utterances or actions) to those functions. An example of this kind of functional approach is Goffman's analysis of system and ritual conditions. Goffman (1981a: 14–15) proposes that conversational interaction requires two sets of conditions. System conditions (also called constraints, because they impose constraints on what can be said and done) center on the mechanical requirements of talk, e.g. a two-way capability for transmitting acoustically adequate and readily interpretable messages, feedback capabilities, contact signals, turnover signals, and so on. Ritual constraints, on the other hand, center on interpersonal requirements of talk: the management of oneself and others so as not to violate appropriate standards regarding either one's own demeanor or deference for another. Different ways of acting (including, but not limited to, verbal utterances) can serve system and/or ritual constraints (e.g. Schiffrin 1988b, on turn-initial particles), and when they do so we can say that they are serving the functional requirements of talk. Note that, if a particular way of speaking were to have a use undefined by the initial system, we might still discover it – but, unless we were to argue that we had missed a function, we would not be able to locate it in our system of functional requirements.

Many functionally based discourse analyses assume etic schemas more general than those devised specifically for conversational interaction. One such framework was proposed by Jakobson (1960). Jakobson differentiates six

language functions that are identified through the way that utterances (cf. texts) can be related to different components of the speech situation (cf. contexts). I have adapted Jakobson's framework below – capitalizing the situational component and putting the corresponding function in brackets.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | CONTEXT<br>[referential] | |
| | CONTACT<br>[phatic] | |
| ADDRESSOR<br>[emotive] | MESSAGE<br>[poetic] | ADDRESSEE<br>[conative] |
| | CODE<br>[metalinguistic] | |

Although others have proposed different functions (e.g. Halliday 1973), Jakobson's schema most firmly grounds language functions in the speech situation *per se*. Note that Jakobson's view of the speech situation includes language as just one of the components of a speech situation and as one of the foci of speech. That is, the basis for a metalinguistic function is the "code"; the basis for emotive and conative functions are addressor and addressee. Jakobson also makes the critical point that utterances do not have a single function: although a particular expression may have a *primary* function, it is most typical for it to be used to simultaneously realize different functions. *Do you know the time?*, for example, may have a phatic function (it opens contact), an emotive function (it conveys a need of the addressor), a conative function (it asks something of the addressee), and a referential function (it makes reference to the world outside of language).

The second direction available to functional analyses is a more emic direction: begin with how particular units (again, utterances, actions) are used and draw a conclusion about the broader functions of such units from that analysis. In other words, one would begin from observation and description of an utterance itself, and then try to infer from analysis of that utterance and its context what functions are being served. It is important to note that such inferences are not totally *ad hoc*: rather, they can be firmly grounded in principled schema as to what functions are available. But they do differ from more etic approaches because they are not as wed to the notion of system, and because they are more open to the discovery of unanticipated uses of language (see Hymes 1961).

Let us go on to see how a discourse analysis stemming from the functionalist view that discourse is language use might actually proceed. We can begin by returning to (5) from section 3.

(5) JAN: (a) Are you free for lunch today?
BARBARA: (b) I have to advise students all day.

In addition to being identifiable as question and answer, we can recognize quite easily that the utterances in (5) are being used to realize certain functions, i.e. to try to accomplish interpersonal goals and to convey social and expressive meanings. Although we can suggest such goals and meanings quite readily, however, we might not be able to verify them without more knowledge of the context of the exchange, including such information as the relative status of, and relationship between, the participants, their setting, and their usual ways of interacting, as well as information about the conventional meanings of invitations to lunch. (For example, in some groups in American society, saying *Let's have lunch sometime* does not really "count as" an invitation to lunch.) We might find, for example, that Jan is pursuing a friendship, reciprocating for a prior offer from Barbara, and/or paying deference to Barbara's higher status. But in order to decide which (if any, or perhaps all) of these functions were being realized, we would probably need a good deal of information about the context of the exchange.

We have seen thus far that functional definitions of discourse assume an interrelationship between language and context. One problem stemming from this assumption is that it becomes difficult to separate the analysis of discourse *per se* from other analyses of language and context – even analyses that may really belong more in different areas of inquiry. I will illustrate through another example. (10) is from a sociolinguistic interview (Schiffrin 1987a; chapters 5 and 8 of this book); (10) also appears in Schiffrin 1988b.

(10) DEBBY: (a) Yeh. Well some people before they go to the doctor, they'll talk to a friend, or a neighbor.
(b) Is there anybody that [uh . . .
ZELDA: (c) [Well:: well I guess-
HENRY: (d) [Sometimes it works.
(e) Because there's this guy Louie Gelman,
(f) he went to a *big* specialist,
(g) and the guy . . . analyzed it *wrong*.
(h) In fact his doctor didn't know,
(i) and the specialist didn't know.

We can informally characterize this exchange as one in which I am seeking information (a, b), and in which Henry tells me a story that provides the information that Henry thinks I am seeking. (Although space prevents me from including the entire story in (10), what is included in (e) to (i) is the story initiation.) The language used during this exchange might then be examined as to how it serves these functions.

When we focus on different aspects of what is said in (10), however, we find that there are many different ways to focus upon the language that is used *without* saying anything about the functional gloss just noted: a question–answer exchange in which the answer is a story. Let us focus first on my own utterances in (a) and (b):

DEBBY: (a) Yeh. Well some people before they go to the doctor, they'll talk to a friend, or a neighbor.
(b) Is there anybody that uh . . .

We are fortunate, in some ways, that we can use my own knowledge (as the speaker) of what I was trying to accomplish with these utterances. Although my utterances could have a number of different communicative functions, what I wanted to find out was who Henry talks to about his problems – to whom he would complain, turn to for advice, if he didn't feel well. (As we will see, Henry acts upon an interpretation different from what I had intended.) I first describe the general situation in which I was interested (in a), and then assume that Henry can understand my elliptical question (in b) as asking for a specific instance of that general situation, i.e. whether there is anybody that he (as a member of the larger set of "some people") would *go to*.

The function that I have just described is most typically analyzed as part of speech act theory: the intended communicative force of an utterance can provide us with a way to categorize it as a particular speech act, e.g. as a "request". Performing actions through speech, or, to paraphrase Austin (1962), doing things with words, is certainly a function of language. The problem, however, is that speech acts may be (and often are) analyzed at a sentence level: in other words, an analysis of intended communicative functions need not say anything at all about discourse.

Let us take another aspect of (10) to illustrate how a focus on language use can take us in another direction. Although I did not include phonetic detail in my transcription of (10) above, I will now be more specific about how two words are pronounced: *there*, *this*. In saying *there* and *this* in (e), for example, Henry pronounces the initial consonants not as fricatives, but as affricates. These possible pronunciations join with a third – a stop – to form what has been called a sociolinguistic variable (Labov 1972a): an alternative way of saying the same thing (e.g. pronouncing the same word, producing the same phoneme), whose variants are used differently by people depending on who they are (e.g. social class, gender, age, ethnicity), where they are (setting), and how they are speaking (e.g. carefully, casually). Thus, given the particular distribution of these variants in the speech community in which Henry lives, we might interpret Henry's use of the affricate as a marker (Scherer and Giles 1979) of his social identity (male, lower middle class, who is speaking relatively casually). Put another way, we could say that the affricates have the social and interactional functions of displaying Henry as a particular kind of person engaging in a particular kind of interchange. Thus, these pronunciations have a great deal to do with the social identity and style of the speaker as someone who exists (and presents himself) within a particular constellation of social and cultural meanings – with contextual inferences resulting from what Henry says (e.g. chapter 4). However, they have little to do with the way what is said is used to fill the other functions I noted earlier – answering a question and telling a story.

I have been suggesting thus far that analyses stemming from a view of discourse as language use can be too inclusive: they can include sentence-sized units and phonological variation. I will take one other aspect of (10) to illustrate another way that such analyses can be too inclusive. Recall that, in (10), Henry complies with my request for information by telling a story about his friend Louie Gelman. Note that this is not the compliance that I had intended: rather than telling me who he talks to, Henry provides support for the general situation that I have described, i.e. he illustrates why talking to one's friends can be a better solution to medical problems than seeking professional help. Clauses (e), (f), and (g) focus on how Henry introduces some of the characters in his story (see chapters 6, 7, and 8).

HENRY: (d) Sometimes it works.
(e) Because there's this guy Louie Gelman,
(f) he went to a *big* specialist,
(g) and the guy . . . analyzed it *wrong*.

Note, first, that *this guy Louie Gelman* is introduced as the object of an existential predicate "there is." This structure places a new referent (a referent about whom Henry cannot expect me to know anything) at the end of a clause, and predicates very little about the new referent except that he "exists." Crucial for our purposes here is that this information structure serves a communicative function. Of course this is not the function discussed earlier as "intended communicative force" or "display of social identity." Rather, we might say that this structure eases the transmission of information, i.e. it eases the hearer's understanding of a new referent.[4]

The order of words in (f) and (g) serves a similar function: it eases the hearer's processing of information by placing a new entity in the context of already assumable information. I show this below:

(e) Because there's this guy Louie Gelman [NEW],
(f) he [OLD = Louie Gelman] went to a *big* specialist [NEW],
(g) and the guy [OLD = a big specialist] . . . analyzed it *wrong*.

We have already seen that in (e), *Louie Gelman* is new information in clause final position. "Louie Gelman" is next mentioned as *he* (in f) in clause initial position. This old information is then a background for the introduction of another new referent, "a big specialist", at the end of the clause. When "a big specialist" becomes old information, the referring term is definite and less specific (*the guy*) and in clause initial position. Thus, the old/new information order within a clause serves a communicative function, i.e. it eases the hearer's understanding of new information by placing it in the context of familiar information. Again, although this certainly contributes to our understanding of the functional design of word order within sentences (in fact, it allows us to view this as a text-sentence; see pp. 27–8), it has little to do with our

intuitive gloss of the exchange as a question–answer sequence or with these clauses as a story initiation.

Before we go on, it is important to note that if we adopt a definition of discourse that is purely functional (e.g. analyze what Fairclough (1989) calls discursive practices), then what I have just described would certainly fall within the purview of discourse analysis. But is analysis of the phenomena noted above – pronunciation, speech acts, word order – really the analysis of how what Henry says serves the communicative functions I noted earlier – telling a story to provide an answer to a question? Such analyses seem, instead, to take us into areas of inquiry that have little to do with the functions just noted. My point here, then, is that although there are things we can say about (10) as language use, they do not all contribute to the function of Henry's contribution as an "answer" or a "story." Yet "giving an answer" and "beginning a story" seem to be functional glosses that contribute to our understanding of the communicative content of the utterances in (10): they give Henry's utterances an internal unity (grouping the utterances in one "turn" together) as well as an identity through which they are related to what I said initially in the exchange (they connect "turns" across speakers). In brief, these functions help us understand relationships "across," not "within," utterances.

There are some features and qualities of (10) that seem to bear more heavily on the way different utterances are related to one another. Observe first that Henry's story describes how different medical professionals wrongly diagnosed Louie until a neighbor was finally able to tell him what was really wrong; also, at the end of the story, Henry summarizes his point by saying that doctors can make mistakes. With this information about Henry's story in mind, let us re-examine the following section of (10):

(f) he went to a *big* specialist,
(g) and the guy . . . analyzed it *wrong*.
(h) In fact his doctor didn't know,
(i) and the specialist didn't know.

Several aspects of clauses (f) to (i) (the introduction to the story) prefigure the actions in the story, and the point being established through the story and made explicit through its summary. First is the contrastive stress on *BIG specialist* and *analyzed it WRONG*. This establishes a frame in which authority can be seen as wrong (Henry later states that *Doctors are not God!*) and thus makes Henry's point more salient.

Note, also, that Henry modifies a basic rule of narrative ordering (Labov 1972b): he does not always report events in the order in which they occurred. People typically visit their own doctors *before* consulting with a specialist. In (f) and (g), however, Henry reports his friend's encounter with the specialist and then mentions an encounter with *his doctor* (h). This deviation from temporal ordering is marked with *in fact* in (h): *in fact his doctor didn't know.* Modifying the reported order of events in this way has the discourse function

of helping Henry enlarge the size or membership of the group of professionals who were wrong – thus adding to the overall point of his story.

Finally, the way Zelda begins to answer my question also hints at the overall point of Henry's story. I present this section again.

DEBBY: (a) Yeh. Well some people before they go to the doctor, they'll talk to a friend, or a neighbor.
(b) Is there anybody that [uh . . .
ZELDA: (c) [Well: : well I guess-

Zelda's *Well: :* had a high pitch and a final rise – an intonation often associated with uncertainty and doubt (Ward and Hirschberg 1988). We might say that this, too, has a discourse function: it conveys the attitudinal frame through which Zelda treats my proposition about whom people talk to when they're sick, and perhaps even Zelda's doubt about the wisdom of medical professionals.

As I have just illustrated, there are aspects of (10) that are relevant to key functions of the utterances (answering a question, opening a story) – functions that help utterances "fit" with other utterances. If we define discourse just as language use, however, there may be no way to legitimately separate questions about the functions that help us understand relationships across utterances from questions about the functions that are realized within utterances (e.g. speech acts, word order, phonological variation). Although this may be seen as a positive outcome if we are searching for ways to unify functionalism in general, it ends up removing a certain degree of autonomy from discourse studies as a particular branch of linguistics. Interestingly, it is this very synthesis that Tannen (1989a: 6) finds appealing about the definition of discourse as language *beyond the sentence*:

> Discourse – language beyond the sentence – is simply *language* – as it occurs, in any context (including the context of linguistic analysis), in any form (including two made-up sentences in sequence; a tape recorded conversation, meeting, or interview; a novel or play). The name for the field "discourse analysis," then, says nothing more or other than the term "linguistics": the study of language.

Despite the value of so integrative an approach, I believe that efforts to define discourse analysis as the study of language itself (as does Tannen) or to define discourse analysis as the study of language functions are more appropriate at later stages of theory building (e.g. when one wants to articulate a theory of language that accommodates discourse analysis) than at early stages of discourse analysis (e.g. when one wants to define what it is that one wants to study).

We have seen in this section that defining discourse as language use depends upon broader assumptions about the relevance of language to meanings,

activities, and systems outside of itself. A corollary of this definition is that functionally based approaches view discourse as a socially and culturally organized way of speaking. Those functions are not limited to tasks that can be accomplished by language alone; rather they can include tasks such as maintaining interaction or building social relationships. Thus, functional analyses focus on how people use language to different ends: they are typically concerned less with the way people intend what they say to serve referential meanings (to convey propositional information), and more with the unintended social, cultural, and expressive meanings stemming from how their utterances are situated in contexts.

Although this inclusive view of the scope of discourse analysis is critical to the articulation of a linguistic theory within which discourse can fit, it also has the untoward effect of threatening to submerge discourse analysis within broader and more general analyses of language functions, without leaving a space within which discourse analysts can formulate a clear set of principles, goals, topics, and methods specific to their own enterprise. It makes no provision for analysis of the way the communicative content of an utterance contributes to our understanding of relationships across utterances, or, alternatively, for the way relationships across utterances help us understand the form, function, or meaning of a single utterance. Put most simply, it fails to make a special place for the analysis of relationships between utterances. Instead, a functionalist definition of discourse includes within its scope all language use: it provides no way to define discourse as different from other levels of language use (e.g. the use of sounds, words, or sentences). What we need to capture in a definition of discourse is the idea that discourse analysis imposes its own set of phenomena, its own problems and puzzles – and can discover its own regularities – in addition to those that it "inherits" from lower-level parts of discourse and those based in the way language is a social practice "determined by social structures" (Fairclough 1989: 17).

## 5 Discourse: utterances

In this section, I consider another definition of discourse: discourse is utterances. This view captures the idea that discourse is "above" (larger than) other units of language; however, by saying that utterance (rather than sentence) is the smaller unit of which discourse is comprised, we can suggest that discourse arises not as a collection of decontextualized units of language structure, but as a collection of inherently contextualized units of language use.

The main problem with this definition is that the notion of "utterance" is not really all that clear. For many linguists, utterances are contextualized sentences, i.e. they are context bound (as well as text bound). Hurford and Heasley (1983: 15), for example, make the following distinction:

> A sentence is neither a physical event nor a physical object. It is conceived abstractly, a string of words put together by the grammatical rules of a language. A sentence can be thought of as the ideal string of words behind various realizations in utterances and inscriptions.

In Hurford and Heasley's framework, "Discourse analysis is fun" in (11a), (11b), and (11c) would all be considered one sentence, but different utterances:

(11a) Discourse analysis is fun.
(11b) Discourse analysis is fun.
(11c) BOB: I really like my linguistics courses.
SUE: Oh I do too! Discourse analysis is fun.

The three occurrences of "Discourse analysis is fun" are three different utterances – three different instantiations of a single sentence. (11a) and (11b) are realizations of the sentence that share many aspects of a context: they both occur on the same page of the same book, and I am using them merely to make a point about utterances, without providing any more information about who, where, when, or how they may be found outside of this text. Despite this similarity, (11a) and (11b) are two different utterances: (11a) is the first appearance of the sentence, and (11b) is the second appearance (a repetition) of the sentence. What this means is a difference in the textual environment of (11a) and (11b). Finally, (11a) and (11b) both differ from (11c): although (11c) is also an illustration in a book, I have provided for it a hypothetical interactive context between two hypothetical interlocutors.

Before I go on to a problem with the view that discourse is "utterances" (stemming from the sentence–utterance distinction just illustrated), let me note the advantages of this view. First, defining discourse as utterances forces us to attend to the contextualization of language structure in a way going beyond Lyons's notion of text-sentence (pp. 27–8) to what we might call (following Lyons) context-sentence. Second, since this definition demands attention to more than one utterance, extended patterns and sequential arrangements automatically come under examination. Thus, defining discourse as utterances seems to balance both the functional emphasis on how language is used in context and the formal emphasis on extended patterns.

The main problem with this view of discourse is the definition proposed above of utterances – as realizations of sentences. Some linguists propose that sentences and utterances are radically different from each other, e.g. Fasold's (1990) belief that utterances need have no grammatical backing at all (they may or may not conform to grammatical principles) and sentences are abstract objects that may never actually "happen" or be realized. Others reverse the sentence-to-utterance mapping relationship to propose that sentences are "decontextualized" utterances. Figueroa (1990: 284), for example, claims the following: "all human actions take place within a particular spatio-temporal

context; therefore whether one is introspecting about a sentence, whether one is reading a sentence, whether one is speaking, one is performing utterances." To extrapolate a bit from Figueroa, sentences are as contextualized as anything else that is the object of attention and intention; what complicates their consideration as utterances is that the context of a sentence is that of metalinguistic scientific discourse (see also Goffman 1981b). Thus, "the question for linguistic theory is . . . whether utterances are decontextualized either into an utterance type or sentence . . . or whether utterances are left contextualized" (Figueroa 1990: 284).

Regardless of these difficulties, the view that I will take in this book is that discourse can best be thought of as "utterances." I will view utterances as units of language production (whether spoken or written) that are inherently contextualized; whether (or how) they are related to sentences (or, in fact, to other units such as propositions, turns, or tone units) is an issue that will not explicitly enter into our discussion. A definition of discourse as "utterances" implies several goals of discourse analysis that underlie much of what follows in this book. First is what we might call syntactic goals, or more appropriately for discourse analysis, *sequential goals*: are there principles underlying the order in which one utterance, or one type of utterance, follows another? Second is what might be called *semantic and pragmatic goals*: how does the organization of discourse, and the meaning and use of particular expressions and constructions within certain contexts, allow people to convey and interpret the communicative content of what is said? how does one utterance (and the sequential relationship between utterances) influence the communicative content of another? Consistent with the differences between formalist and functionalist paradigms discussed earlier, the approaches to discourse analysis to be compared vary in terms of how deeply they pursue problems of sequential structure, and in terms of their willingness to delve into interpretations of meaning and use.

## 6 Summary: definitions, issues, and discourse analysis

I began this chapter with a brief description of two different paradigms underlying our conception of language (section 2). After comparing two different definitions of discourse stemming from these two paradigms – discourse as language above the sentence or clause (section 3), discourse as language use (section 4) – I proposed a third definition that sits at the intersection of structure and function – discourse as utterances (section 5).

The definitions of discourse that we discussed raise important issues that will help us understand the similarities and differences among the approaches

to be presented in the rest of the book. Although I presented the structural (formalist) definition of discourse as separate from the functionalist one, I will suggest later in this book that actual analyses of discourse reveal an interdependence between structure and function (chapter 9). The distinction between structure and function also bears on two other issues that I discuss later. One is the relationship between text and context: structural definitions focus upon text and functional definitions upon context (chapter 10). Another is the way linguists view communication: structural definitions take a narrower view of communication than do functional definitions, and place a higher priority on the role of the code (cf. text) in communication (chapter 11). Although I discuss all three of these issues in general terms in relation to different approaches to discourse in part III, the sample analyses in chapters 3–8 (part II) will also show how different kinds of empirical analyses provide a basis for understanding these theoretically important issues.

Before closing this chapter, I want to make a slightly different point. I noted at the outset of chapter 1 that discourse analysis is one of the most vast, but also least defined, areas in linguistics. The availability of two different perspectives – stemming from two different ways of defining discourse – is partially responsible for the tremendous scope of discourse analysis. If we focus on structure, our task is to identify and analyze constituents, determine procedures for assigning to utterances a constituent status, discover regularities underlying combinations of constituents (perhaps even formulating rules for producing those regularities), and make principled decisions about whether or not particular arrangements are well formed. If we focus on function, on the other hand, our task is to identify and analyze actions performed by people for certain purposes, interpret social, cultural, and personal meanings, and justify our interpretations of those meanings for the participants involved. Dealing with either structure or function alone is thus a hefty task: but dealing with both can take us into two different analytical worlds that are often difficult to integrate.

The need to consider both text and context also increases the scope of discourse analysis. One obvious reason is that context can be tremendously broad and defined in different ways, e.g. mutual knowledge, social situations, speaker–hearer identities, cultural constructs. Another reason is that the text–context relationship is not independent of other relationships often assumed to hold between language and context (context as "culture," "society," or "interaction"). Yet, references to language "in" (or "and") context are far from neutral descriptions. Rather, any description of the language–context relationship veils tacit assumptions about the relationship between two different symbol systems and two different structures, e.g. their relative autonomy, the precedence of one over another, the way they impinge upon one another. Speaking of language *in* society, for example, assumes that language is a system both smaller than, and dependent upon, a broader matrix of social interactions and structures – thus making assumptions not only about how two systems impinge upon one another, but also about the very nature of those

two systems. Such assumptions bear not only on our understanding of discourse, but on our understanding of language in general.

## Notes

1 Compare Hopper's (1988) distinction between the A Priori Grammar Postulate and the Emergence of Grammar attitude.

2 I am by no means attempting a comprehensive review of all formal and functional approaches (a task that would require its own book). Rather, I am trying to take one or two typical (often classic) examples of each approach in order to show how they differ. Nor am I claiming that the characteristics that I present are shared equally by all representatives of structural or functional approaches. One criterion differentiating functionalists, for example, is the type of external function deemed important: in addition to (or as alternative to) a concern for social function (e.g. Halliday) and communicative function (e.g. Givón) is a concern for cognitive and perceptual function (e.g. Bates and MacWhinney, Kuno). Although these functions are associated with different perspectives (e.g. Halliday with sociolinguistics and Bates and MacWhinney with psycholinguistics) – and the influence they exert may be markedly different – what the perspectives share is an emphasis on the influence of factors outside of language on linguistic processes and structures. Thus, what I claim through the following discussion is that the assumptions made by formal and functional approaches are different: despite variation within structural approaches and within functional approaches, there is nevertheless greater variation between (than within) these two approaches.

3 The view that discourse is similar in kind to lower-level linguistic units leads to a tendency to view only grammatical units (sentences, clauses) as the building blocks of discourse, i.e. the hierarchy is comprised of units of "the same kind." In this sense, the view that discourse is propositionally structured can thus be quite different in some ways. Some analysts (e.g. Halliday and Hasan 1976) have proposed that the task of conveying meanings (semantics) is so different from the task of building sentences (syntax) that discourse is fundamentally different in kind than sentences. (Interestingly, however, Halliday and Hasan (1976: 2) still incorporate sentences into their view of text: although "a text does not *consist* of sentences; it is *realized by*, or encoded in, sentences.")

4 In addition to saying that a linguistic structure eases the transmission of information, we might also say that a structure in discourse (i.e. a sequence of referring terms in which a first-mention is explicit and indefinite, and a next-mention is inexplicit and definite) emerges because of constraints on the sequential flow of information: if a first-mention provides explicit information, a next-mention can provide considerably less information. (See discussion in chapter 5.)