

**Text and Contextual
Conditioning
in
Spoken English**

A genre-based approach

Volume One: Text

Guenter A. Plum

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Note on Web Publication

Except for the correction of a few typographical errors, this version of my thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy on 31 March, 1988 is materially identical to the copies deposited with the Faculty of Arts and the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney. However, in order to make this web version more readable on a screen, some of the fonts have been changed, as well as other small changes made to the appearance of some tables and figures. These changes have resulted in changes to the pagination of the original thesis.

The two volumes of my thesis, comprising a 'text' and a 'data' volume, were published in 1998 as Monograph Number Ten (ISSN 0963-1925) in the *Monographs in Systemic Linguistics* Series, Department of English Studies, University of Nottingham, England; see Foreword to Monograph No. 10 below. Sadly, the monograph series is no more and copies are no longer available. To satisfy occasional requests for a copy of my thesis, I decided to republish it on the web and thus make it accessible for the foreseeable future. The changes mentioned above have also of course resulted in changes to the pagination of the monograph.

Use Acrobat Bookmarks to jump to chapters, sections, etc. (The Contents listing is not clickable as it is part of the original Word file.) You may download and / or print part or all of the two volumes, and make use of my work as you see fit – all I ask is that it be acknowledged. Reference should be made to the web version since this is now the only one generally available.

Guenter A Plum
June 2004
<http://functionaledit.com>

Foreword – Monographs in Systemic Linguistics

Number Ten 1998

Editorial Committee: Margaret Berry, Roberta Dewa, Hilary Hillier, Caroline Stainton

The present volume is the second thesis from the nineteen-eighties which we have included in the series. Like the first (Monograph Number Nine), it appears by popular request; it is well known and highly regarded in systemic circles and has often been quoted. We are very pleased to be able to make it more widely available. As in the case of Monograph Nine, the historical perspective of the thesis has been preserved: only very minor alterations have been made to the main body of the thesis; and the references have been left largely in their original form, in order that readers may be clear what was available to the author, in what form, at the time of writing.

Guenter Plum's study brings together two approaches to linguistic variation: Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and Labov's variation theory. In particular, it adopts the model of genre developed by Martin within Halliday's approach, being especially concerned with probabilistic relationships between aspects of the model. A quantitative analysis of clausal theme and clause complex-type relations is reported, the aim being to investigate their correlation with generic structure. The analysis is also related to social characteristics of speakers such as gender and membership of social group. Plum concludes that such factors are significant in the making of grammatical choices and that therefore "social factors must be made part of a model of text in order to fully account for its contextual conditioning".

The study includes much valuable discussion of methodology. The author rightly claims that "by questioning every step taken both in the gathering of the corpus and in its analysis much can be learned which is of interest to a theory of discourse". The corpus too is of interest in its own right, consisting of text collected in sociolinguistic interviews with fifty adult speakers of Australian English in Sydney. In order that full value may be given both to the methodological discussion and to display of the data, we are publishing this monograph in two volumes.

Margaret Berry (on behalf of the editorial committee)

Dedication

In memory of my parents

Wilhelm Plum
(1905 – 1959)

and

Anna Plum née Zimmermann
(1907 – 1961)

who taught me much about text:

my father as storyteller and my mother as conversationalist

Abstract

This study brings together two approaches to linguistic variation, Hallidayan systemic-functional grammar and Labovian variation theory, and in doing so brings together a functional interpretation of language and its empirical investigation in its social context.

The study reports on an empirical investigation of the concept of text. The investigation proceeds on the basis of a corpus of texts gathered in sociolinguistic interviews with fifty adult speakers of Australian English in Sydney. The total corpus accounted for in terms of text type or 'genre' numbers 420 texts of varying length, 125 of which, produced in response to four 'narrative' questions, are investigated in greater detail in respect both of the types of text they constitute as well as of some of their linguistic realisations. These largely 'narrative-type' texts, which represent between two and three hours of spoken English and total approximately 53000 words, are presented in a second volume analysed in terms of their textual or 'generic' structure as well as their realisation at the level of the clause complex. The study explores in some detail models of register and genre developed within systemic-functional linguistics, adopting a genre model developed by J.R. Martin and others working within his model which foregrounds the notion that all aspects of the system(s) involved are related to one another probabilistically.

In order to investigate the concept of text in actual discourse under conditions which permit us to become sufficiently confident of our understanding of it to proceed to generalisations about text and its contextual conditioning in spoken discourse, we turn to Labovian methods of sociolinguistic inquiry, i.e. to quantitative methods or methods of quantifying linguistic choice. The study takes the sociolinguistic interview as pioneered by Labov in his study of phonological variation in New York City and develops it for the purpose of investigating textual variation. The question of methodology constitutes a substantial part of the study, contributing in the process to a much greater understanding of the very phenomenon of 'text in discourse', for example by addressing itself to the question of the feasibility of operationalising a concept of text in the context of spoken discourse.

The narrative-type texts investigated in further detail were found to range on a continuum from most experientially-oriented texts such as procedure and recount at one end to the classic 'narrative of personal experience' and anecdote to the increasingly interpersonally-oriented 'exemplum' and 'observation', both of which become 'interpretative' of the 'real world' in contrast to the straightforwardly representational slant taken on the same experience by the more experientially-oriented texts. The explanation for the generic variation along this continuum must be sought in a system of generic choice which is essentially cultural.

A quantitative analysis of clausal theme and clause complex-type relations was carried out, the latter by means of log-linear analysis, in order to investigate their correlation with generic structure. While it was possible to relate the choice of theme to the particular stages of generic structures, clause complex-type relations are chosen too infrequently to be related to stages and were thus related to genres as a whole. We find that while by and large the choice of theme correlates well with different generic stages, it only discriminates between different genres, i.e. generic structures in toto, for those genres which are maximally different. Similarly, investigating the two choices in the principal systems involved in the organisation of the clause complex, i.e. the choice of taxis (parataxis vs. hypotaxis) and the (grammatically independent) choice of logico-semantic relations (expansion vs. projection), we find that both those choices discriminate better between types more distant on a narrative continuum.

The log-linear analysis of clause complex-type relations also permitted the investigation of the social characteristics of speakers. We found that the choice of logico-semantic relations correlates with genre and question, while the choice of taxis correlates with a speaker's sex and his membership of some social group (in addition to genre). Parataxis is favoured by men and by members of the group lowest in the social hierarchy. Age on the other hand is not significant in the choice of taxis at all. In other words, since social factors are clearly shown to be significant in the making of abstract grammatical choices where they cannot be explained in terms of the functional organisation of text, we conclude that social factors must be made part of a model of text in order to fully account for its contextual conditioning.

The study demonstrates that an understanding of the linguistic properties of discourse requires empirical study and, conversely, that it is possible to study discourse empirically without relaxing the standards of scientific inquiry.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to my many friends and colleagues who have supported, advised and encouraged me during my work on this thesis. There is room to thank only a few by name.

First and foremost I wish to thank the two people in the Department of Linguistics at Sydney University who have made the most direct contribution to my attempt in this study to bring together the two theoretical perspectives of systemic-functional grammar and variation theory, my supervisor Dr James Martin, and Dr Barbara Horvath. While my theoretical debt to Dr Martin will be obvious from the thesis itself, my debt to Dr Horvath will not be so self-evident and I would therefore like to record that she, in her role as my teacher of variation theory, not only first encouraged me to explore issues of linguistic variation in a systemic framework but that she has also always been prepared to act as the second supervisor 'from the other side' when needed. I consider myself fortunate to have had the benefit of both my teachers' advice.

My debt to Professor Michael Halliday exceeds the contribution his theoretical work has made to my study; it certainly extends to the inspiration he provides to anyone who has had the privilege of working with him. His specific contribution to the accomplishment of this study lies in his discussing with me the many finer points of his analysis of the clause complex in the light of seemingly recalcitrant spoken data and I thank him for his forbearance.

My very special thanks go to my friend and colleague Joan Rothery who has provided the kind of support which is as invaluable as it is rare – intellectually stimulating, knowledgeable and insightful she has also been unconditionally supportive personally. Not only has she discussed my work with me on countless occasions, she also familiarised herself with 'my texts' so well in order to discuss theoretical problems with me that they may now form a subtext in our conversations even when these are not concerned with problems of text. I also thank her for reading as much of my very own text, undoubtedly much less entertaining, as she found possible and for her helpful comments and suggestions.

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I thank Ann Cowling for her invaluable assistance with the statistical analysis of the clause complex. Any errors evident in the discussion will be entirely due to my insufficient understanding of (the language of) statistics.

I thank Fran Christie for reading a number of my chapters in draft form – some of them in successive versions – and commenting on them in great and helpful detail.

And last but certainly not least I wish to thank my interviewees who invited me into their homes and permitted me to disturb their lives just a little, my fond hope being that they may not have minded too much talking about their favourite subject – their dogs. Since many expressed the view that they as dog lovers are misunderstood in the community at large, I trust that by my taking them and their stories seriously (though not solemnly) in this thesis I may be repaying them for the many kindnesses shown to me. Whatever misunderstandings, shortcomings and errors of judgment remain may not be blamed on those who have tried their very best to save me – and my reader – from these; those who know me also know how stubbornly I will at times resist the best advice.

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Notational Conventions

The conventions listed below apply on the whole to both volumes, the major differences being that the representation of textual examples in Volume 1 is influenced by having to serve particular objectives in the context of some argument, while the primary objective in Volume 2 is to present a fair transcription of spoken texts with a simultaneous display of their generic structure and clause complex relations.

The transcription aims to strike a balance between the kind of faithfulness which records any and every noise made by interactants on the one hand and the kind of idealisation and regularisation of speech which represents speech as a carefully planned if spoken activity. While the former style of transcription may render the transcribed text quite unreadable and useless for any analysis other than one whose aims are to shed light on interaction per se, the latter is likely to give a misleading picture of both the nature of the spoken language as well as of the spontaneous production of text.

For this reason hesitation phenomena, for example, have not been transcribed but pauses have been represented. Most of the self-corrections have also not been transcribed since a ‘slip of the tongue’, which is corrected, or the repetition of some wording, especially when it is no more than a kind of hesitation, tell us nothing of great interest. Some instances of correction, especially where a wording ‘fades out’, are transcribed since the following wording at times builds on the very wording left trailing in the previous one and would itself become difficult to understand without it. Equally, some false starts have been transcribed since their wording may be built on later on in the text, e.g. by a pronominal reference to a fully lexical item in an abandoned clause at an earlier point. Lastly, the interviewer’s linguistic and paralinguistic expressions of his role as listener are excluded since they are irrelevant to the largely monologic production of these texts. (See also discussions in Volume 1, Sections 4.1 and 4.3.)

The texts as presented here aim to be *readable* despite the addition of generic and grammatical coding. It is greatly regretted that there are no indications of intonation included. Apart from lying outside the interests pursued in the thesis, the inclusion of any intonation analysis in the texts themselves would have severely affected the texts’ readability.

1. General

Speakers are identified as ‘GP’, the current writer and interviewer, and ‘I’, the interviewee. Where necessary, a third party is suitably identified.

Self-corrections, including ‘broken-off’ words, are indicated by a dash placed immediately to the right of the corrected item and, if such items can be excluded from the textual and grammatical analyses without distortion, they are also enclosed in single curly brackets.

Interjections by a third party, including the interviewer, as well as interpolations by the interviewee (and any responses to them by a third party) which clearly lie outside the text are enclosed in double curly brackets.

Doubtful text, i.e. text which could not be heard, is indicated by being ‘enclosed’ in empty single parentheses; similarly, if the status of the transcribed item is doubtful it is enclosed in single parentheses.

Gestures, laughter, etc., are so indicated in double parentheses.

Slips of the tongue which are not corrected are transcribed but interpreted by giving their likely meaning enclosed in single inverted commas inside double parentheses.

Pauses are indicated by three dots; no attempt is made to quantify the length of the pause except that a very lengthy pause marking the end of a text is indicated by a triple sequence of three dots.

Continuation of text which is not transcribed is indicated by ‘... (continues)’.

Conventional punctuation is largely limited to indicate group boundaries, e.g. to separate vocatives or to signify elaboration at group rank, as well as to isolate those interpersonal or textual clauses which have been ignored in the clause complex analysis, e.g. adjuncts such as *you know*, *as I told you*, *I’m sorry* (as part of reported speech), etc., as well as certain kinds of repetition such as the commonly repeated projecting clause *I said*.

In addition, conventional punctuation is also used to indicate exclamations and questions unambiguously. Elsewhere at clause rank, clause complex notation is relied on instead of standard sentence punctuation, with clause complex-initial words being capitalised redundantly.

The major exception to the practice of minimal punctuation at clause rank pertains to the need to indicate those wordings whose status as reported speech or thought is not already indicated by the clause complex notation because they are not structurally related to a projecting process. This may apply to a clause (‘simplex’) or clause complex which are clearly not projections yet still reported speech or thought in a non-structural sense, and in those instances single inverted commas are used to signify thought and double inverted commas speech; conversely, this may apply to some wording which is not part of a projected clause, such as the ubiquitous *you know* which may or may not be part of the projection, and in those instances the status of the wording excluded from the projection is indicated by virtue of the actual projection being enclosed in inverted commas contrary to the usual practice.

Spelling of ordinary words reflects non-standard pronunciation in only one instance, viz. the common *me* for *my* as in *me dog*.

Loudness as one particular realisation of prominence is indicated by upper-case spelling of the word or syllable in question.

2. Text

Boundaries of each text are indicated by three cross-hatches ###.

3. Genre

Generic structures, i.e. genre categories, are signified by name in upper-case preceding the whole text, e.g. **NARRATIVE**.

Generic stages, i.e. elements of generic structure, are signified by names in small capital letters preceding the relevant part of the text, e.g. **ORIENTATION**.

Recursed generic structures or recursed generic stages are signified by being numbered sequentially, e.g. **ARGUMENT (1)**, **ARGUMENT (2)**.

Abandoned, resumed, continued, etc., generic stages are signified as such by being labelled in parentheses, e.g. **REORIENTATION (abandoned)**.

Embedded generic structures and embedded generic stages are signified as above (in smaller print) but indented, the status of the structural ranking of all elements being inferrable from the relative position of the category labels and the relevant text, e.g.

ORIENTATION:

RECOUNT
ORIENTATION
...

RECORD
...

REORIENTATION
...

COMPLICATION

...

4. Clause complex

Logico-semantic relations are indicated by:

EXPANSION	elaboration	=
	extension	+
	enhancement	x
PROJECTION	locution	“
	idea	‘

Tactic relations are indicated by:

parataxis	Arabic numerals:	1, 2, 3 ...
hypotaxis	Greek letters:	α, β, γ, δ, ε ...

Boundary markers:		clause complex boundary
		clause boundary
		group/phrase boundary
	3 4	enclosed (interpolated) clause
	5 6	enclosed (interpolated) group/phrase
	1 2	embedded (rankshifted) clause
	[]	embedded (rankshifted) group/phrase

Non-experiential clauses are not coded as part of the clause complex analysis. For example, clauses such as *you know* or rhetorical interpolations such as the ‘self-querying’ *what was the other one?* in *and he picked out two dogs, the cattle dog and a – what was the other one? – collie, sheltie*; textual clauses such as *and as I said*; and repetitions of projecting clauses such as *I said* in *I said, “Fred”, I said, “why don’t you tell him?”* will have their status as technically separate clauses indicated by conventional punctuation such as commas or hyphens and, in the latter case, ‘additionally’ by the non-application of single or double inverted commas. (However, the common modalisation *I think* is not usually ‘set apart’ from coded clauses in this way since it is rarely spoken on a separate tone group.)

Numbering in subscripts enclosed in parentheses is such that single clauses not entering into any clause complex are treated as units on a par with complexes, i.e. are treated as ‘simplexes’; e.g. (3.1) followed by (3.2) means one complex with two related clauses, whereas (4.1) followed by (5.1) etc., means that (4.1) is a single clause structurally unrelated to any other clause in the text.

Rankshifted clauses which themselves form clause complexes have their clause complex relations indicated but are left unnumbered.

Exemplification of clause complex relations

(after Halliday 1985c:197)

paratactic	hypotactic
EXPANSION	
elaboration	
The man was very pale; 1 he didn't like dogs. =2	My mother had had dachshunds, α which she'd bred. = β
extension	
We bought this one 1 and she was terrible. +2	She's the worst I've ever seen α except she had a terrific nature. + β
enhancement	
John liked a beagle 1 so we bought a beagle. x2	We kept them for a while α because it was our first litter. x β

PROJECTION	
locution	
The chap said: 1 "Oh why don't you show it?" "2	They told me α that there was still one left in the litter. " β
idea	
I thought: 1 'I'll buy Joan a nice birthday present.' '2	The judge thought α she was afraid of being in the ring. ' β