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Ten Questions for Guiding a Discourse-Based Grammar Syllabus

■ Discourse-based research has provided grammar teachers with a great many new and interesting insights into the meaning and use of target structures, thus presenting new challenges regarding how to include this information in a grammar syllabus. Based on an analysis of discourse patterns and recurrent themes from research in the areas of discourse-based grammar instruction, corpus linguistics, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), this paper proposes guidelines in the form of 10 questions for helping teachers systematically incorporate discourse information into the teaching of all structures in a grammar syllabus. The paper demonstrates how to use the guidelines for providing concrete examples of how and where grammatical structures are used in discourse, and it concludes with a discussion of implications for teaching writing at advanced levels of grammar instruction, with suggestions for using the guidelines at beginner and intermediate levels as well.

Introduction

Coincident with various insights from discourse-based approaches to grammar instruction (e.g., Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; McCarthy, 1991), a great many discourse-based insights into the meaning and use of grammatical structures have also come from the corpus literature (e.g., Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999; Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002; Carter & McCarthy, 2006) and from research related to teaching academic writing and EAP (English for Academic Purposes) (e.g., Hinkel, 2004; Master, 1995, 2002, 2005; Swales & Feak, 2004). For the grammar teacher faced with so much new and interesting grammar information, this state of affairs begs two questions: How can these insights inform a community college or university ESL grammar syllabus? What precisely are the implications of discourse-level grammar for a grammar syllabus?

In this paper, I propose a framework for teaching discourse-based grammar, with the goal of offering a simple and practical way for exploring the contribution of grammar to discourse coherence (i.e., logical organization and

clarity) and to discourse cohesion (i.e., grammatical and lexical connections). Instead of merely adding a large collection of interesting grammar insights to already packed grammar syllabi, I will identify 10 questions that can serve as guidelines for systematically helping teachers incorporate discourse information into the teaching of all structures in a grammar syllabus. Then, using the guidelines, I will suggest possible discourse-based contributions to an advanced-level grammar syllabus, and I will conclude with suggestions for incorporating the guidelines at beginner and intermediate levels of grammar instruction as well. Most important, since one of the key tenets of a discourse-based approach is that "no single set of linguistic features will be appropriate for all students" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman,1999, p. 584), these suggestions are intended to provide teachers with a *tool* for teaching "grammar *from* context" (see Byrd, 1998a, 1998b), without prescribing any specific set of structures or order of presentation.

Research in the following four areas of grammar reveals systematic discourse patterns and recurrent themes that serve as the basis for the 10 questions presented in this paper.

Tense and Aspect

Discourse-based descriptions of tense and aspect have contributed significantly to our understanding of the contribution of tense and aspect to the coherence and cohesion of discourse, both by elucidating the use of particular verb forms individually and by providing insight into topics such as tense shifting, which have been notoriously difficult to explain at the sentence level (e.g., Biber et al., 1999, 2002; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Hinkel, 2002, 2004; Hopper, 1979; Hughes & McCarthy, 1998; Suh, 1992). This body of research has identified correlations between tense/aspect choice and (a) discourse parts (e.g., beginning, middle, end), (b) discourse types (e.g., news report, academic writing), and (c) information structure (e.g., foreground/background, given/new).

Reference

The use of referential expressions such as pronouns, definite and indefinite articles, and other determiners often involves reference in units of discourse larger than a single sentence. Therefore, even in more sentence-based grammars, discourse-based descriptions and pedagogy involving referential expressions are quite common. Nevertheless, larger databases and other progress in the field of discourse research have continued to identify *patterns* of reference and to yield new insights into determiner and pronoun usage in different parts of discourse and in different genres (e.g., Biber et al., 1999; Hinkel, 2004; Master, 1995, 2005; McCarthy, 1991, 1994). One particularly interesting line of research on the nature of cohesion involves the idea of "cohesive chains" and "lexical substitution," as first described by Halliday and Hasan (1976). This line of research suggests patterns of reference that tie together a number of different referential expressions that are both grammatical and lexical in nature (e.g., articles, personal pronouns, demonstrative and possessive adjectives and pronouns, synonyms, nominalizations, gerunds,

infinitives, and clauses), thereby helping to extend the notion of reference beyond personal pronouns and articles.

Subordinate Clauses (Full and Reduced)

Discourse research on the three main types of subordinate clauses—relative (or adjective) clauses, adverb clauses, and noun clauses—rests on an important generalization about their use: Subordinate clauses play a central role in distinguishing primary information (foreground) from secondary information (background) in discourse (Hinkel, 2004; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). Thus, discourse-based research has contributed significantly to our understanding of information structure, particularly the correlation of background/foreground information or given/new information with various types of relative clauses, adverb clauses, and noun clauses (e.g., Biber et al., 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Ford & Thompson, 1986; Fox & Thompson, 1990; Hinkel, 2004; Yule, 1998). Also important in this subordinate clause research is the correlation of various genres and their features (e.g., the features of precision, conciseness, objectivity, and coherence in academic writing) with different types of relative clauses, adverb clauses, and noun clauses.

Modals

While the use of the passive for establishing objectivity is commonly discussed in grammar teaching, discourse research also singles out other structures such as modals as significant contributors to establishing and maintaining objectivity and other features of academic tone such as modesty and credibility (Swales, 1990). Research in the area of "hedging," defined as "making a proposition less assertive" (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 279), offers insight into various uses of modals in academic writing, especially as a counterbalance for learners who tend to overgeneralize and exaggerate in their writing (Hinkel, 2004). This research also illustrates the pervasive use of certain modals in the presentation and development of arguments (Biber et al., 1999).

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Following Byrd (1998a, 1998b) and Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000), let us assume that a discourse-based grammar syllabus will include the following:

• Authentic reading and listening material;
• Grammar that is based on the needs of the students, as determined by the type of discourse that students need to understand and produce;
• Teaching grammar in "clusters" where appropriate, rather than systematically isolating one structure at a time;
• A great deal of recycling, spiraling, and integrated practice of different grammatical structures as they work together in discourse to convey meaning.

With regard to these features, Figure 1 lists 10 questions intended as guidelines for considering the discourse contributions of each grammatical

structure covered in a syllabus. These questions can be used for discovering and organizing patterns of use of grammatical structures in paragraphs and longer stretches of discourse. While generally intended for written discourse, in some instances the questions may also apply to longer stretches of spoken discourse (e.g., oral narratives, news reports, academic lectures).

Figure 1
Ten Questions for Guiding a Discourse-Based Grammar Syllabus

1. Is the structure used in introductions (e.g., at or near the beginning, in topic sentences, thesis statements, etc.)?
2. Is the structure used in conclusions (i.e., at or near the end)?
3. Is the structure used to provide background information (i.e., less important information that is not part of the main event or idea)?
4. Is the structure used to provide information in the foreground (i.e., important information that is part of the main event or idea)?
5. Is the structure used to introduce new information (i.e., information not shared or inferred by the reader/listener) or old information (i.e., information shared or inferred by the reader/listener)?
6. How is the structure referred back to once it is used? What other forms of reference are used *in addition to pronouns*?
7. Is the structure used to condense or summarize information?
8. Is the structure used to explain or dissect the elements of a problem or argument?
9. Is the structure used to set a certain tone (i.e., to sound more objective, more academic, more credible)?
10. Is the structure used to connect ideas or contexts or to transition from one idea or context to another?

Illustrative Examples

The purpose of this section is to illustrate each of the discourse uses described in the questions shown in Figure 1. This will be accomplished by discussing a sampling of relevant discourse-based research related to each question. Note that the citations used below to illustrate each discourse use come from a variety of sources; they are not limited to research data provided in the research articles or books themselves. There are three reasons for my choice of illustrative examples:

1. The examples provided in some of the research were truncated versions of original discourse, and in many cases, they proved inadequate for *seeing* their uses in the larger discourse. I therefore chose fuller illustrative examples from other sources instead.
2. I attempted to use a wide variety of discourse types in order to show the breadth of the discourse research, and at the same time, to illustrate the ease in finding examples in sources that teachers and students would be likely to encounter.

3. I frequently replaced British English examples with ones from North American English, once again to provide examples that students and teachers of North American English would be more likely to encounter.

Question 1: Is the structure used in introductions (e.g., at or near the beginning, in topic sentences, thesis statements, etc.)?

Introductory sentences and sections of discourse correlate highly with various tense/aspect choices. For example, to distinguish a number of forms that are often thought to be virtually synonymous at sentence level, Suh (1992) proposed the "frame-elaboration hypothesis," in which one tense, aspect, or modality form is used to introduce a narrative, while another form is used to explain or "elaborate" the narrative by providing details. Suh's work accounts for discourse uses of *used to* versus *would, be going to* versus *will,* and the present perfect versus the simple past. In particular, Suh found that *used to, be going to,* and the present perfect typically introduce or "frame" a narrative, while sentences that follow them with *would, will,* and the simple past, respectively, elaborate the narrative. Below is an example of the present perfect versus simple past pattern, which is very common in news reports (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 618).

(1) Poisonous black widow spiders *have invaded* Britain by plane. They *stowed away* in crates of ammunition flown from America to RAF Welford, Berks. A US airman at the base near Newbury *captured* one of the spiders in a jar after it *crawled out* of a crate.

Suh (1992) also noticed another conventionalized pattern related to the beginning of a discourse, namely the frequent use of the simple present for introducing a topic with a generalization (see also Yule, 1998). The generalization, in the form of a statement of fact, is usually followed by extended examples consisting of details, facts, or other explanatory sentences, often predominantly in the simple past or the simple present. This rhetorical pattern is widely discussed in the EAP literature (e.g., Hinkel, 2004; Swales, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2004). For example:

(2) In negotiating with foreign business people, small things *matter.* During seemingly endless negotiations with the Japanese Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI), Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M) Harry Helzer and a few of his colleagues *left* the table and *began* preparing tea. Later, their prospective partners, executives of the Sumitomo Trading Co., *asked* why Heltzer and his crew had behaved so uncharacteristically. Helzer, who *later* rose to be 3M's chief executive, *smiled* and *explained:* You guys know how to haggle with MITI; we just *wanted* to get out of your way. (Khosla, L., 2001, p. 36, in Porter & vanDommelen, 2005, p. 44)

Note that if the generalization connects the past with the present, the present perfect is often used instead.

Question 2: Is the structure used in conclusions (i.e., at or near the end)?

In addition to the well-known uses of transition expressions such as *in conclusion* or *finally*, discourse-based research has correlated other structures such as the present perfect and the past perfect with concluding sections of discourse. These are patterns that may not immediately come to mind when thinking about the meaning and use of the present perfect or past perfect.

First, Carter & McCarthy (2006) show that summarizing in the present perfect is especially frequent in concluding sections of discourse. For example, note the use of the present perfect in a chapter conclusion from a psychology textbook:

(3) Thus, there are many different kinds of learning. We *have touched* on a number of them in this chapter. We *have seen* that psychologists disagree about what learning is, what is learned, and whether organisms are basically active or passive as… (Rathus, 1997, p. 247)

Second, Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) describe how the past perfect is frequently used at the end of a passage to express a climax, resolution, or result:

(4) The students *sat* in the bleachers of Pauley Pavilion watching the faculty enter in their caps and gowns. Dignitaries *continued* to arrive while the band *played* a festive melody for the onlookers. To the cheers of the crowd, President Clinton *came in* and *took* his assigned seat on the podium… UCLA's 75th anniversary *had begun*. (*Daily Bruin*, May 25, 1994, cited in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 173)

Question 3: Is the structure used to provide background information (i.e., less important information that is not part of the main event or idea)?
Question 4: Is the structure used to provide information in the foreground (i.e., important information that is part of the main event or idea)?

Questions 3 and 4 will be treated together here to better describe how backgrounding and foregrounding information bear on tense/aspect choices as well as the use of relative clauses (and related participial phrases and appositives) in discourse.

First, comparing the past continuous and simple past as they are used together in a narrative reveals a "scene-setting" or "backgrounding" function of the past continuous in contrast to a "foregrounding" function of the simple past for describing key events (Bailey, 1989; Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Wennerstrom, 2003; Yule, 1998). This pattern is especially frequent at the beginning of oral narratives and in opening paragraphs of novels and short stories. Thus it overlaps with introductory functions described in Question 1 above. In the following opening to a short story, note how six past continuous sentences (relevant forms in italic) describe background information before the main event unrolls (the foreground) in the form of the simple past (underlined):

(5) Two boys *were sitting* on the harbor wall playing with dice. A man *was reading* a newspaper on the steps of the monument, resting in the shadow

of a hero who *was flourishing* his sword on high. A girl *was filling* her bucket in the fountain. A fruit-seller *was lying* behind his wares, gazing at the lake. Through the vacant window and door openings of a café one could see two men quite at the back drinking their wine. The proprietor *was sitting* at a table in front and *dozing*. A bark *was* silently *making* for the little harbor, as if borne by invisible means over the water. A man in a blue blouse <u>climbed</u> ashore and <u>drew</u> the rope through a ring. … (Kafka, 1946, in Howe & Howe [Eds.], 1982, p. 89)

Second, like the past continuous, the past perfect is used in past discourse for providing background information about an earlier time (Hughes & McCarthy, 1998). Sometimes, in fact, this use of the past perfect may take the form of a flashback (Lock, 1996). In (6) below, the past perfect background information (in italic) comes in the first two paragraphs of a short essay. Though this use of the past perfect may occur at other points in a discourse, it is an especially useful device at or near the beginning, where background information is often needed for explaining the context or for giving a reason or justification for the story. On the other hand, the simple past (underlined) is used in the foreground to push the discourse forward:

(6) With the wind biting my face and the rain soaking through my clothes, it didn't seem like July. I <u>watched</u> a puddle form at the foot of my sleeping bag as the 10-foot plastic sheet jerry-rigged above me <u>gave way</u> to the wind. I *hadn't eaten* for almost a day, and a rumble in my stomach <u>demanded</u> why I was in the Northern Cascades of Oregon—alone, soaked—in the first place. With two more days alone in the wilds ahead of me, I had plenty of time to think about that question.

    I*'d* always *been* impressed by people who *had been* in Outward Bound, basically because I*'d* always *lumped* myself in the I-could-never-do-that category. … (Philbin, 1997, p. 316)

Next, we turn to the use of different types of relative clauses that can be explained in terms of their role in providing background information. First, short and often reduced restrictive relative clauses are frequent in both conversation and writing for the purpose of quickly (i.e., economically) "grounding" or "anchoring" a noun to shared or inferrable information (Fox & Thompson, 1990; Prince, 1981). In (7) and (8), the reduced relative clauses provide just enough background information necessary for identifying *a guy* and *the framework*:

(7) <u>A guy</u> *I work with* says he knows your sister. (Prince, 1981)
(8) In <u>the framework</u> *developed* in this section, we are trying to compress a text. … (Kleinberg & Tardos, 2006, p. 176)

Examples such as (8) are very common in academic prose and especially in technical research articles (Biber et al., 1999; Master, 2002). Interestingly, Biber et al. (1999, p. 631) identify a small set of verbs (fewer than 25) that are

most frequent in such *-ed/-ing* constructions (e.g., *using, consisting, based, made.*) This type of frequency information is often cited by Hinkel (2004) as useful for simplifying the learning task for students. (See Implications and Applications below.)

Nonrestrictive relative clauses are another important device for adding background material to a discourse. According to Biber et al. (1999), they are most common in the news and in scientific writing. In the news, they add newsworthy background about proper nouns; in scientific writing, they provide information about terminology, especially technical terms. An example of the latter comes from the introductory sentence to a *Scientific American* article:

(9) Particle cosmology, *which investigates how the smallest units of matter have determined the shape and fate of the universe,* is one of the hottest topics in physics today. (Kaiser, 2007, p. 40)

Because academic prose and the news are both registers with "high informational density" (Biber et al., 1999, p. 639), appositive noun phrases are common alternatives to relative clauses for meeting the demands of precision, specificity, and economy. Like nonrestrictive relative clauses, they tend to provide background information about proper nouns and technical terms. For example:

(10) Earlier, we discussed the notion that most problems have a natural "search space"—*the set of all possible solutions*—and we noted that a unifying theme in algorithm design. … (Kleinberg & Tardos, 2006, p. 47)

Question 5: Is the structure used to introduce new information (i.e., information not shared or inferred by the reader/listener) or old information (i.e., information shared or inferred by the reader/listener)?

Like indefinite articles and *there* constructions, relative clauses also play a role in introducing new information. According to Yule (1998), relative clauses introducing new information central to the discourse tend to occur toward the end of a sentence, and they tend to be longer. These relative clauses are "presentational" in nature, often following *there is/are* (Fox & Thompson, 1990). Example (11), which is from a university science Web site, actually has two presentational relative clauses of this type:

(11) In addition to gelatin, there are a number of other natural and synthetic polymers *that can form gels.* For example, there are several vegetarian, edible hydrogels *that are made from agar, alginate, and carrageen.* … (http://www.ccmr.cornell.edu/ask, September 12, 2007)

Relative clauses introducing new information also tend to occur in the language of definition (Swales & Feak, 2004), as in the following political science textbook:

(12) An ideology is a system of principles and beliefs *that ties together a*

person's views on a wide range of particular issues. For example, if you are told that… (Fiorina, Peterson, Johnson, & Voss, 2005, p. 137)

Finally, the conditional is another structure used for introducing new information. Ford & Thompson (1986) point out the following common pattern: After a generalization, a conditional sentence, typically preceded by *For example,* illustrates the generalization. In example (13), continued from (12) above, the "generalization" is in the form of a definition:

> (13) An ideology is a system of principles and beliefs that ties together a person's views on a wide range of particular issues. *For example, if you are told that Representative Smith is a "liberal" Democrat, it is a safe bet that Smith is…* (Fiorina et al., 2005, p. 137)

With regard to structures introducing old information, these will not be discussed separately here since they overlap with structures discussed in Question 4 and Question 6—see example (8) and examples (14)-(16).

Question 6: How is the structure referred back to once it is used? What other forms of reference are used in addition to pronouns?

Lexical substitution, a term first used by Halliday and Hasan (1976), extends the notion of reference and cohesion beyond determiners and pronouns to other lexical nouns. According to Halliday and Hasan, nouns are often replaced with synonyms, near synonyms, or varying degrees of more general terms (e.g., *furniture* or *items* to replace *chairs and tables*). Such substitutions, along with pronouns, articles, and other determiners (especially *this, these,* and possessives) form "cohesive chains" (p. 15) that are crucial for meaningful and cohesive information flow. Consider, for example, the two different cohesive chains (one underlined, the other in italic) operating simultaneously in a textbook passage cited by Hinkel (2004, p. 281):

> (14) A baby boom took place in *the United States* between 1945 and 1965. This 75-million-person bulge will move upward through *the country's* age structure during the 80-year period between 1945 and 2025. …Today, these middle-aged people make up nearly half of all adult *Americans.* In sheer numbers, they dominate *the population's* demand for goods and services. Companies not providing products and services for this bulge in *the population* can go bankrupt. (Miller, 2000)

While lexical substitution may at first appear to be largely a vocabulary issue, it is, in fact, intricately tied to grammar. As Biber et al. (1999, p. 232) state, "Establishing reference requires both lexical and grammatical means." This lexical and grammatical nature of cohesion is often emphasized in discourse research (e.g., Carter & McCarthy, 2006; Cook, 1989; Hinkel, 2004; McCarthy, 1991; Swales & Feak, 2004) and easily found in cohesive chains, where general nouns refer back to events, activities, processes, and other types of situations expressed in earlier discourse by gerunds, infinitives, or noun

clauses. In other words, these cohesive chains often illustrate that referring expressions do not just refer back to simple nouns and pronouns; they may refer back to more complex nominal structures or to whole sentences as well:

> (15) The vehicle started *to sway/rock from side to side* while I was still going straight on the road at about 45 mph. I was approaching a turn but this behavior started even before… (http://www.consumeraffairs .com/automotive/land_rover.html, January 15, 2004)
>
> (16) Many of us believe *that learners have certain characteristics which lead to more or less successful language learning*. Such beliefs are usually based on… [Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 49)

The words *behavior* and *beliefs* are used above for summarizing and packaging a lot of information from previous clauses or phrases into a noun phrase. They illustrate an economical device for maintaining cohesive ties without wordy repetition, and they are especially common in academic writing and news, where, according to Biber et al. (1999), the dense overall use of nouns favors the use of lexical substitution and repetition over pronouns in order to avoid misunderstanding. Hinkel (2004), in fact, estimates that there are approximately 100 semantically general "catch-all" nouns such as *event*, *problem*, and *trend* that are commonly used for lexical substitution. According to Biber et al., these nouns occur frequently after the demonstrative determiners *this/these*. Swales and Feak (2004, p. 32) thus recommend the pattern "*this/these* + summary word" for maintaining flow and joining ideas together in academic writing. Note that we will return to the issue of lexical substitution in Question 7, since it appears to involve condensing and summarizing information as well.

Question 7: Is the structure used to condense or summarize information?

First, a common use of the present perfect in academic writing is for recapitulating or summarizing points and arguments that have been made up to a particular moment in the discourse. Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 273) call this use of the present perfect a "textual signal" or "signpost" that guides the reader backward and forward in a text. Example (17) shows how the present perfect sums up a particular point in order to transition to what will be done next:

> (17) So far, we *have spoken* rather glibly about assigning meanings to grammatical categories, and it is now time to look more seriously into the problems that arise in… (Comrie, 1985, p. 18)

Note that a related use of the present perfect for transitioning will be addressed in Question 10.

Second, Carter and McCarthy (2006), Hinkel (2004), and Yule (1998) describe the conventionalized use of the simple present for abstracts and summaries in academic articles, textbooks, and theses. Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 273) cite the following example:

> (18) This article *looks* at the effect of transoceanic migration on rural

Sicilian families. The author *focuses* on the conflicts, stresses, and transformations experienced by members of transnational families.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the use of "summary words" for cohesion discussed in Question 6 is based on the summarizing function of abstract nouns, nominalizations, and gerunds, structures that package information densely in academic English. These structures permit speakers and writers to refer to information (often previously stated) compactly in the form of a noun instead of as a sentence (Biber et al., 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 2006). Following is a typical example from academic writing:

(19) But before we get to this, we need to narrow the ground somewhat. *This narrowing* is necessary because there are many types of research publication that appear in journals, not all of which we have the space to deal with in this book. (Swales & Feak, 2004, p. 215)

Question 8: Is the structure used to explain or dissect the elements of a problem or argument?

Conditionals play an important role in developing argumentation, according to Biber et al. (1999). Since they describe the conditions under which facts are true, they help writers "explore options" (Ford & Thompson, 1986) in an argument. For example:

(20) *If we consider ourselves passengers on "Spaceship Earth,"* we will find ourselves on a pilotless journey with no discernable route to follow. *If we can convince ourselves that we are actually the crew of this spaceship, and that we must reach a specific socioeconomic destination,* then we will continue to approach that destination—*even if we make mistakes along the way.* (Yunus, 1999, p. 248)

Modals, too, help in the development of argumentation in academic style, For example, Biber et al. (1999) report the frequent use of *may*, *might*, and *could* for marking logical possibility. Thus the following example illustrates *could* and *might* as they are used for exploring possible problems in an article on reintroducing large wild animals to North America:

(21) We foresaw many challenges that would have to be addressed and overcome. These include the possibility that introduced animals *could* bring novel diseases with them or that they *might* be unusually susceptible to diseases already present in the ecosystem; the fact that habitats have changed over the millennia and that reintroduced animals *might* not fare well in these altered environments. … (Donlan, 2007, 55)

Question 9: Is the structure used to set a certain tone (i.e., to sound more objective, more academic, more credible)?

Biber et al. (1999, p. 825) report the frequent use of concessive clauses in academic prose for showing "the limitations of certain facts, events, or claims,"

and Hinkel (2004) further describes this use of concessives as a "hedging device" often found in introductions, thesis statements, and topic sentences. Thus as a tool for moderating generalizations and acknowledging other points of view, concessive clauses, like other hedges (e.g., modals, adverbs, quantifiers), play a role in establishing an appropriately objective academic tone (see Swales, 1990). The example below illustrates this use in a thesis statement from a textbook discussion:

(22) Although prescription and over-the-counter drugs have done much to alleviate suffering and increase the well-being of people around the globe, the major drug companies are also faulted for many of their practices. (Boatright, 1993, p. 411, in Holten & Marasco, 1998, p. 243)

As hedging devices, the modals *may, might, can,* and *could* are especially frequent in academic writing, since much of academic prose is characterized by possibilities, hypotheses, and tentative conclusions, instead of facts or absolute assertions (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). In fact, Carter and McCarthy discuss a common use of *may* and *can* in academic writing in which these modals are not only used to express likely occurrences, but they are also used to describe things that do typically occur. In other words, they are used as hedges, in the same way that *normally* or *generally* are often used.

(23) The anger experience *may* culminate in a wide variety of behavioural reactions, including aggression or withdrawal. (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 280)

Question 10: Is the structure used to connect ideas or contexts or to transition from one idea or context to another?

Beyond the use of explicit sentence connectors such as conjunctions (e.g., *and, but, or*) and transitional adverbs (e.g., *however, moreover*), the present perfect and *if* conditionals are two other structures with a transitioning function. For example, Larsen-Freeman (2003), Lock (1996), and Yule (1998) refer to the use of the present perfect as a transition, link, or "discourse bridge" between the past and present. In the following newspaper excerpt, Larsen-Freeman (2003, p. 73) shows how the present perfect links a past description to a current one:

(24) "Downtown <u>was</u> basically a ghost town," said Rich Bailey, director of the local chamber of commerce's news bureau. "That <u>was</u> a result of economic changes all across the country. Historically, Chattanooga <u>was</u> a manufacturing town, and…
   All that has changed now. The air <u>is</u> much cleaner, the warehouses <u>have</u> either <u>been</u>… (*The Brattleboro Reformer,* July 7, 1999)

Finally, discourse research substantiates the use of sentence-initial adverbial clauses as tools of cohesion and organization that help maintain information flow by repeating or referring to previously mentioned information (Biber et al., 1999, 2002; Hinkel, 2004). The research also offers interesting examples

beyond the more traditional ones of contrast with *while* and *although.* For example, Biber et al. (2002) show the use of conditional sentences for maintaining information flow in a conversational example from fiction. Note how the *if*-clause repeats information from the previous clause and presents it as given information:

> (25) It's not the rummy that aggravates my blood pressure. *If there were no cards,* there would still be the stock market, and *if there weren't the stock market,* there would be the condominium in Florida. (Biber et al., 2002, p. 379)

Implications and Applications

The questions raised in Figure 1 map grammar onto ideas that immediately come to mind when dealing with longer stretches of discourse: How do we begin? How do we continue, proceed, explain? How do we conclude? What is most important? What is less important? And so on. These are questions that many writing teachers address in teaching rhetorical structure but often without systematically making the explicit connection between grammar and features of discourse (see Hinkel, 2004).

The goal of these questions, therefore, is to help teachers make explicit the possible connections between grammar and discourse that may or may not be obvious. Key to this endeavor is the notion of discourse "templates" or "scripts" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), which are conventionalized patterns representing features of grammar correlated with features of discourse. These connections and patterns are not meant to be prescriptive rules but rather possible "choices" or "resources" that are available in discourse (Frodesen & Holten, 2003). Discourse patterns, therefore, suggest a number of direct applications for teaching grammar.

Let us begin by considering an advanced grammar course, in which grammar instruction is typically used as a bridge to academic writing. The guidelines above can be used for helping students apply their grammatical knowledge to writing. For example, advanced students probably know that the simple present is used to make general statements, but do they know that this use for generalizations means that the simple present is often used in topic sentences? Do they know that the present perfect is often used this way as well? And do they know that these topic sentences are often followed by details in the simple past? The point here is to take the abstract knowledge students have about meaning and use and to show them *how* and *where* they would use it in writing.

Direct application of this discourse pattern might include using authentic texts as models, with scaffolded practice in which students first discover or notice the pattern, and then practice writing missing topic sentences from authentic paragraphs. In addition, they may also write simple past details to elaborate various topic sentences. This short, focused practice leads to opportunities for students to develop their own paragraphs and short essays with reminders about using various grammar patterns to structure their discourse. In other words, as pointed out by Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999), the grammar pattern becomes a template for authentic practice.

Since discourse allows us to see a number of different grammatical structures interacting at once, the clustering of grammatical structures in discourse-based teaching is a natural consequence. For example, noticing the cohesive chains throughout a paragraph or longer discourse might involve working with personal pronouns, articles, demonstratives and possessives, and lexical substitutions. Scaffolded practice may consist of practicing short patterns such as *this* + summary word (Swales & Feak, 2004) to refer back to one or more sentences from authentic discourse. Other patterns might include the systematic shortening involved in multiple references to a long noun phrase (e.g., *the beautiful city of Vancouver→ the city→ it)*. More challenging practice might use cloze passages of various lengths or dictocomps for reconstructing both short and longer cohesive chains. Once students become familiar with these patterns, they can be reminded to use them in their own longer writing assignments via editing checklists, explicit instructions, and other types of reminders of how to make their writing cohesive.

Earlier, in the discussion of *-ed/-ing* phrases and in the discussion of summary words, these structures were correlated with sets of verbs that they most frequently occur with. Hinkel (2004) is a strong advocate of using this type of data, which are available in the corpus literature (e.g., Biber et al., 1999) and in the EAP literature (e.g., Swales & Feak, 2004). She recommends having students learn the most frequently used words, phrases, and patterns that correlate with various grammatical structures common in academic writing. For example, for the present perfect, Hinkel (2004, p. 176) suggests practicing "discourse driven sentence stems with the present perfect" such as *Recently, there has been growing interest in …/The development of xxx has led to the hope that...* (see also Swales & Feak, 2004, pp. 250-251).

My final example of implementation of these guidelines at the advanced level relates to the use of relative clauses for making writing more clear and concise. Advanced students may know how to use relative clauses for writing definitions (e.g., *A rose is a flower that has a sweet fragrance.*); they probably also know how to use a relative clause to identify a noun (e.g., *the man who is talking*). The next logical step, therefore, is to show them where and how these uses fit into essay writing: Relative clauses may be used early in a paragraph to introduce or define a noun, to remind readers about the identity of a specific noun, or as an economical way to add background information without starting a new sentence and without starting a new topic. Practice might include noticing different patterns in authentic discourse and then writing topic sentences with definitions, identifying information, or background information, followed by turning one topic sentence into a short paragraph. Longer writing assignments might include reminders about using relative clauses for various purposes and in various places.

The important point is that once students become conscious of these patterns, they are more likely to notice them and use them over and over again in their essays. As Hyland (2003, p. 123) states, "Learning to write involves acquiring an ability to exercise appropriate linguistic choices, both within and beyond the sentence, and teachers can assist this by providing students with an explicit grammar." What we are trying to do, then, is to expand our students' repertoires by making them aware of all of the possibilities at their disposal.

At intermediate and beginning levels, most of the same questions from Figure 1 can be addressed, but since they will be based on simpler authentic texts, the range of grammar and the complexity will be more limited. Consider Question 1 again, for example, but this time the pattern might involve the past continuous versus simple past (also related to Question 3), *used to* versus *would*, or *be going to* versus *will*, all in the context of short personal narratives. The same type of practice is possible at any level: using authentic passages for noticing the patterns, writing missing introductory sentences or missing elaboration, and so on. According to Byrd (1998a), many of the same grammar points can be covered, but what changes more profoundly is the complexity of the reading and writing that the students do.

What is particularly striking about discourse-based grammar teaching at beginner and intermediate levels is the opportunity for introducing a number of fundamental ideas gradually and building them up through time. Cohesion is a case in point. The idea that we use more than pronouns for reference can be learned even at the beginning level, where possessives, demonstratives, and lexical substitutions can all be shown to interact in texts.

Moreover, even basic structures such as adverbs of frequency can be considered in terms of their discourse use at a beginning level of grammar instruction. Specifically, their effect on sentence meaning can be used as an introduction to the notion of hedging, if we compare, for example, sentences such as *Students dislike large lecture courses.* versus *Students usually/generally/typically dislike large lecture courses.*

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to propose a tool for organizing the enormous amount of discourse information that is available to grammar teachers, and to suggest how this tool, in the form of "10 questions," can provide concrete examples of *how* and *where* grammar is used by speakers and writers to convey meaning. A few caveats are in order. First, it should be pointed out that these questions are not meant to be a definitive list. Indeed, there may be other questions that immediately come to mind, (e.g., *What genre does the structure correlate most frequently with*?). Second, there are undoubtedly other ways of combining or reorganizing these questions, especially in light of potential overlap among many of the topics, including, for example, introductions and backgrounding or conclusions and summarizing. Nevertheless, the questions are intended as a manageable tool for translating research into classroom practice, particularly since we have every reason to believe that discourse research and computer analyses will continue to yield new and useful insights into "the grammar of" introductions, conclusions, summaries, details…, in other words, into "the grammar of" discourse.

Author

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Appendix
Additional Sources for Examples

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