The phone rang early one morning. When I picked it up, a woman said, abruptly:

I just talked to Grace and asked if we could change it to tomorrow.

It happened to be Thanksgiving Day here in Canada and so, based on my cultural knowledge, I surmised that perhaps the ‘it’ referred to an invitation for a Thanksgiving dinner. I understood Grace to be a personal name referring to a woman. If, on the other hand, she had said that she had talked to, say, Gurjeet (and had spoken with a Punjabi accent) I might not have assumed she was referring to a Thanksgiving dinner. Although the usual small-talk beginning a phone conversation was dispensed with (suggesting a close relationship with the intended addressee), the excerpt itself was constructed as a typical introduction to a conversation. If I hadn’t interrupted her and told her she probably had the wrong number, I could imagine her next statement to have been something like:

But I just remembered we have to be out of town then.

Much more could be said about this excerpt, such as why the speaker chose to express her message in the form of two coordinate clauses followed by a subordinate clause. It would have been equally acceptable (and saved her three words) if she had used one main clause followed by a subordinate clause, as, for example, in:

I just asked Grace if we could change it to tomorrow.

Did the medium of the phone have some bearing on this perhaps?

Geoff Thompson’s *Introducing functional grammar* provides a framework for answering—and asking—questions such as these. The book is explicitly based on the similarly titled—but much longer—*Introduction to functional grammar* by the Australian linguists Halliday and Matthiessen. In fact, Thompson explains in his foreword that he hopes his work will ‘tempt’ readers to go on to explore the writings of Halliday and others.
This volume is a great resource for a course in discourse analysis or—as I used it—for self-study as an introduction to functional grammar. There is a lot of material compacted in these 300 pages. The book can, I think, be easily adapted for either an undergraduate or graduate course, depending on the selection of material and exercises.

The emphasis in functional grammar is on language in use. For this reason, each chapter contains exercises based on (what appear to be) authentic discourse fragments (both oral and written), ranging from a single sentence to several pages. Even though the exercises are grouped at the end of each chapter, the reader is referred to a particular exercise when the relevant material has been covered in the chapter, ensuring immediate practical application of the material while it is still fresh on the reader’s mind. Several larger texts recur several times throughout the book, giving the reader an opportunity to look at the same text from different perspectives. A very helpful feature of the book is a key to the exercises following chapter 10.

This is not a dry, abstract book on grammar. The tone of the book is warmly personal, creating the feeling you are part of a classroom discussion. Throughout, the author uses the first person singular. When he presents his own analyses, he is always careful not to sound pedantic but invites the opinions and insights of the reader, encouraging creativity and reflection.

In the course of the book, we are guided through several levels of analysis—referred to as ‘metafunctions’—each of which looks at a text from a different perspective. The first three chapters are introductory and are relatively brief. Chapter 1, The purposes of linguistic analysis, summarizes the differences between functional grammar and the predominant approach in linguistics, namely transformational-generative grammar (TG). TG views grammar as a computer-like system for producing correct sentences. In contrast, functional grammar views language as having ‘evolved’—and continuing to ‘evolve’—for the purpose of communication. For this reason it is argued that it is the social context—not the brain—where we need to look in order to understand the forms of language.

As an aside, the concept of language, or of particular language structures, as having evolved for a certain function is a theme that recurs several times throughout the book. For example, in section 6.3.2 on ‘Theme in non-declarative clauses’, we are told:

…the clause structure of WH-questions has evolved as different from that of declaratives precisely in order to allow the thematization of the WH-element. (p. 146, emphasis mine)

The choice of the term ‘evolved’ to refer to language change here is, I think, deliberate—though on at least one occasion the author uses the word ‘developed’ instead (see p. 181). (In this connection, see especially the discussion at the beginning of chapter 9.) It is similar to the way the word ‘evolved’ is used in natural science, such as in this quote from a book on whales:

In water, their bodies became streamlined and grew larger. Forelimbs evolved, or gradually changed, into flippers that helped them steer. (MacMillan, p. 9)

Here in chapter 1 (p.7) the author refers to the language system as a whole when he says that “language has evolved for the function of communication” (cf. p. 45, emphasis mine).
In contrast, I suggest that a biblical philosophy of language would begin with the presupposition that language was *designed* by the Creator (who, being Triune, is an inherently communicative Being) for certain specific purposes, communication being one of them, perhaps the *main* one. It is interesting, however, that language was given to man when Adam was still alone, and man’s first task involving language was naming the animals (see Genesis 2:19).

Since language has an intelligent Designer, we can expect the structures in language to reflect this design. Happily, even our evolutionist friends and colleagues cannot fail to see the Designer’s hand. Thus Halliday is said to consider the ability of language to form metaphor as “a basic *design* feature of human language” (p. 220, emphasis mine).

The exercise at the end of chapter 1 presents eight brief excerpts from such diverse genres as a car advertisement, a recipe, and a novel. For each, we are asked to identify how context determines word choice and grammatical structure.

The working terminology is introduced in chapter 2, *Recognizing clauses and clause constituents*. A fundamental principle in functional grammar is the distinction between functions (or slots) and the structural forms (or fillers) that fill those slots. Functions are indicated with an initial capital. For example, in our opening sentence, the function of Adjunct is filled by the prepositional phrase ‘to Grace’. Figure (1) shows the slots and fillers of the first clause.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>just</th>
<th>talked</th>
<th>to Grace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Adjunct</td>
<td>Predicator</td>
<td>Adjunct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nominal group</td>
<td>adverbial group</td>
<td>verbal group</td>
<td>prepositional phrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pronoun</td>
<td>adverb</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1: Slots and fillers**

The structural slots at the clause level are filled by groups and phrases. The groups in this example are all realized by a single word as indicated on the second level. The Adjunct slot is filled by a prepositional phrase. Prepositional phrases are roughly at the same level as groups but whereas groups are *expansions* of a word, prepositional phrases are *contractions* of a clause.

Two other key principles in functional grammar are rank scale and embedding. Units at one rank can be split into smaller units at a lower rank. There are four ranks: clause, group, word, and morpheme. (There is no ‘sentence’ rank. A typical sentence—like our example—can be described as a combination of clauses known as a clause complex.) A unit may be expanded by means of another unit of the same or higher rank being embedded in it. For example, a clause may be embedded in a nominal group, as in this example:

> the dinner that we had planned for this afternoon

The ‘if’ clause in our opening example is not considered an embedded clause in functional grammar. The exercises include a letter to a medical column of a magazine and the response—which will resurface at several points later in the book.
Chapter 3, *An overview of functional grammar*, introduces the three main metafunctions that will be studied in detail in chapters 4–7. These are: 1) experiential, 2) interpersonal, and 3) textual (a fourth metafunction—the logical—deals with how messages are connected; it is covered briefly in chapter 8). At each level, the speaker (or writer) is (usually unconsciously) faced with a number of choices. This can be captured in a system network. (But note that this is not meant as a blueprint of how the brain actually operates.) By comparing texts from a particular register (such as a written recipe), patterns of choices will appear at each level.

In the chapter exercise we are asked to find a lengthy text (written or spoken) and calculate the percentages of declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses found in it, and then to find a similar text and compare the percentages.

The following four chapters constitute the bulk of the book. Beginning with the interpersonal, they explore the three metafunctions in order—with two chapters devoted to the textual analysis. The first three are comparatively long, ranging from 38 to 55 pages; the last one is only 15 pages. (Compare this with 44 pages for all of chapters 1–3.)

Chapter 4 is entitled *Interacting: the interpersonal metafunction*. By treating language as a collection of isolated sentences, traditional grammar ends up with a truncated view of language. Language is a two-way process enabling us to exchange information or goods-and-services. For this reason we should expect there to be features of the language that exist to serve these so-called *interpersonal* functions.

Interpersonal meanings are usually expressed in the Mood (comprising the Subject and the Finite; the latter is the first element in a verbal phrase). A ‘Mood analysis’ of our opening sentence is presented in figure (2). Each clause can be divided into Mood and Residue. Note that in the main clauses of our example the Finite is ‘fused’ with the lexical verb. The Conjunctive Adjuncts ‘and’ and ‘if’ are not part of the interpersonal metafunction. Instead, they have a textual function, signaling the relation of the following clause to the preceding one (see comments on chapter 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>just</th>
<th>past</th>
<th>talked</th>
<th>to Grace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject</strong></td>
<td><strong>Adjunct</strong></td>
<td><strong>Finite</strong></td>
<td><strong>Predicator</strong></td>
<td><strong>Adjunct</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo-</td>
<td>-od</td>
<td>Residue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and | past | asked |
---|------|-------|
(Conjunctive) | Finite | Predicator |
| Mood |

if | we | could | change | it | to tomorrow |
---|----|-------|--------|----|-------------|
(Conjunctive) | **Subject** | **Finite** | **Predicator** | **Complement** | **Adjunct** |
| Mood | Residue |

**Figure 2: Mood and Residue**
Modality is a complex topic: Halliday and Matthiessen (p. 621) posit 144 categories. We can distinguish various levels of probability (how likely something is true) or usuality (how frequently it is true), to name just some. In the dependent clause of our example above, the auxiliary 'could’ signals a polite request for permission (but this is balanced by the choice of the subject ‘we’ rather than ‘she’ which suggests that the speaker expects a decision based on some form of collaboration). Consider the subtle nuances in meaning if our caller had used one of the following alternatives instead:

- if we should change it to tomorrow
- if we hadn’t better change it to tomorrow
- if we should consider changing it to tomorrow

Appraisal (a speaker’s evaluation whether something is good or bad) brings us even more to the “edge of grammar” (as traditionally defined) because, like modality, it is also not tied to any specific grammatical structures. Nevertheless, it too is a central part of the meaning of a text. Appraisal may be inscribed (that is made explicit by certain emotive lexical items) or evoked without any explicit evaluative wording. Note how the message would have changed if our caller had used another way to refer to Grace, using different emotive terms:

- I just talked to your lovely wife.
- I just talked to that woman of yours.

The chapter concludes with a sample analysis of interaction in a nursing advertisement. This text will be discussed further in chapters 6 and 7. The chapter exercises include several extracts from a doctor’s consultation which will be analyzed in detail in chapter 10.

In chapter 5, *Representing the world: the experiential metafunction*, we change our focus to the propositional content of the text: the processes, participants, and circumstances. A transitivity analysis of a clause begins by identifying the process represented by the verb—e.g. material or mental—and its participants. The rationale for distinguishing processes is that they behave differently in the grammar. In our opening example, the two main clauses both express verbal processes, while the dependent clause is a relational, attributive process. We can represent these as in figure (3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>just</th>
<th>talked</th>
<th>to Grace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sayer</td>
<td>Circumstance</td>
<td>Process: verbal</td>
<td>Receiver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>and</th>
<th>asked</th>
<th>if we could change it to tomorrow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process: verbal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projecting</td>
<td>Projected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>if we</th>
<th>could change</th>
<th>it</th>
<th>to tomorrow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attributor</td>
<td>Process: relational, attributive (caused)</td>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3: Transitivity analysis**
In a sample transitivity analysis, the author analyzes two texts that are similar in style, a recipe from a cookbook and a televised cooking demonstration, comparing the percentage of the various process types, participants, and circumstances in each.

For some sentence types—especially material processes involving a change of state—it may be helpful, in addition to a transitivity analysis, also to do an ergativity analysis. From this perspective we ask whether a process happened by itself or whether someone caused it to happen. For example, there is a large class of verbs in English that shows the following alternation pattern:

a. He closed the door.
b. The door closed.

In a transitivity analysis, ‘he’ in (a) and ‘the door’ in (b) are both labeled as Actor. But this obscures the fact that in both sentences the action happens to the door. In an ergativity analysis ‘the door’ is labeled as Medium in both sentences and ‘he’ in (a) as Agent (the external cause).

Chapter 6, Organizing the message: the textual metafunction – Theme, is the first of two chapters exploring the textual metafunction. The Theme consists of the first functional element of the clause up to and including the first experiential element. The Theme is what the clause is about while the remainder of the clause (called the Rheme) provides the actual content. Identifying the Themes of a text helps us see the development of the text. The chapter concludes with a detailed sample analysis of three different kinds of texts: a fragment from a history textbook, the nursing advertisement introduced in chapter 4, and a spoken discussion.

As figure (4) indicates, our opening example sentence contains two independent clauses, each of which has its own Theme. The second clause is elliptical, the Subject ‘I’ being carried forward from the previous clause. Since a Theme must always include an experiential element, the understood Subject ‘I’ is part of the Theme in the second clause.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>just talked to Grace</th>
<th>and</th>
<th>(I)</th>
<th>asked if we could change it to tomorrow.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
<td></td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4: Theme analysis*

The conjunction ‘and’ in this example has a textual function: it signals that the second clause is joined to the previous one. The conjunction ‘if’ signals that the following clause is part of a clause complex with the preceding clause. The Theme of the second independent clause functions as Theme for the whole clause complex.

In declarative sentences, the unmarked Theme is the Subject. Thus both Themes here are unmarked. The speaker is signaling that the text is about herself. A new participant (‘we’) is introduced in the Rheme of the second clause.
Chapter 7, *Organizing the message: the textual metafunction – cohesion* explores the devices by which the speaker creates coherence, that is the sense that a text holds together and is not a random collection of ideas. Discussed are: reference, ellipsis, and conjunction. An example of ‘cohesive ellipsis’ in our example sentence is the deletion of ‘I’ in the second main clause. The ambiguity in the telephone excerpt is caused by the fact that ‘it’ is a homophoric reference, i.e. one that is assumed between the speaker and the hearer, and does not refer back to something mentioned earlier in the conversation.

By way of illustration, the author shows how coherence is created in an excerpt from a science textbook for young children as well as in the nursing advertisement introduced in the previous chapter. In the chapter exercise, we are asked to analyze coherence in the letter and response from chapter 2 and the doctor’s consultation from chapter 4.

Having covered the three main metafunctions, we are introduced in chapter 8, *Clauses in combination*, to a fourth resource for text analysis, the logical metafunction. This function operates particularly at the clause level. Clauses may be deliberately combined into a clause complex. There are two main types of logico-semantic relations. These are expansion and projection. They are both exemplified in our caller’s excerpt.

In this clause complex we have two equal or paratactic clauses combined with the conjunction ‘and’, with the second clause expanding on the first. This type of expansion is called elaboration: the second clause restates the first in different words. Numbers are used to indicate the order. (In order not to be confused by graphemic markers, slashes are used to separate clauses rather than capital letters and punctuation marks.)

/// I just talked to Grace // and asked if we could change it to tomorrow ///

1 2

The second clause is a projecting clause which is followed by the report of what had previously been said. This clause complex has a hypotactic or dependency relationship. Greek letters are used to indicate this:

/// I just talked to Grace // and asked / if we could change it to tomorrow ///

1 2α 2β

Having identified the logical relations in the clause complex, we should now ask why the speaker combined her ideas in this way. She could, for example, have said,

I just talked to Grace. I asked if we could change it to tomorrow.

This sounds less natural, however—though we might talk like this when addressing someone whose native language is not English. Another option for the speaker was to use a quote rather than a report:

I just talked to Grace and asked, “Can we change it to tomorrow?”
We expect to see quotes in news articles where the focus is on the direct wording of the speaker. However, even in informal speech quotes are used when the speaker wants to dramatize a narrative. For example, I recently happened to overhear a conversation in which the main speaker was describing how his chiropractor friend had showed him to do certain exercises. Expressing his surprise at the results, he said,

"I'm like, "This is so awesome!"

In the telephone excerpt, on the other hand, the caller is not narrating a story and so feels no need to use a quote.

The use of ‘if’ to introduce a projected clause is an indication that we are dealing with informal speech. We should also note the choice of projecting verb ‘asked’. If the speaker had said that she had talked to a government official, she might have used the verb ‘requested’ instead. The verb ‘asked’ matches the structure and Mood of the projected clause. It would sound very unnatural to say,

"I just talked to Grace and demanded if we could change it to tomorrow."

if we were looking at a larger text, we would probably see certain patterns in the use of projections.

The chapter exercises include the excerpt from the doctor’s consultation as well as an excerpt from a novel for which we are asked to analyze the dependencies and the logico-semantic relations.

Chapter 9, *Grammatical metaphor*, is, in my opinion, the most fascinating in the book. Human language has the capability to expand its meaning potential by using certain structures in new and original ways. The test to show that we are dealing with metaphor is the ability to render the wording in a more ‘congruent’ manner, that is one which is closer to the state of affairs in the external world. A common strategy for metaphor is to use nominalized forms. Nouns are normally used to express things while events are normally expressed by way of verbs. Therefore, by ‘nouning’ an event we give it the status of a fact.

Consider the highlighted clause in the following excerpt from a book on fasting:

*Although a general rule is to stop all medication while fasting, the immediate cessation of certain kinds of medication can result in death.*

This is a relational process in which the noun phrase up to the verb is called Value/Identified and ‘in death’ is called Token-Identifier. We can illustrate the double readings of the noun phrase as in figure (5), with the more congruent wording below. Note that the material process ‘cease’ in the congruent wording has been nominalized in the metaphorical wording as ‘cessation’. This has the knock-on effect that the Circumstantial Adjunct ‘immediately’ has been changed into an Epithet modifying the noun ‘cessation’. 
Nominalization is a way of encapsulating information and is a very common kind of metaphor used in textbooks. Grammatical metaphor typically creates simpler, more condensed syntactic forms at the clause level but more complex ones at the group level. Note that the metaphorical wording below consists of only one clause while its congruent counterpart consists of two clauses. However, this simplification has come at a cost: the whole first clause is now condensed in a lengthy nominal group around ‘cessation’.

metaphorical: the immediate cessation of certain kinds of medication can result in death (one clause)

congruent: if people immediately cease certain kinds of medication, this can result in death (two clauses)

Spoken language is focused more on interaction and involves constantly establishing rapport. The result typically is a wordier expression—as we saw in our opening example with the two coordinated main clauses.

Earlier I mentioned the author’s use of the word ‘evolved’ to refer to language change. I suggested that this reflects a certain ideology. This is an example of lexical metaphor, a sub-category of grammatical metaphor.

The chapter exercise includes an excerpt from a medical textbook in which we are asked to identify the nominalizations and render the text in a more congruent way. We also revisit the doctor-patient consultation that was introduced in chapter 4.

In the final chapter, chapter 10, *Implications and applications of functional grammar*, the author leads us in a sample analysis of two texts previously seen: the doctor-patient consultation (introduced in chapter 4) and the excerpt from the medical textbook (from chapter 9). The analyses illustrate a key point that has been emphasized throughout the book, namely that functional grammar is designed for language in use, not for the analysis of abstract sentences. While other grammatical approaches take a modular view, treating structure (syntax), meaning (semantics), and use (pragmatics) independently, functional grammar seeks to establish a unified model of language showing the interrelationships between these various perspectives.

Functional grammar has been applied effectively in the field of TEFL, especially in the area of Communicative Language Teaching. (Thompson himself is director of a TESOL program at the
University of Liverpool.) The model fits well with discourse analysis and can provide objective criteria where assessing texts is important, such as for grading university students’ written assignments. Although this is not mentioned here, the principles for discourse analysis developed in functional grammar can also, I expect, be profitably applied in analyzing other languages for the purpose of producing texts in translation.

Following chapter 10, we find, in this order:

1. *Answers to exercises*, a thirty-page section with an answer key to all the exercises in the book
2. *Further reading*, a five-page supplement mentioning other introductions to functional grammar, links to functional grammar websites (although one has changed in the meanwhile, see references below), and—listed for each of the chapters covered—resources for further study
3. *References*, a thorough listing of references, the majority of which are not mentioned in Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), suggesting a great deal of original research on the part of the author
4. *Index*, consisting of eight two-column pages. A helpful feature of the index is that pages where a term is introduced and defined are highlighted. Unfortunately, personal names have not been included in the index. One will thus not be able to look for references to Halliday in the book. I would also have found it useful to look up, for example, the nursing advertisement and review the different analyses of the text.

I began this review with a very brief excerpt from a telephone conversation. By looking at this ‘text’ from the perspective of the different metafunctions, we have seen that the speaker made a series of choices in presenting her message. Any authentic text can be revealing. The final sentence of chapter 7 captures the message of the whole book in this regard:

But the important point, which relates to the fundamental aim of a functional approach to language analysis, is that we can in principle use even individual lexico-grammatical choices in context to understand something of the way in which language (and thus language users) construe the world – *that we can see the world in a linguistic grain of sand.* (p. 194, emphasis mine)

Functional grammar takes a wide view of language. An area not addressed in the book is gestures (in spoken text) and design (in written text). It seems to me that there is no reason why these should be excluded from an analysis of texts. The sample texts presented have all been reduced to the same font and type. Any designer will argue that choices made in terms of such things as font type, font size, layout, the use and placement of illustrations, even type of paper, all play a major role in communication. In spoken text, we might also consider intonation (which is mentioned several times in the book), speed, and—in conversation—overlap. Interestingly, ‘intonation’ is listed in the index but not ‘gestures’. When I brought this up with the author, he referred me to Baldry and Thibault (see references below). (About the scope of grammar, see chapter 6, *The openness of natural language*, in Postal 2004. For my review of this book, see the reference below.)
The book is printed on clear-white paper. The binding is excellent. Even after extensive use over a number of months, my copy is still in excellent shape.

My interest in functional grammar was piqued by SIL coursework in the late eightees/early nineties in Stratificational Grammar as developed and taught by the late Ilah Fleming. There are many obvious parallels between her model (which she called ‘Communication Analysis’) and functional grammar. I dedicate this review to her memory.

References


