Chapter 4

The structure of a text

Introduction

Let me begin from one of the basic questions that Halliday has already raised in Chapter 1: what is text? My aim is to elaborate upon the definition he has offered: 'we can define text in the simplest way ... as language that is functional. By functional, we simply mean language that is doing some job in some context ...'. I want to show in some detail what it means to define text, as Halliday does, as 'language that is functional', 'that is doing some job in some context of situation'. My main hypothesis will be that text and context are so intimately related that neither concept can be enunciated without the other.

But before broaching this main topic, let me begin by taking the word 'text' in its rather general sense — the sense that is enshrined in *Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary* as:

> the actual words of a book, poem etc., in their original form or any form
> they have been transmitted in or transmuted into ...

Thinking of text this way, what could one say about its most outstanding characteristics? The attribute that comes to mind most readily is that of UNITY. Clearly we can't know — in the sense of being acquainted with — all the books, poems etc., either in their original form or otherwise; but clearly, also, we do know texts — in the sense of being able to discriminate between a text and a 'non-text', a complete text and an incomplete one. I am suggesting that the basis for these judgments lies in the notion of unity.

The unity in any text — whether written as Chambers' definition implies, or spoken as face-to-face interaction requires — is of two major types:

- unity of structure
- unity of texture.

I am going to discuss the unity of structure first. Texture will be discussed in the following chapter.

What is text structure?

Structure is a familiar term, but what does it mean in the expression 'the structure of a text'? Probably the easiest way to explain it is to give a paraphrase, to say, for example, that it refers to the overall structure, the global structure of the message form. A simple example will serve to illustrate what is meant here. While I was a visitor in Japan, my colleagues took me to see a Kabuki play, and I had the need and the opportunity to learn a little about this famous art form. On reading a little booklet relating to Kabuki, I learned that there is a genre known as Sewamono within which there is a particular sub-genre known as Enkirimono. I learned also that the basic pattern in Enkirimono is that there is a breaking off of relations, either between a married couple, or between lovers. The reason for this break is not known to one of the participants, the forsaken member of the relationship, who takes it as an act of cruel desertion; but in actual fact the real motive behind the desertion is a noble one. For example, a husband might divorce a wife in order to prevent her from suffering the consequences of some crime that he might have commited. Now, on the basis of this much information, I could postulate that in every instance of Enkirimono, there will be at least three elements of structure. I will give these elements descriptive names, so that they may, hopefully, have a mnemonic value:

1. the Precipitative Event: an event that propels from one stage to another. It would thus lead to the second element. An example of a Precipitative Event, perhaps, would be the geisha rejecting her lover, or the husband informing his wife that he is divorcing her; *structure is made up of separate events or elements*
2. the Consequential Event: an event brought about as a consequence of the Precipitative Event;
3. the Revelation: the Consequential Event leads to some revelation of facts hitherto concealed. The Revelation leads to a re-interpretation of the Precipitative Event; the nobility of the act becomes obvious. What had appeared as heartless forsaking now assumes heroic proportions, being seen in its true colour as an act of devotion and self-sacrifice.

Assuming that my understanding of Enkirimono, sketchy though it is, is nonetheless correct in essentials, we have postulated three elements that are essential to the structure of every Enkirimono text; and these are: Precipitative Event, Consequential Event, and Revelation. We can refer to literary studies for this kind of concept of text structure. The earliest widely known Western model is the Aristotelian definition of Greek tragedy as made up of three elements: the beginning, the middle, and the end. One may have reservations about this actual analysis; I am not concerned with that here. My only concern is to provide such examples as will clarify my own use of the terms 'element of text structure' and 'generic structure of text'. So, as a first step, I have referred to two genres: that of Enkirimono and that of Greek tragedy. In each case I have shown the presence of elements of structure. But drama, epic, fables, or sonnets—no matter how much valued by a community—are not particularly privileged in this respect. Even the *the Aristotelian definition of structure*

use of language that appears most effortless and least specialised, namely casual conversation, possesses structure in this sense (Ventola 1979).

Between classical tragedy and the everyday common phenomenon of casual conversation (Ventola 1979), there exists a wide range of genres, varying in the extent to which the global structure of their message form appears to have a definite shape. Strange as it may sound, the structure of casual conversation is much less well understood, even by those of us who specialise in talking about conversation, than that of, say, the Petrarchan sonnet. Many of us would be surprised by the suggestion that there is structure in a text generated in the course of buying a kilo of potatoes and three cloves of garlic.

In this chapter, I propose to abandon the better described genres of literature in favour of one that is much closer to the conversation end of the spectrum. The invisibility of structure in the latter type of genres is justification enough for the decision; but there is a deeper reason. An understanding of genres from everyday situations — particularly those in which language acts as an instrument, for example in the context of canoeing from Malinowski — helps us to see clearly the very close partnership between language and the living of life.

Such understanding assists in describing the relationship between language and context in those areas too where this partnership is not so obvious. This is often the case with written text, but particularly with texts of verbal art, philosophy, and science — in fact, all areas outside the domain of commonsense knowledge. To explain the relationship between texts of the latter type and their context, we must invoke Malinowski's notion of context of culture. Although I shall be discussing some aspects of this question in Chapter 6, there will not be enough time to follow up the question in as great a detail as is needed to talk about the relationship of context to text structure. Here, I will choose a genre that is closer to the canoeing situation than it is to, say, the nursery tale (Hasan 1984a) or a fable (Halliday 1977). It is embedded in a type of context that could be described as FOCUSED INTERACTION, and, within that, more specifically it belongs to the genre of SERVICE ENCOUNTER where the participants bear the role of seeker and supplier of goods and/or services.

A text and its context

Let us first introduce a text.

Text 4.1

C: Can I have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas please?
V: Yes, anything else?
C: No, thanks.
V: That'll be dollar forty.
C: Two dollars.
V: Sixty, eighty, two dollars. Thank you.

Text 4.1 is an example of the genre Service Encounter. Anyone who knows the English language and is generally acquainted with the

Western type of culture will have no difficulty in 'placing' this text into the context that is appropriate to it. Earlier Halliday considered the question 'how do we explain the success with which people communicate?'. If it is true, as he suggested, that 'the situation in which linguistic interaction takes place gives the participants a great deal of information about the meanings that are being exchanged, and . . . that are likely to be exchanged', then it is equally true that the meanings that are being made by the language will give the participants a great deal of information about the kind of situation they are in.

I emphasise this two-way relationship between language and situation, for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, this emphasis reveals the un-commonsense view of situation. The commonsense view is that we say 'Can I have . . .', 'How much is that?', 'That'll be six dollars seventy', and so on, because we happen to be in a shopping situation. The un-commonsense view is that shopping as a culturally recognisable type of situation has been constructed over the years by the use of precisely this kind of language. Without the recognition of this bi-directionality, it would be difficult to account for the possibility of verbal art, science, philosophy—in fact, the entire domain of human knowledge—or, for that matter, deceptions and misunderstandings.

From a practical point of view, too, this emphasis is important, because as I begin to explore the details of the relationship between context and text structure, I may, in the interest of brevity, limit myself to showing how some feature of the context can be used to predict some element(s) of the structure of possible and appropriate texts. Such statements should be read as implying that, all else being equal, the presence of those elements of the text's structure would 'construct' those same features of the context. We can now turn to the question of how context affects the structure of the text.

Contextual configuration

Halliday has introduced the three terms field, tenor, and mode. These refer to certain aspects of our social situations that always act upon the language as it is being used. I should like to introduce here a related concept: CONTEXTUAL CONFIGURATION, using the acronym CC instead of the full label.

Each of the three, field, tenor, and mode, may be thought of as a variable that is represented by some specific value(s). Each functions as a point of entry to any situation as a set of possibilities—or, to use a technical term, OPTIONS. Thus, the variable field may have the value 'praising' or 'blaming'; tenor may allow a choice between 'parent-to-child' or 'employer-to-employee' while mode might be 'speech' or 'writing'. Now given that any member of a related pair of options can combine with any member of any other, the following are some of the possible configurations:

- parent praising child in speech
- employer praising employee in speech

- parent blaming child in speech
- employer blaming employee in speech.

Each of these entries is a CC. A CC is a specific set of values that realises field, tenor, and mode.

Contextual configuration and text structure: general remarks

We need the notion of CC for talking about the structure of the text because it is the specific features of a CC — the values of the variables — that permit statements about the text's structure. We cannot work from the general notion of, say, 'field' since it is not possible to claim, for example, that field always leads to the appearance of this or that element. Moreover, often a combination of features from more than one variable might motivate the appearance of some single element of a text (Hasan 1978). We need to see the total set of features — all the selected values of the three variables — as one configuration, rather than attempting to relate aspects of the text's structure to individual 'headings'.

CC as an account of the significant attributes of a social activity

In the structural unity of the text, the CC plays a central role. If text can be described as 'language doing some job in some context', then it is reasonable to describe it as the verbal expression of a social activity; the CC is an account of the significant attributes of this social activity. So, it is not surprising that the features of the CC can be used for making certain kinds of predictions about text structure. These are as follows:

predictions about elements of text structure

1. **What** elements **must** occur;
2. **What** elements **can** occur;
3. **Where must** they occur;
4. **Where can** they occur;
5. **How often** can they occur.

More succinctly we would say that a CC can predict the OBLIGATORY (1) and the OPTIONAL (2) elements of a text's structure as well as their SEQUENCE (3 and 4) vis-à-vis each other and the possibility of their ITERATION (5). These points are discussed in the following sections. Here let me say that an ELEMENT is a stage with some consequence in the progression of a text.

Text 4.1 and its context

Look again at Text 4.1. What kind of CC would such a text be embedded in (always assuming that it was created as an appropriate response to a real-life situation)? Let us examine the values of the three variables briefly.

The field of discourse for text 4.1

Field, being concerned with the nature of the social activity, involves both the kind of acts being carried out and their goal(s). Here, there is a short-term goal of acquiring some food-stuffs in exchange for some money. This is what we refer to as 'buying', and buying always implies selling.

56

The tenor of discourse for Text 4.1

This social activity is institutionalised. And so the nature of the activity predicates the set of roles relevant to the unfolding of the activity (Hasan 1980). Let us refer to this as the AGENT ROLES component of the tenor of discourse; these are quite obviously vendor and customer. This is what the 'V' and 'C' stand for in Text 4.1.

agent roles

Cutting across the agent role is another component of tenor, which is also susceptible to whether or not the activity is institutionalised. This is the component concerned with the degree of control (or power) one participant is able to exercise over the other(s), almost by virtue of their agent role relation. You will note that the agent roles construct DYADS. If the dyad is HIERARCHIC, one agent will have a greater degree of control over the other; if it is NON-HIERARCHIC, then we have relations of peer-hood, such as those of friendship, rivalry, acquaintanceship, and indifference.

For Text 4.1, the dyad is hierarchic; within the range of the social activity, the customer exercises greater power. The vendor is in a soliciting position, having to sell the goods. It is important to recognise that control may shift from one agent to the other, and that a person carrying a subordinate hierarchic role in the agent dyad is not necessarily submissive.

Both agent role and dyadic relation are essentially determined by reference to general social matters. We might even say that in as much as agent roles and their dyadic structures are determined by the nature of the social activity, these are expressions of a social structure. But tenor is also concerned with those relations between participants that arise from their biographies. It makes a good deal of difference to the job that language has to do if I buy my kilo of potatoes from a vendor whose shop I use only irregularly as opposed to one who is also my next-door neighbour. The component of tenor that relates such details of biography to the details of social structure may be referred to as SOCIAL DISTANCE (Hasan 1973, 1978, 1980).

roles determined by social matters

social distance

Social distance is a continuum, the two end-points of which may be referred to as MAXIMAL and MINIMAL. A maximal social distance obtains when the persons involved know each other through infrequent encounters only in the capacity of the agent of some one institutionalised activity and in the dyadic status that correlates with the agent role. Thus my social distance to a vendor is maximal if as a day-tourist I walk into his or her — let's say her — store to buy some fruit and I meet her for the first time, since I only know her as a vendor. This distance is likely to be less if the vendor were someone from whom I had been buying fruit over the years; it would be even less, if I also know her in some other capacity. For example the vendor and I may belong to a club, or she may be a neighbour or a relative. The more minimal the social distance, the greater the degree of familiarity between the carriers of the role. Social distance affects styles of communication. In a long-standing relationship, for example, that of marriage, one participant is normally able to predict a great deal of what the other might say or do. So the need for explicitness is not so pressing. The tenor values for Text 4.1 are perhaps quite obvious now: the social distance between the vendor and customer is near maximal.

social distance and style of communication

57

The mode of discourse for Text 4.1

The third variable, mode, can also be examined under at least three
different sub-headings. First there is the question of the LANGUAGE
ROLE — whether it is constitutive or ancillary. These categories should
not be seen as sharply distinct but rather the two end-points of a con-
tinuum. The role of language for Text 4.1 is largely ancillary, for it
accompanies the activities of handling the fruit. In fact, the extent to
which it is explicit is governed by my desire to present an example from
everyday familiar activities in such a way that you are able to under-
stand all the significant aspects of it.

The second way mode may be considered concerns PROCESS SHAR-
ING. Is the addressee able to share the process of text creation as it un-
folds, or does the addressee come to the text when it is a finished
product? In the former case, the text is in the SPOKEN MEDIUM; in the
latter, it is in the WRITTEN MEDIUM.

The most important factor arising from the spoken medium is the
possibility of immediate feedback. Even if the occasion is one where
the speaker is allowed the floor for a considerable stretch of time without
the addressee having the right to interrupt — for example, a speaker
producing a talk to a professional group — he or she is still able to get
a good deal of feedback from the extra-verbal modalities of communi-
cation, for example gesture, eye contact, and facial expression. The
addressee, too, is able to hear the 'tone of voice' and see the speaker's
expression. Moreover, the physical presence of the addressee impinges
upon the process in a way that the writer's own awareness of the needs
of the addressee can hardly ever do; for one thing, in the spoken medi-
um, both hear (and often see) the same things. This is obviously im-
possible in the case of the written medium.

The written medium is normally associated with the constitutive
role of language, while the spoken coincides with both the constitutive
and the ancillary. The notion of monologue is associated with the writ-
ten medium, though the spoken medium permits the possibility of either
monologue or dialogue. The written medium is associated with a good
deal of revision and editing; the spoken medium coincides with the ex-
tempore shaping of messages. In the case of Text 4.1, addressor and
addressee share in the process of text creation.

The third important factor relevant to mode is the CHANNEL. Chan-
nel refers to the modality through which one comes in contact with the
message — whether the message travels on sound waves or on a piece
of paper. Confusion can arise from a failure to distinguish between
channel and medium, particularly if the terms 'written' and 'spoken'
are used for both. Elsewhere (Hasan 1978, 1979), I have referred to
the two as the VISUAL and AURAL channel, respectively. This solution
has other drawbacks. So for the present, I will adopt the terms GRAPH-
IC and PHONIC to refer to whether the channel for contact with the mes-
sage is marks on paper or noises meeting the ear. It is obvious that
channel and medium are closely related. Medium is a historical product
of the conditions accompanying channel, but with the increase in our
ability to record messages, the relationship between the two has
changed. It is possible for medium and channel to be congruent, but

(margin notes:) language role may be constitutive or ancillary — process sharing — channel — graphic and phonic channel

58

it is not necessary that they should be. For example, if I walk into a vegetable store to buy fruit the medium and the channel are highly likely to be congruent — namely spoken and phonic. Again, if I have to apply for a job, there is likely to be congruence between the two, with written medium and graphic channel. But if I write a letter to a friend, such congruence is likely to be absent, for I shall tend to write as if speaking. So, while materially the channel will be graphic, for all intents and purposes, the medium will be spoken. In Text 4.1, the medium is spoken and the channel, phonic.

The contextual configuration of Text 4.1

The CC for Text 4.1 is summed up briefly in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1   CC1: the contextual configuration of Text 4.1

Field:	Economic transaction: purchase of retail goods: perishable food . . .
Tenor:	Agents of transaction: hierarchic: customer superordinate and vendor subordinate; social distance: near-maximum . . .
Mode:	Language role: ancillary; channel: phonic; medium: spoken with visual contact . . .

The structure of Text 4.1

Obligatory elements

We can now use the summary account of the CC in Table 4.1 to examine Text 4.1. Text 4.1 is reproduced below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2   The structure of Text 4.1

SR = →⌈ Can I have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas please?

SC = →⌈ Yes, anything else?
            ⌊ No thanks.

S = →⌈ That'll be dollar forty.

P = →⌈ Two dollars.

PC = →⌈ Sixty, eighty, two dollars. Thank you.

The text begins with a request for goods: *Can I have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas please*. This is the first obligatory element. Let us refer to this element as SALE REQUEST (SR). Its occurrence is predicted mainly because of the field values. The purchase of goods presupposes prior selection, and in a store with retail goods service, this selection must be made known to the vendor. This is basically what makes the element SR obligatory.

Sale Request = SR

The normal pattern following a request is, of course, the granting or the rejecting of it; either is possible in a sale environment, too. I shall use the term SALE COMPLIANCE (SC) irrespective of whether the

Sale Compliance = SC

59

response is positive or negative. In Text 4.1, SC is positive: *Yes, anything else?* It is important to realise that *yes* is not meant just as a short form for 'Yes, you can have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas'; rather, it is an encouraging noise that says 'Yes, go on! ask for more things'. In other words, a positive SC is highly likely to contain an invitation for more purchases. Its prime purpose is sales promotion, not the granting of SR. The true granting of the SR is actually in the doing—the vendor does her part of SC as she completes getting the goods for the customer. The element SC is completed only when the customer has responded to the invitation, as in Table 4.2 where the customer's response to the invitation is *No, thanks*. The motivation for SC is to be found in both the field and the tenor values. Behind the invitation to buy some more lies the ideology of 'free enterprise'. And at the same time, the hierarchic status of the vendor is one that raises the expectation of her readiness to serve as long as required. Her 'Yes, anything else' or just 'Yes' or 'Anything else?' said on a rising intonation is thus a highly condensed message.

idealogy as an
essential element in
Service Encounter

Note that if, for some reason, the remainder of Text 4.1 were not available, you would still know that (1) this is (part of) a buying-selling text and (2) it is incomplete. It is not incomplete because it is too short; there are shorter texts, for example 'No smoking'. Non-technically, the items of the text discussed so far could be seen as fulfilling the conditions of 'giving', but there is a crucial difference between 'giving' and 'selling'. In the latter case, not only does the buyer select, and is provided with the selected commodity; he or she must also be told the price, and the payment must be made, before the social process can be said to have been accomplished. The reason why just this much of Text 4.1 would not be taken as a complete text is because we do not have an appropriate indication that the process of purchase has been completed yet. Once the structure of the text indicates the completion of this activity, we would have no hesitation in considering the text complete.

S = Sale
P = Purchase

An important part of selling is when the reckoning begins: the vendor must inform the customer what the exchange value of the goods is. The message associated with this function, I refer to as SALE (S). The next obligatory element is PURCHASE (P): the customer must offer the exchange value in return for ordered goods. The buying and selling activity is clinched by the vendor acknowledging receipt of payment. This takes some politeness formula, for example, 'Thanks', 'Great', and might additionally cover the business of handing over change, should this be necessary, as is the case in Text 4.1.

obligatory elements
in Text 4.1
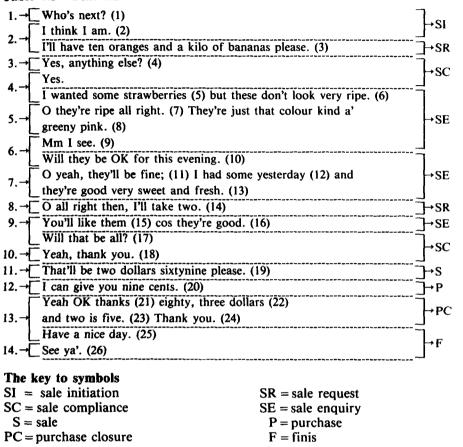
So the obligatory elements of Text 4.1 are SR, SC, S, P, and PC in that order. This can be displayed as SR^SC^S^P^PC, with the sign ^ showing the order of the elements.

To appreciate the significance of the obligatory elements, let us look at a related text (Text 4.2), which contains some optional elements. We assume that the CC presented in Table 4.1 is relevant to Text 4.2 as well.

60

Optional elements

Let us first introduce Text 4.2 (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Text 4.2

1.→	Who's next? (1)	→SI
2.→	I think I am. (2)	
	I'll have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas please. (3)	→SR
3.→	Yes, anything else? (4)	→SC
4.→	Yes.	
	I wanted some strawberries (5) but these don't look very ripe. (6)	
5.→	O they're ripe all right. (7) They're just that colour kind a' greeny pink. (8)	→SE
6.→	Mm I see. (9)	
	Will they be OK for this evening. (10)	
7.→	O yeah, they'll be fine; (11) I had some yesterday (12) and they're good very sweet and fresh. (13)	→SE
8.→	O all right then, I'll take two. (14)	→SR
9.→	You'll like them (15) cos they're good. (16)	→SE
	Will that be all? (17)	→SC
10.→	Yeah, thank you. (18)	
11.→	That'll be two dollars sixtynine please. (19)	→S
12.→	I can give you nine cents. (20)	→P
13.→	Yeah OK thanks (21) eighty, three dollars (22) and two is five. (23) Thank you. (24)	→PC
	Have a nice day. (25)	→F
14.→	See ya'. (26)	

The key to symbols

SI = sale initiation	SR = sale request
SC = sale compliance	SE = sale enquiry
S = sale	P = purchase
PC = purchase closure	F = finis

In this presentation, the dotted horizontal lines show element boundaries; the initials in the right-hand column refer to the labels for structural elements; numbers within the round brackets refer to the individual messages of the text, while those in the left-hand column number the successive turns (Sacks et al. 1974) in the dialogue between the vendor and the customer.

You will note that the obligatory elements occur in Text 4.2 as well. But there are several other elements that only appear here, and not in Text 4.1. For example, the text begins with SALE INITIATION (SI), realised by messages (1) and (2). SI is an optional element. To say this is to imply that in the absence of SI, a text would still be interpreted as embedded in CC1 so long as it contains the obligatory elements. So, by implication, the obligatory elements define the genre to which a text belongs; and the appearance of all of these elements in a specific order corresponds to our perception of whether the text is complete or incomplete.

optional elements in Text 4.2

genre is defined by obligatory elements in structure

61

So what role do optional elements have? Do they appear random-
ly? To say that some elements may be optional is not the same as say-
ing 'anything goes'. The finite set of optional elements that can possibly
occur in texts of the genre under focus can be stated quite definitely.

By definition, an optional element is one that **can** occur but is not
obliged to occur. The conditions under which there is a high probabili-
ty of its occurence can be stated. For example, SI is likely to occur in
a crowded store, with many customers needing attention; it would not
occur in a shop where there are no other customers.

The point is obvious enough, but note how it distinguishes the op-
tional and obligatory elements. Our perception of the kind of social
activity we are involved in does not change if the shop is crowded: we
do not say this is not an economic transaction, or that the agent roles
are not vendor and customer, etc. This context is viewed simply as
another variant of CC1. The crowdedness of the premises is not
sufficient ground for saying that the CC has changed its character; nor
is it a definite enough characteristic to be criterial in the definition of
a genre.

So, while optional elements do not occur randomly, their option-
ality arises from the fact that their occurrence is predicted by some at-
tribute of a CC that is non-defining for the CC and to the text type
embedded in that CC. It is not surprising that optional elements can
be seen as having wider applicability. For example, 'Who's next?' can
act as the initiating element of many other service encounters, where
participant turn-initiation is institutionally controlled. So, when I go
to renew my car registration, if there is a crowd, I wait till the clerk
calls 'Who's next?', and when it is my turn I proceed to carry out the
rest of my business. But this same procedure is not necessary if I hap-
pen to get there at a time when the office is not very busy and when
I can walk right up to the clerk and say 'I'd like to renew my registra-
tion'. In both cases I think of the situation as one of renewing car regis-
tration.

Note if we wished to characterise the CCs in which such initiation
can take place, the description would be so gross that we would have
no idea of what specific activity was going on. The description may
read something like this:

Field: Service encounter
Tenor: Institutionalised agents
Mode: Phonic channel; spoken medium.

Iterative elements

In Text 4.2, you will notice several entries marked SE. SE is an option-
al element and stands for SALE ENQUIRY. It can occur at any point after
SI and its function is to determine some attribute of the goods contem-
plated for purchase. It can either be raised by the customer or the ven-
dor and is completed when the other participant has responded, if such
response is required as in (6) or (10). Note that like initiation, enquiry
too could be seen as a possible feature of any service encounter. For
example, in renewing my registration, I might ask the clerk 'I got mar-
ried last week. Can the registration be renewed in my married name?'.

When a particular (set of) element(s) occurs more than once, we refer to this phenomenon as ITERATION, or RECURSION (Hasan 1979). For Text 4.2, SE would be labelled an iterative (or recursive) element. As a linguistic phenomenon, iteration is always optional. Can iteration be predicted from any attribute of the context of situation? It is relatively easy to demonstrate this possibility when some obligatory elements are iterative. For example, there is the possibility of iteration for SR and SC as indicated by Text 4.2. Essentially, the iteration of these can be predicted on two assumptions:

1. the customer does not remember all the goods at once; and/or
2. the vendor must display readiness to serve and continue to invite more SRs, due to the nature of the field and tenor. This acts as an incentive to further SR.

A guess can be made about the motivation for the iteration of SE. Whatever goods or services are required, the recipient of these — here, the customer — needs to be sure that they are of the type desired. This can involve repeated queries because:

1. phenomena possess more than one attribute; and/or
2. any one attribute may be discussed and elaborated upon.

Text 4.2 has another optional element, FINIS (= F). The probability of its occurrence is higher when the social distance between the participants moves towards the minimal end of the scale. The element has a function that Malinowski would have described as 'phatic communion'. It is not a signal to end the purchase act; this was achieved in PC. F is a signal that although the purchase act — an experiential event — is completed, the interpersonal relation continues. This is done by a display of good will: *have a nice day*, and/or the expression of the desire to renew contact: *see ya*.

One optional element that did not appear in Text 4.2 is GREETING (G). G is like F in that it indicates continuity of personal relation, signalling the recognition of the other participant as a potential agent in some activity.

A text and its genre: generic structure potential

In the discussion above I have established:

1. the obligatory elements for Texts 4.1 and 4.2;
2. the optional elements for Text 4.2;
3. the iteration of elements in Text 4.2.

I have also stated the order of sequence for the obligatory elements and implied what the order would be for some of the optional ones, for example, F and G. Some more will be said below about the sequence of other optional elements. Here I would like to compare Texts 4.1 and 4.2, and arrive at some generalisations through this comparison.

We find that Texts 4.1 and 4.2 are closely related: they are embedded in the same CC and share the same set of obligatory elements. These two points of similarity are interdependent. Generally speaking, language is doing the same kind of job in both — it is assisting in the buying and selling of some goods of a specific kind. There are differences

too; these can be expressed very briefly as the kind of differences that do not alter the kind of job that language is doing. Structurally, Text 4.2 contains certain elements that could be contained but need not be contained in other texts embedded in the same context. It is possible to express the total range of optional and obligatory elements and their order in such a way that we exhaust the possibility of text structure for every text that can be appropriate to CC1. In other words it is possible to state the STRUCTURE POTENTIAL of this genre, or its GENERIC STRUCTURE POTENTIAL. The acronyms SP and GSP will be used interchangeably to refer to this from now on. The GSP for CC1 is shown in Table 4.4

optional and obligatory elements and structure potential

GSP = generic structure potential

Table 4.4   Generic structure potential for CC1

$$[(G)\cdot(SI)^{\frown}] \ [(S\widehat{E}\cdot) \ \{SR^{\frown}SC^{\frown}\} \ ^{\frown}S]P^{\frown}PC(^{\frown}F)$$

You will recognise the labels for structures and the caret sign indicating sequence. The round brackets indicate optionality of enclosed elements: so G, SI, SE, and F are optional. Any one—or more—of these elements may or may not occur in some text embedded in CC1. The dot · between elements indicates more than one option in sequence. But optionality of sequence is never equal to complete freedom; the restraint is indicated by the square bracket. So, for example, we can read the first square bracket as follows:

optionality never implies complete freedom

• G and/or SI may/may not occur;
• if they both occur, then either G may precede SI, or follow it;
• neither G nor SI can follow the elements to the right of SI.

The curved arrow shows iteration. Thus $(S\widehat{E}\cdot)$ indicates that:

• SE is optional;
• SE can occur anywhere, so long as it does not precede G or SI and so long as it does not follow P or PC or F;
• SE can be iterative.

So, together with iteration and optionality of sequence, SE is projected as capable of occurring before, after, and/or between the three other elements in the square bracket.

The braces with a curved arrow $\{^{\frown}\}$ indicate that the degree of iteration for elements within the braces is equal; if SR occurs twice, then SC must also occur twice; and so on.

A GSP of the type presented in Table 4.4 is a condensed statement of the conditions under which a text will be seen as one that is appropriate to CC1. It is a powerful device in that it permits a large number of possible structures that can be actualised. Let us refer to any one actualisation of GSP as ACTUAL STRUCTURE. We have already met two actualisations of the GSP: Texts 4.1 and 4.2, both of which display an actual structure the possibility of which is captured in the GSP. These actual structures are represented in Table 4.5.

actual structure

Table 4.5   The actual structures of Texts 4.1 and 4.2

Text 4.1: SR^SC^S^P^PC
Text 4.2: SI^SR₁^SC₁^SE₁^SE₂^SR₂^SE₁^SC₂^S^P^PC^F

Text 4.3 is another example.

Text 4.3

V: Good morning, Mrs Reid. ⎤ G
C: Good morning, Bob. ⎦
   Can I have a couple of apples? ⎤ SR
V: Is that all today? ⎤ SC
C: Yes thank you. ⎦
V: Sixty cents. ⎤ S
C: Here y'are. ⎤ P
V: Thank you. ⎤ PC
   Goo'day. ⎤ F
C: 'Bye. ⎦

The actual structure of Text 4.3 can be represented as follows:

G^SR^SC^S^P^PC^F

Another text may begin with an SE, 'How much are those Granny Smiths today?', and might then follow the pattern of Text 4.3 from SR onwards to PC, and so on.

Even restricting ourselves to just the elements SE, SR, SC, and S and ignoring the possibility of iteration, we can get at least the following fragments of texts appropriate to CC1 (see Texts 4.4–4.7).

Text 4.4

SE: Have you any Granny Smiths? Yes, large or medium?
SR: Well give me half a dozen large ones please.
SC: Yes, what else? That's all, thanks.
    actual structure = ... SE^SR^SC ....

Text 4.5

SR: Can I have half a dozen large Granny Smiths?
SE: Are they local? They look very good. Yes, they are from the Blue Mountains.
SC: Will that be all now? Yes, thank you.
    actual structure = ... SR^SE^SC ....

Text 4.6

SR: Can I have a dozen Granny Smiths?
SC: Will that be all now? Yes.
SE: Where are these apples from? They look very good.
    actual structure = ... SR^SC^SE ....

Text 4.7

SR: Can I have a dozen Granny Smiths?
SC: Will that be all just now? Yes, thank you.
S: That'll be 95 cents.
SE: Where are these apples from? They look very good.
    actual structure = ... SR^SC^S^SE ...

Each of these texts has a different actual structure, but each realises a possibility built into the GSP. the significance of this point is discussed in Chapter 6

65

The status of obligatory elements in the structure potential

A particular GSP is recognised by the set of obligatory elements; this claim is implied in the observation that optional elements have wider applicability. This makes it important to distinguish between optional and obligatory elements. Let us see if this is possible.

An interesting fact about the obligatory elements appears to be that they are open to certain kinds of operations. These can be seen as strategies for ensuring that:

- the obligatory elements do occur;
- that their realisation is adequate.

Strategy: probe

Consider CC1. Suppose a customer enters a shop and just hangs about making no SR. What is likely to happen? Very possibly, the vendor would say 'Can I help you?', 'Are you all right?', or some such thing. This is our familiar element SI and it can be seen as a strategy to provoke an SR. While it is not binding on the customer that, in response, he or she — let's say she — make a sale request, this strategy forces her to come clean. Either she must take on the role of a looker-on — 'No, I'm just looking' — or she must produce a sale request or sale enquiry. We could perhaps refer to this strategy as PROBE. It consists of some device that is calculated to bring about the kind of behaviour on the part of some (one) participant that could reasonably be read by the others as a manifestation of an obligatory element in question, or if appropriate, it may lead to a claim that the view of the CC held by the other participant should be revised. 'I am just looking' is equal to saying 'this is not a shopping situation for me'.

Strategy: repair

A second strategy is that of REPAIR. This strategy is employed when an obligatory element is realised, but not adequately. For example if in CC1, a buyer says 'I'd like some oranges', this will be an inadequate realisation of SR. The vendor cannot proceed to the next stage without more information and is likely to repair the situation by saying 'Would a 3 kilo bag be enough?' or 'Did you want navels? They are five for ninety-nine'. So this is a strategy to lead to the adequate realisation of an obligatory element.

Strategy: re-align

In those CCs where the social distance is tending towards minimal, talk can get diverted from one direction to another in face-to-face interaction. So even if the field is 'economic transaction: purchase', the vendor and customer may find themselves engaged in a discussion that bears no specific relevance to the matter in hand. One may move from a discussion of stawberries, to that of drought, to that of high cattle mor-

66

tality, to that of the government's ineptitude in handling the situation. There are strategies for bringing the wandering participant back to the business in hand by joking, by confronting, and by taking the topic and deliberately relating it to something in hand (Cloran 1982). More work needs to be done to check whether these strategies — which we may call RE-ALIGN — are normally applied only so that an obligatory element occurs, thus ensuring return to the CC in question.

A characteristic of obligatory elements

If we ask why it is possible to use probe or repair for obligatory elements, the answer will highlight the main difference between these and the optional elements. Knowledge of the CC provides a very good idea of what meanings are relevant to what stage of an ongoing activity, and if those meanings are not being made at that stage, something can be done about it. For example, no utterance can act as SR unless it contains information about the identity and quantity of the commodity sought. So if either of these features is missing from the utterance seeking commodity, repair can be applied. By contrast, we can only do something fairly general and indeterminate about an optional element, for example, SE. This element may concern the availability, and/or the attributes, and/or the cost of the commodity; and even this does not exhaust the possibilities. So when faced with a novel product, a buyer may want to know how it should be used, how much might be sufficient, and so on.

Although I have said a good deal about the obligatory elements, we shall return to the notion, and also to that of the relation between text and context, in Chapter 6. Let us examine very briefly here the question of the realisation of the elements of text structure.

The realisation of structural elements

There is a good reason for establishing some certain way of defining the boundaries of a text's structural elements. Without this, the analysis will remain so intuitive that two persons analysing the same text might differ greatly. So it is desirable to find criteria for deciding what part of a text realises which element; more than that, it is important to establish what type of criteria these are.

One thing that seems quite certain is that no neat one-to-one correspondence exists between a structural element and a clause or sentence. In Text 4.2, the element SI is realised by clauses (1) and (2). Nor does one structural element correspond to one speaker turn; it is not the case that one turn by one speaker will necessarily contain just one element of text structure. SI in Text 4.2 covers one full turn (*Who's next?*) and one half (*I think I am*), after which the rest of the customer's turn is devoted to the realisation of the next element, SR. Nor is the structural element always co-extensive with one individual message or act. Greeting and Finis always require two individual acts — for example, a greeting and a greeting back. The search for a unit of some sort — either syntactic (for example, sentence), dialogic management (for example, turn), or message status (for example, offer-receipt) — as a

67

universal formal equivalent of a structural element seems doomed to failure. The text is a unit of meaning; it is language that is functional in some context. If this is true, then the elements of the structure of the text will have to be defined by the job they do in that specific contextual configuration, which is logically related to the text's structure. And this implies (1) that the realisational criteria need not be identical across genres, and (2) that an element's realisational criteria might be stated most clearly in terms of some semantic property. For example, we can say that SR must be realised by the following set of semantic properties:

- demand
- reference to goods
- quantity of goods.

Even with an optional element, it is possible to make certain claims that may be sufficient for its identification; for example, SE must make reference to the same general domain in which the participants are operating. In Text 4.1, we could not have an SE such as 'What size shoes do you wear?' or 'Do you like to go sailing?'. I am not suggesting that these sorts of unrelated things cannot be said. But if they are, it is highly likely that the participants as well as the onlookers will regard them not as a part of the buying–selling text, but rather as a separate one.

Context, genre, and text structure

To think of text structure not in terms of the structure of each individual text as a separate entity, but as a general statement about a genre as a whole, is to imply that there exists a close relation between text and context, precisely of the type that has been discussed in the preceding pages. The value of this approach lies ultimately in the recognition of the functional nature of language. If text and context are related in the ways I have argued above, then it follows that there cannot be just one right way of either speaking or writing. What is appropriate in one environment may not be quite so appropriate in another.

Further, there is the implication that an ability to write an excellent essay on the causes of the Second World War does not establish that one can produce a passable report on a case in a court of law. This is not because one piece of writing is inherently more difficult or demanding than the other, but because one may have more experience of that particular genre.

The early stages of essay writing are probably quite as problematic—and for exactly the same reason—for all youngsters (Martin & Rothery 1980, 1981; Christie 1983). One learns to make texts by making texts, in much the same way as one learns to speak a language by speaking that language. Familiarity with different genres does not grow automatically with growing age, just as language does not simply happen because you are two or three or five years old. For both you need social experience.

A child may not experience at home the genres that the system of education particularly requires. In this respect, home environments

68

might differ significantly. The home where a child naturally encounters different kinds of written communication creates an awareness of language that is not the same as that created by a 'print-less' home. But the school requires the same types of tasks to be performed by all its pupils. A teacher's understanding of generic structures will be an active ingredient in his or her success as a teacher. Children need to be exposed to a wide range of genres — particularly those that are actively required in the educational process — for example, résumé, report, expository essay, and so on. It is a mistaken view of both text and learning to imagine that one can get children to write an essay on the relationship between climate and vegetation by simply talking about it; and it is worse still to imagine that one can do this without talking about it at all.

This is not a contradictory statement. In the earlier part of this chapter, I suggested that the spoken mode is more versatile than the written. This is not an accident. Many — in fact most — of our activities are conducted through speaking (Goffman 1974, 1981). Talk prepares the way into the written mode. But it would be a mistake to think that writing something down is simply a matter of putting down graphically what you could have said phonically. The structures of written and spoken genres vary a great deal even if they might range around the same, or a similar, field. It is one thing to talk about text structure to a group of students and another to write about it for the same kind of audience. The case of the child in the classroom is no different. The child needs to be given the experience of both talking and writing over a large range of genres.

The relevance of structure to recall and comprehension is another important fact. A passage of writing has a better chance of being remembered if its structure is clear. In language studies — particularly where early reading and writing are concerned — often the pupil is exposed not to clear, well-structured texts, but to a jumble of nonsensical sentences, for example, 'Dan can fan', 'Man can fan', 'Dan can fan man' (Gerot 1982). Such items still appear in many early readers.

An understanding of text structure and the relevance of text structure to understanding and recall will be sufficient to deter any teacher from the use of such material, which instead of helping the child actively puts a hurdle in his or her way!