Analysing English Grammar

A practical step-by-step introduction to the analysis of English grammar, this book leaves the reader confident to tackle the challenges analysing grammar may pose. The first textbook to take an integrated approach to function and structure in grammatical analysis, it allows students to build experience, skill and confidence in working with grammar. The innovative, hybrid approach combines an introduction to systemic functional theory with a solid grounding in grammatical structure. The book approaches grammar in an incremental way, enabling students to develop grammatical skill in stages. It is of particular value to those starting to work with functional grammar but it is also relevant for experienced readers who are interested in developing a more systematic approach to grammatical analysis.

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Preface

In many ways this book is the sum of my life so far as a lecturer in functional grammar at Cardiff University. It has come from working closely with my students and trying to help them map the expressions of language functions onto grammatical structures and vice versa. Many students are apprehensive about the study of grammar but there is merit in working through it. One student described it once as climbing a mountain; very challenging but very satisfying when you finally get it. This is the real motivation behind this book. I wanted to offer something that would unlock some of the mysteries. I hope that this book will let people see grammar as a thing of interest and something that we shouldn’t be afraid of. I also hope that it will raise curiosity and lead readers to pursue an even more detailed understanding.

I am grateful to many people who have helped me write this book. My students have contributed indirectly. I would like to thank Cardiff students, past and present, who have taken Describing Language or Functions of Grammar with me. They have been incredibly supportive and encouraging. Although it seems like a lifetime ago, I was also a linguistics student once, at York University in Toronto, Canada. I am grateful to have had such inspiring and dedicated professors and I’d like to thank Ian Smith, Ruth King, Susan Ehrlich and Sheilah Embleton especially.

I owe thanks to Michael Halliday, the founder of systemic functional linguistics, for such inspirational writings and for the depth of thinking that shows through his work. I would also like to thank Robin Fawcett in particular for welcoming me to Cardiff and being so generous with his time and his work. I am grateful to all my colleagues in the Centre for Language and Communication Research at Cardiff University for their support and encouragement. I have also been greatly influenced by Geoff Thompson as well as Meriel Bloor and Tom Bloor, who have written very successful introductory textbooks to systemic functional linguistics. Both of these books were life-saving to me when I was new to this theory and I still refer to them regularly. I hope that this book will merit sitting on a shelf alongside theirs.

Work of this nature requires more than intellectual inspiration and moral support. I have been very lucky to have a supportive family who allowed me the time to write and complete this book. I am especially indebted to my mother, Gael Fontaine, for her many hours of proofreading. I would also like to thank Clyde Ancarno for her constant support and comments on draft versions. Two former students deserve special thanks for commenting on drafts: Michael Willett and David Schönthal.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments, which have led to a greatly improved final version of this book.