Some Textually Relevant Grammatical Choices

D. J. Allerton

Apart from short public notices like *Kindly refrain from smoking* and isolated exclamations like *Fire!* most ordinary uses of spoken and written language involve constructing a text of more than one sentence. The notion of "text" further implies that sentences are put together in an organized way. Some texts are planned at a macro-text level, such as when a book is divided into parts and/or chapters; but most spontaneous uses of language, such as natural conversation, informal letters and notes, or diary entries, are not planned at all at such a high level. All kinds of text agree, however, in being planned at the lower textual level of clause, sentence and sentence sequence. This planning involves the adaptation of the form of a sentence to make it appropriate to the context in which it occurs, thus indicating its relationships to neighbouring sentences. Since the relations between the clauses of a complex sentence are similar to those obtaining between sentences in sequence, any textual linguistic analysis must also take account of links between clauses. The various kinds of inter-clause and inter-sentence connection have been surveyed in a number of works, notably by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and by Van Dijk (1977). For each kind of connection a choice must be made from a list of grammatical options. After considering briefly what these selections are, we can go on to look at one of them in more detail and consider its stylistic relevance.

But what, first of all, is meant here by "choice" or "selection"? This manner of referring to linguistic behaviour derives from a commonly adopted view of language production, according to which the speaker selects his message by making a series of (psycho)linguistic decisions. Each decision constitutes a lexical or grammatical choice. In the case of the impromtu speaker it cannot be a matter of conscious choice, although somehow, apparently, a selection is made. The writer, on the other hand, may be more aware of making a selection, though even he

may be less than clear about the nature of the selections he makes; he is perhaps dimly aware of the availability of a number of conceptually equivalent modes of expression, each with its own textual or stylistic nuance. In either case, the choices, no matter how they are made, can be seen as determining the structure of both sentences in terms of clauses and of the wider text formed by sentences in combination.

In cataloguing textually relevant grammatical choices, we should not appear to be undervaluing lexical choices. As is made clear by Halliday and Hasan (1976: 274–92), textual cohesion is also achieved through lexical relations like repetition, synonymy and hyponymy (including the use of "general words", such as *thing, stuff*), as well as collocational links between words. But writers of all kinds have always been at least aware of lexical choice, even though they have not totally understood it. What they have been less conscious of is the grammatical selections we may outline as follows.

Firstly, let us consider the selection of a textually appropriate noun phrase for referring to a particular entity, i.e. a person, an animal, or a thing, concrete or abstract. The following phrases, for instance, are all different ways used by Conan Doyle to refer to Sherlock Holmes's arch-rival:[1]

> (ex-)Professor Moriarty, Moriarty, the Professor, the gentleman on whose front teeth I have barked my hands, his [= Col. James Moriarty's] brother, our friend, that man, the man, he/him

The proper noun phrase, for example, directly names an individual, and thus demands a familiarity with the bearer of the name in question; common noun phrases, on the other hand, identify an individual through description. The different degrees of richness a common noun phrase may display, correspond to different amounts of information required to identify the individual concerned, and this obviously depends on what is already established as "given"[2] by the preceding text. The use of a definite determiner or pronoun signals to the listener-reader that he should have enough information to unambiguously pick out the individual item. If, in the extreme case, the preceding text makes further description, and even the class of the entity the speaker has in mind,

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[1] These and all following examples are taken from 'The Final Problem' in: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950).

[2] The term derives from M. A. K. Halliday, cf. for instance Halliday (1970: 162–64). For a more detailed study see Allerton (1978).

quite obvious, then not even a head noun is necessary: a pronoun like *he/him* is appropriate.

A second grammatical selection which can be textually relevant is the tense-aspect form of the verb. For instance, in the following extract:

> On the Monday morning Holmes had telegraphed to the London police ... (p. 249)

we might ask why Conan Doyle has used *had telegraphed* rather than *telegraphed* (or *was telegraphing*). The answer, of course, lies in the context in which this event is being presented. The events of a narrative are most naturally presented in their "real" consecutive order, but the (past) perfect can be used in inserting a mention of an earlier event which has an effect which appears at this point in the narrative. The English progressive is also used (but in a different way) to indicate the timing of an event (and its completion) relative to other events mentioned in the text.

As a third grammatical choice with textual relevance we should mention the selection of an appropriate lexical verb with the right valency characteristics and in the right voice. If we examine the sentence:

> A minute later a carriage and engine could be seen flying along the open curve which leads to the station. (p. 248)

we may be struck by the verb complex *could be seen*, i. e. *see* used in the passive: Conan Doyle could have instead used a simple intransitive verb like *appeared;* alternatively, he could have transformed the whole sentence to use the active form *(we) could see (a carriage and engine)*. Such selections are made partly on the basis of which noun phrase fits most naturally into subject position, and this in turn is in part determined by the identity of the subject and other noun phrases in the passive sentence.

Fourthly, in our list of textually relevant grammatical choices we must refer to the various foregrounding and backgrounding devices, such as fronting, clefting, pseudo-clefting and subject-postponement, that can be used to give different shapes to what is basically the same sentence.[3] Consider, for instance, the cleft construction in:

> It was the sight of that alpenstock which turned me cold and sick. (p. 253)

In ordinary conversation this sentence could well have been used after a previous one by another speaker which had implied that something else

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[3] See the range of sentence structures in Quirk et al. (1972: chapter 14).

had turned "me" [= Watson] cold and sick; the above sentence would then have been used to deny some suggested other cause while accepting that something had turned 'me' cold and sick, and asserting that it actually was the sight of that alpenstock. The effect of using the cleft sentence in a narrative without such a preceding context is to emphasize the cause of Watson's coldness and sickness and take the symptoms as read, so to speak. Other devices, or the same device with a different item clefted, can be used to give different weightings to the various constituents of the sentence and thus signal their significance.

A fifth (and for present purposes, final) point of grammatical selection with textual significance, and the centre of interest in this paper, is the choice of ways of combining the different "eventualities" we talk (or write) about. By "eventuality" is meant an event, process or state of affairs such as is typically referred to by a finite verb and its associated subject, object, etc. (e. g. *The wind blew the door open. The roof was leaking. It was cold.*). We can assume that every simple sentence, with the probable exception of exclamations, refers to an "eventuality" in this sense. But although a simple sentence structure is the basic format for talking about an eventuality, it can be downgraded through coordination or various kinds of subordinative embedding to the status of clause or phrase as a constituent in a larger sentence.

The various complex structures that may arise through using or not using coordination or embedding to link two related eventualities can be summarized as follows:

(a) two separate sentences, optionally linked by a conjunction or sentence adverbial, e. g. *consequently; nevertheless,*
(b) two coordinated clauses, linked by a coordinating conjunction, e. g. *(and) so; but,*
(c) one matrix (or "main"[4]) clause and one subordinate clause, linked by a subordinating conjunction, e. g. *because; although,*
(d) one matrix clause and one non-finite clause (with an infinitive or gerund), linked by a preposition, e. g. *because of; despite,*
(e) one matrix clause and one nominalization, linked by a preposition, e. g. *because of; despite,*

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[4] The traditional term 'main clause' is not ideal, because it suggests the traditional grammatical view that a complex sentence can simply be segmented into 'main clause' and subordinate clause, the former being no more than the sentence remainder left when the subordinate clause has been removed. We should rather insist that the matrix clause includes the subordinate clause as one of its constituent parts.

For some semantic types of link, there is a further possiblity for combining two eventualities, viz.:

> (f) two nominalizations/non-finite clauses, linked by a verb, e. g. *cause; not prevent,* with one of them as the subject of this verb.

The linking words quoted as examples express two semantically different kinds of link, a causal one and an adversative one; other kinds of link include conditional and additive.

As an exemplification of the structurally different kinds of linkage we may consider the following different ways of linking the same two eventualities:

(1) (a) Holmes arrived late. Consequently they missed the train.
                      They nevertheless caught the train.
   (b) Holmes arrived late; and so they missed the train.
                   but they caught the train.
   (c) Because Holmes arrived late, they missed the train.
     Although   caught
   (d) Because of[5] Holmes arriving late they missed the train.
     Despite   caught
   (e) Because of[5] Holmes's late arrival they missed the train.
     Despite   caught
   (f) Holmes's late arrival caused them to miss the train.
                  did not prevent them (from) catching the train.

Despite their differences in outward form these sentences and sentence sequences are all broadly equivalent in their basic referential or cognitive meaning. On the other hand, their different grammatical structure must correspond to some semantic choice made by the speaker/writer and understood by the listener/reader.

Such semantic differences are extremely difficult to describe but they are summarized in Table 1:

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[5] Whereas in (1) (d) *because of* can be replaced by *with* (in colloquial English) in (1) (e) this is impossible; *owing to,* on the other hand, is much more natural in (1) (e) than (1) (d) (in formal English).

Table 1
Types of Eventuality Linkage

(a) Separate Sentence	(b) Coordinate Clause	(c) Subordinate Clause	(d) Non-finite Clause	(e) Nominal-ization
assertion of a claimed fact		mention of a possibility		mention of an assumed fact
major importance independent interpretation		reduced importance		background dependent for inter-pretation

Each sentence or downgraded sentence refers to an eventuality, but whereas in an independent sentence this eventuality is asserted as a (claimed) fact, in a subordinate clause it is only a potential fact or possibility, and in a nominalization (which is after all a kind of noun phrase) it is reified, i. e. seen as a thing and thus assumed as a fact.

There are other semantic strands to this structural difference. One of them seems to be the relative importance attached to one eventuality compared with the other. Matrix clauses, for instance, partly through the falling nucleus intonation pattern typically associated with them, usually carry information that is more important or has greater novelty value. Compare, for instance, the relative weight of the matrix clause and the subordinate clause in (1) (c) above, and consider the effect of switching the causal version round to:

(1) (c')The reason why they missed the train was that Holmes was late.

When an eventuality is further downgraded, to the rank of noun phrase (i. e. it is nominalized), its news value is reduced to that of background information like *Holmes's late arrival* in (1) (e) and (f).

A further semantic aspect to the kind of linkage is the closeness of the link between the two eventualities referred to. Obviously, separate sentences give the impression of being most independent of each other, but even coordinate clauses are at least semi-independent. It seems to require downgrading of one of the eventualities to a minor structural status (subordinate clause, non-finite clause or nominalization) for the closest link to be forged. This seems to suggest that take-overs of small entities by large ones result in more integration than do mergers of equals.

The kinds of meaning we have attributed to particular types of even-

tuality linkage clearly do not constitute direct referential meanings like those of lexical words such as *table* or *cat;* they are not even quite like basic grammatical meanings such as 'past (tense)' or 'agentive (subject)', which might be regarded as secondary meanings which modify and link lexical meanings to form sentential or propositional meanings. We should perhaps rather see our proposed textual meanings as tertiary, in the sense that they are semantic relations between sentence structures, which by definition already have a relatively complete meaning (made up of primary and secondary meanings).

Our inter-sentential meanings form just one kind of textual meaning, and this seems to correlate with one type of textual style. So far we have considered only the possibilities for combining references to two eventualities. If, however, we wish to combine three or more, we can either use one linking pattern repeatedly or, alternatively, use a number of different patterns alongside each other. The latter practice has been adopted by Conan Doyle in the following passage:

> It may be remembered that after my marriage, and my subsequent start in private practice, the very intimate relationship which had existed between Holmes and myself became to some extent modified. (pp. 235–6)

What would this passage have looked if the author had referred to the same eventualities, but had consistently used one of our types of textual linkage (a) to (e) above? He would have presumably produced something like (2) (a) to (e) below:[6]

> (a) You may remember the following points. Very intimate relations had existed between Holmes and myself. Then I had married. Subsequently I had started in private practice. Afterwards our relations became to some extent modified.
>
> (b) The reader may remember the following points: very intimate relations had existed between Holmes and myself, and then I had married and subsequently started in private practice; and so afterwards our relations became to some extent modified.
>
> (c) It may be remembered by the reader that after I had married, after which I started in private practice, the very intimate relations which had existed between Holmes and myself became somewhat modified.
>
> (d) It may be remembered that the very intimate relations previously existing between Holmes and myself becoming to some extent modified after my marrying and subsequently starting in private practice.
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> (e) The slight modification, after my marriage and subsequent start in private practice, in the previously very intimate relations between Holmes and myself may be remembered.

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[6] I have varied other points to fit the general style of each passage, notably the voice of the verb *remember.*

It goes without saying that a natural speaker or writer would rarely if ever use the same linking patterns over and over again in this way; and so the versions (2) (a)–(e) seem somewhat artificial. But the exaggerated consistency of such mini-texts can provide an insight into the semantic contribution and stylistic effect of each individual linking pattern. Broadly, a series of independent sentences gives an impression of clarity, of directness, of personalness, of liveliness, or even a racy quality. Sentences with subordinate clauses, on the whole, seem slightly more formal. And at the other end of the scale, sentences with nominalizations appear factual, but difficult, and even dull – typical, in fact, of a ponderous academic style. In a novel texts of type (a) are best suited to dialogue and dramatic narrative, whereas those of types (d) and (e) are more appropriate to description and contemplation. An unmitigated type (e) is probably too extreme for any literary use, but is commonplace in some academic writing, not least in the field of sociology.

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