Introductory unit

1 Some of these issues have been dealt with in the Introduction, but, very briefly, the main arguments could be summarised thus:

a) Knowing about grammar – knowing *what* a verb is, *what* the past tense is – is of limited use unless you know *how* to put this knowledge to work. Moreover, grammar is just one area of what is called 'linguistic competence', other areas being, for example, knowledge of vocabulary and of phonology (and there is a lot of overlap in these areas). Linguistic competence, in turn, is just one of a number of competences that contribute to overall communicative competence, others being discourse competence (knowledge of how texts are put together) and sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of what is appropriate in different contexts). In short, there is a lot more to learning to speak a language proficiently than learning the rules of grammar (and there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to support this).

Nevertheless, the grammar of a language is highly generative: it is the basis from which it is possible to construct an infinite number of sentences. There are plenty of documented case histories of learners with 'no grammar', who rely mainly on vocabulary, and who have 'fossilised' at a very primitive stage of communicative competence. Grammatical knowledge (whether explicitly taught or picked up unconsciously) is probably therefore a necessary – though not sufficient – condition for language acquisition.

b) Regardless of the approach a teacher decides to adopt towards the teaching of grammar – such as whether to make it overt through explicit reference to rules, or to make it covert, for example by setting learners tasks at successive levels of difficulty – some understanding of linguistic systems is useful in terms of informing choices about the rules to be taught and the tasks to be set. Moreover, when it comes to making decisions about a learner's performance, in terms of providing useful feedback on errors, or measuring progress through tests, knowledge of the language systems is essential. It follows that the deeper the understanding on the part of the teacher, the greater the likelihood of making the wisest choices. It does not follow, however, that an exhaustive knowledge of grammar is *all* that is required in order to teach language effectively.

c) Deductive learning – studying rules and then applying them to examples – is contrasted with inductive learning – studying examples and (either consciously or unconsciously) working out the rules. Both approaches have been shown to work in language learning. Some methods, such as grammar-translation, favour a deductive approach; others, like audiolingualism, are wholly inductive. Different types of students also favour one approach over another: research suggests that some students are cognitively predisposed to 'rule-learning', while others are 'data-gatherers'. The level and the age of the student and the complexity of the rule will determine to a large extent which approach is the more

appropriate: beginners are perhaps not ready to tackle the rules of article use, for example, and children under the age of ten are unlikely to grasp concepts such as 'indefinite past time'. It would seem, therefore, that a methodology that was either exclusively inductive or exclusively deductive might fail with at least some learners some of the time.

d) For reasons pointed out above, there are some students who are either not ready for, or not disposed to, heavy doses of grammatical terminology. Nevertheless, terminology can have its uses in terms of facilitating classroom communication: if a student knows what a verb is, it may be easier and less time-consuming to correct a tense error by saying 'wrong tense' than by any other means. Furthermore, some basic terminology will be an aid to those students who are resourceful enough to continue their learning in their own time, through the use of grammars and dictionaries, for example.

e) Having once decided to give explicit rules, the teacher is then faced with the dilemma as to which rules to give. Some rules – perhaps the vast majority – are in fact very complex and difficult to articulate. Even grammarians do not always agree as to the correct formulation of a rule (and the language is in a state of continual change, anyway). It is important to remember that the value of rules for learners is that they provide the means to generate original utterances, and that if they are so exhaustive as to be unwieldy, they are no longer functional. A good 'rule of thumb' (even if somewhat simplistic) is probably of more use than a rule that is comprehensive, but dense.

f) Since language is used in context, it follows that it should be learned in context: this, at least, is the thrust of an argument that has gained favour with the advent of discourse analysis and pragmatics. How, for example, can you explain (or learn) the meaning of a word like 'actually' without seeing examples of it in context – and, preferably, in an authentic context, not one that has been contrived by the writer of a coursebook? There will be times, however – just as in the study of anatomy, for example – when it may help the learner to understand how language works (and to notice naturally occurring examples) when it undergoes some kind of 'dissection' and analysis.

g) English is not a highly inflected language. In other words, it does not have a complex system of verb or noun endings, unlike, for example, Turkish or German. Nor are English nouns marked for gender; nor does English have the equivalent of *tu* and *vous* forms, i.e. familiar and polite pronoun forms. All this suggests that there is not much grammar in English, and, therefore, not much difficulty – but of course this assumes that grammar is (a) largely a matter of endings and (b) difficult. There is of course more to grammar than endings, especially if syntax is taken into account: a quick glance at *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk *et al.* 1985) suggests that there is a lot more to grammar than morphology, i.e. endings. In short, there is no satisfactory way of comparing the grammatical complexity of different languages, although artificial languages have been designed with a view to eliminating unnecessary complexity. The fact is, children take more or

139

Key and commentaries

   less the same time to learn their mother tongue, whatever it is, which suggests that – to children at least – all languages are equal.

h) The point has just been made that there is more to grammar than verbs, but a glance at most coursebook contents would suggest otherwise. The importance that materials writers and programme designers place on the verb system may not be entirely unjustified, however. Every sentence, after all, must contain at least one verb. Verbs unpack a great deal of information: they tell us about states, events, processes, and habits; they can tell us very generally when these things occurred, and if they were completed. They are also marked for person (*I go*, *he goes*) and number (*I am*, *we are*). However, to teach only the verb phrase would be to deprive learners of other crucial areas of grammar, not least the noun phrase. The complaint 'I've taught them all the tenses: there's nothing left to teach' is a sad reflection of this 'verb's eye view' of grammar.

2 Text type

These questions focus on the features that identify this text as belonging to a distinctive genre.

a) This text is from a newspaper: the headline is typical of newspaper news stories, especially those in the 'tabloids' or popular newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror*.

b) The purpose of the text is to inform, but in such a way as to engage the attention of the reader, however uninterested initially.

c) Among the features that are typical of tabloid newspaper reporting are: one sentence paragraphs; long, information-packed, noun phrases (*a plan…Evita*, *Angry…Rice*, *Walt…picture*); use of direct speech; special newspaper expressions: *dumped*, *clashed*, *vetoed*; simple linking devices: *And…*, *but…*, *now…*; idiomatic and colloquial language, especially when quoting; a non-chronological sequence (see below).

Text organisation

The way the information in a text is organised by the writer is an important factor not only in maintaining the reader's interest, but in helping the reader to make sense of it. As readers, we assume that the organisation of the text is not arbitrary, but that it serves to convey the writer's intention – that it makes the writer's intention coherent. (Coherence is dealt with in Unit 26.)

The chronological order is (**b**), (**e**), (**c**), (**a**), (**f**), (**d**). The actual order has probably been chosen in order to present the most newsworthy information first (although not necessarily the most recent), with background information added later. Note that the implication of the last paragraph, i.e. that Oliver Stone played some part in rejecting Madonna, is not mentioned anywhere else, and its connection with the rest of the text is tenuous.

Cohesion

There are a number of linguistic devices that affect the extent to which a collection of sentences holds together as a complete and cohesive text. (Cohesion will be covered in Unit 26.)

a) The references are as follows: *his* / Webber's; *they* / Disney; *their* / Madonna's and Webber's. Reference is deducible from the overall sense of the text, in conjunction with grammatical markers such as number and gender.

b) The references are all to the same person. Different ways are chosen for variety; also to supply additional information (*Composer*); and – in the case of *Andrew* in line 24 – to mark familiarity.

c) (1) Words connected with cinema: *star* (x2); *film version*; *play*; *part* (x2); *makers*; *picture*; *director*.
   (2) Words connected with music: *pop queen*; *composer*; *co-wrote*; *stage blockbuster*; *rewrite*; *songs* (x2); *award-winning score*; *music*; *writing*.
   (3) Words connected with argument: *vetoed*; *angry*; *vowed*; *demanded*; *insisting*; *sort out*; *differences*; *clashed*; *pain in the butt*.
   Note that these words, along with the proper names, comprise over a third of the text, and supply an important element of cohesion.

d) The references are: *now*: around the time of writing the article; *this* (week): the week in which the article was published; *last* (year): the year before that in which the article was written; *then*: at that time, i.e. last year, when she was offered the part. These are all examples of 'deixis', which is the way speakers or writers anchor their discourse to the context in which they are speaking or writing.

e) Pronouns and possessive adjectives are used to refer back to people already mentioned: this helps bind the text together; so does repetition of names; and so do lexical 'chains' or 'sets'; expressions that 'point' to the time and place (*here*, *now*) anchor the text in the 'real world'.

Vocabulary

a) Words are formed in four main ways: by adding suffixes such as *re-* to the stem *write*, or *-(e)r* to the stem *compose*; by putting words together to make compounds, as in *award + winning*; by clipping or shortening existing words, as in *pop* from *popular*; and by converting words from one part of speech to another – thus the verb *to star* is derived from the noun *a star*.

b) Both *dumped* and *clashed* have violent connotations; they are also commonly used journalistic expressions, e.g. in headlines.

c) This is US slang.

Key and commentaries

Grammar

a) a: determiner (specifically, an article)
plan: noun
vetoed: verb (the past participle of the verb, in this case)
by: preposition
angry: adjective
who: pronoun (a relative pronoun, in this case)
after: conjunction
now: adverb

Note that these are the eight categories into which words are traditionally classified.

b) a noun phrase: a film version of Evita
a verb phrase: has been vetoed
an adverb phrase: then
an adjective phrase: interested in working with Andrew
a prepositional phrase: in the end

These represent the five ways in which words are grouped together to form elements in sentences. Note that phrases can consist of a single word or a number of words.

c) *Webber* is the subject of the headline; *blocks* is the verb; *'Evita' Madonna* is the object.

Most sentences have a subject and a verb. Other possible elements include objects, complements and adverbials (see Unit 12)

d) The analysis of the sentence is as follows: *Walt Disney, makers of the £30 million picture* is the subject; *are insisting* is the verb; *that she must star* is the object.

Note that *Now* is an adverbial, and that *that she must star* is a clause which, in turn, has a subject (*she*) and a verb (*must star*).

e) infinitive: *to star*; *to rewrite*; *to sort out*
present participle: *insisting*
past participle: *vetoed*; *called*; *offered*; *dumped*; *interested*
auxiliary verb: *has*; *been*; *should*; *are*; *must*; *have*; *was*
modal auxiliary: *should*; *must*

f) present tenses: *has been vetoed*; *are insisting*; *must star*; *have called*; *needs*
past tenses: *co-wrote*; *vowed*; *should play*; *demanded*; *was offered*; *was dumped*; *clashed*; *said*; *told*; *was interested*; *thought*; *was going to be*
perfect aspect: *has been vetoed*; *have called*
progressive aspect: *are insisting*; *was going to be*

142

g) transitive verbs: *star* (line 1); *veto*; *co-wrote*; *vow*; *play*; *demand*; *rewrite*; *insist*; *call*; *sort out*; *offer*; *dump*; *update*; *tell*; *interest*; *write*; *think*
    intransitive verbs: *star* (line 11); *clash*; *work*
    phrasal verb: *sort out* (*call for* is better classed as a prepositional verb: see Unit 25)

Discussion

Opinion differs widely over this issue. However, it is a basic assumption of this book that some familiarity with the metalanguage enables teachers to talk to each other, to make sense of much of the literature on language teaching, and – should they choose to – to talk to their students about the language that is the object of study. Of course, simply to talk *about* the language does not constitute *learning* the language, and the use of grammatical terminology should always be considered a means and not an end in itself.