FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR AND ITS APPLICATION IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

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INTRODUCTION

Although language and writing are intimately connected, the field of study most directly concerned with language study—linguistics—has had little influence on composition pedagogy.[1] While transformational sentence combining was quite popular at one time, its influence has declined considerably over the years. That linguistics has had so little effect on composition study should not surprise us: most established linguistic theories (transformational grammar, for instance) have been concerned with topics of little use to either the writing teacher or the writing student. Neither teachers of writing nor the students that they teach would profit much from knowing, for instance, how many X-bars a given phrase contains.

More recently, however, many linguists have shifted their attention from the study of linguistic competence to the study of linguistic performance. Instead of describing and formalizing the abstract system underlying language, they have become concerned with investigating how language is actually used. And since learning to write is basically learning to use language in a specific way, theories of language use ought to prove of direct value to composition theory; they are, as Leech observes, "rhetorical" in nature and interested in investigating the manner "in which s [the speaker

or writer] uses language in order to produce a particular effect in the mind of *h* [the hearer or reader] (15)." In particular, as I will demonstrate in this paper, one theory of language use—functional grammar—provides insights into language that can be directly applied in any writing class.

FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

Most theories of language postulated during this century have been non-functional in nature, that is, concerned only with the form of linguistic utterances and not with their use. Transformational grammar, for instance, has from its inception been based on rules of "grammatical competence": rules reflecting the unconscious knowledge of syntax, semantics, and phonology that any speaker of a language possesses (Radford 3). A speaker of English knows that an utterance such as *Could you please tell me where Fifth St. is?* is well-formed because he or she has an unconscious knowledge of how to form a Yes/No-Question in English. Functional theories of language use, in contrast, are concerned not just with the form of grammatical utterances but with their function as well. That is, a functional grammarian would be interested not only in how a Yes/No-Question such as the above is formed but in the fact that such a question in the appropriate context functions as a polite way of requesting information.

Although a number of functionally-based theories of language exist, Leech's theory is one of the few that explicitly formalizes the relationship between the form and function of utterances.[2] Leech's theory contains two components: a grammatical component and a pragmatic component. Within the grammatical component are rules of semantics, syntax, and phonology; within the pragmatic component are principles of the interpersonal rhetoric and principles of the textual rhetoric.[3]

As an illustration of these components and how they interact, consider how they would account for the short text below:

Man to close friend: I am *extremely* upset because my son is in the hospital. Yesterday he was mugged by a gang of ruthless, vicious thugs.

To both produce and interpret this text, the speaker and hearer must draw upon their unconscious knowledge of a variety of rules of English grammar. They must know, for instance, the rule of

phonology (voicing assimilation) that accounts for why the last sound in *mugged* is pronounced as [d] rather than [t] or [ed]; the rule of morphology (plural formation) that produces the form *thugs*; the rule of syntax (passive formation) depicting the form of the second sentence; and so forth.

A knowledge of only rules, however, is not sufficient to guarantee that one will be able to communicate successfully. One must also have a knowledge of the appropriate social and linguistic contexts in which to use the many forms that rules will produce. To account for this dimension of language, Leech posits a series of principles. Principles of the interpersonal rhetoric reflect the fact that language is not simply an expression of meaning but also "an expression of one's attitudes and an influence upon the attitudes and behaviour of the hearer" (Leech 56). In the above example, the speaker chooses to violate one part of Leech's Approbation Maxim ("MINIMIZE DISPRAISE OF OTHER") when he describes those who put his son in the hospital as *ruthless, vicious thugs* rather than as, say, *dangerous criminals*. He violates this maxim because he knows that this is the appropriate choice to make in the particular social situation he is in—a conversation about an emotional topic with a close friend. Principles of the textual rhetoric reflect the fact that linguistic interaction involves not just single, unrelated sentences but groups of related sentences comprising a text. In the example above, the principle of End-Focus (Leech 22) stipulates that a passive construction is appropriate in the second sentence because this construction enables old information (*he*) to be placed at the start of the sentence and new information (*A gang of thugs*) at the end.

All competent speakers of English would have little difficulty producing an utterance such as the above, since they have unconsciously internalized the rules and principles necessary for producing such an utterance. In other words, they possess what Hymes terms "communicative competence." Composition students, however, are in a slightly different position. To communicate successfully in the written medium, they must expand their communicative competences to deal with the new demands placed on them when writing. And one of the most notable differences between written and spoken language is that *different forms in each are used to satisfy similar functions*. Speech, for instance, is segmented by stress, pitch, and intonation; writing, by punc-

tuation. Persuasive spoken discourse has a much different form than written persuasive discourse. Spoken discourse consists of hesitations, stammers, and incomplete utterances; written discourse, of utterances that are carefully edited. In short, while composition students can quite easily (and unconsciously) match forms and functions in their everyday use of language, they have difficulty doing so in the written texts that they produce. The goal, therefore, of any pedagogical application of functional grammar is the development of a pedagogical strategy that helps composition students learn both the functions of language in written discourse and the forms that will enable them to fulfill these functions. Although functional grammar has many potential applications in the composition class, I will focus in the remainder of this paper on presenting a functional view of punctuation. Specifically, I will discuss punctuation within the framework of Leech's functional theory of language and then outline how this view of punctuation can be taught to composition students.

A FUNCTIONAL THEORY OF PUNCTUATION

Most handbooks contain lengthy sections on punctuation in which the marks of punctuation are discussed individually in terms of the syntactic constructions that they optionally or obligatorily set off. For instance, most handbooks have a section on the comma containing rules for punctuating compound sentences, non-restrictive modifiers, adjectives in a series, introductory adverbial clauses, and so forth. Because handbooks present punctuation as little more than a taxonomy of unrelated marks and rules, they obscure the systematic nature of punctuation. More specifically, they ignore the functions of punctuation and the rules and principles derivable from these functions.

Punctuation has primarily a communicative function: its main purpose is to insure that the written text is easily understood by the reader. This function is realized by the marks of punctuation separating and enclosing syntactic, semantic, and prosodic boundaries. For instance, the period following *people* in the passage below helps readers comprehend this short text by separating a syntactic boundary, the boundary between two declarative sentences; a semantic boundary, the end of a statement; and a prosodic boundary, a relatively long pause.

China is inhabited by nearly a billion people. It is the most
heavily populated country in the world.

As the above example illustrates, punctuation involves the com-
plex interaction of syntax, semantics, prosody. As an illustration
of just how complex this interaction can be, consider the punc-
tuation of adverbials occurring initially in a sentence. Quirk et al.
isolate three classes of adverbials: adjuncts, disjuncts, and con-
juncts.[4] Adjuncts include time and place adverbials such as *today*
and *on the table*; disjuncts include adverbials such as *probably*
and *unfortunately* which express the viewpoint of the speaker or
writer; and conjuncts include transitional expressions such as
therefore and *as a result*.

When all three classes of adverbials are clauses, syntax is solely
responsible for their punctuation: adverbial clauses are syntactically
complex and are therefore almost always punctuated in initial
positions:

Because enrollments were down, the school had to lay off
teachers.

However, when adverbials are syntactically less complex, seman-
tic and prosodic considerations determine whether they are punc-
tuated or not. Adjuncts tend not to be punctuated because they
are semantically integrated into the clauses in which they occur:

Yesterday most students were let out of classes early.

Conjuncts, on the other hand, tend always to be punctuated
because they are sentence adverbials and hence less semantically
integrated into the clauses in which they occur:

Therefore, a new law was passed.

Occasionally, however, a few conjuncts, such as *thus*, are not
punctuated because in speech they are sometimes not followed
by pauses:

Thus a new law was passed.

To account for the linguistic functions of punctuation, we can
adapt Leech's theory of language and postulate rules and prin-
ciples of punctuation. Rules of punctuation stipulate precisely which
boundaries can be punctuated and what marks they can be punc-
tuated with; principles of punctuation stipulate which choices of

punctuation are most appropriate in a given context. To account for the punctuation of introductory adverbials, we will need one rule of punctuation and three principles of the textual rhetoric— principles governing how we use punctuation to construct written texts:[5]

> Rule for introductory adverbials: Punctuate an introductory adverbial with either a comma or no mark of punctuation.
> Syntactic Principle: The more syntactically complex a construction, the heavier its punctuation should be.
> Semantic Principle: The more distantly related two constructions are, the greater the need to separate them with a heavy mark of punctuation.
> Prosodic Principle: The more prosodically integrated two constructions are, the less need to punctuate them.

The rule for punctuating introductory adverbials states simply that they can be either unpunctuated or punctuated with a comma. The principles specify which choice is most appropriate in a given situation. The syntactic principle, for instance, accounts for why it is very necessary to punctuate an introductory clause but less necessary to punctuate an adverb.

Although the rule and principles postulated above appear more complicated than handbook discussions of punctuation, they are ultimately more explanatory because they apply not just to introductory adverbials but to a wide variety of constructions. The syntactic and semantic principles, for instance, dictate in the example below the choice of a heavy mark of punctuation such as a period: the period reinforces the fact that the clauses of the compound sentence are relatively lengthy and complex and are joined by a conjunction—*but*—that signals that the clauses are distantly related to one another:

> College can be an extremely rewarding experience for students, especially if they take it seriously. But if they treat college simply as an excuse to have a good time, they will graduate with little more than a degree.

The advantage of describing punctuation in terms of rules and principles is that this view of punctuation provides instructors with a pedagogy for teaching punctuation that stresses the systematic nature of punctuation, an important characteristic of punctuation

that traditional approaches to the teaching of punctuation have largely ignored.

PAST APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF PUNCTUATION

Traditionally, handbooks have taken a very grammar-oriented approach to teaching punctuation, an approach that is based on the belief that to punctuate appropriately, a student must have knowledge of a number of syntactic constructions and the marks that can be used to punctuate them. Although the value of teaching grammar in the composition class remains controversial, the consensus among many composition theorists is that instruction in formal grammar is of little value. As Hartwell (119-20) remarks, rules based heavily on a knowledge of formal grammar are

> COIK: 'clear only if known . . .' If you know how to signal possession in the code of print, then the advice to add -'s to nouns makes perfect sense, just as the collective noun *monies* is a fine example of changing -*y* to -*i* and adding -*es* to form the plural. But if you have not grasped, tacitly, the abstract representation of possession in print, such incantations can only be opaque.

The key point that Hartwell makes is that traditional instruction in grammar has failed because it does not promote conceptualization: to simply present a composition student with a rule of punctuation followed by a series of fill-in-the-blank exercises is not enough to ensure that this student will apply the rule the next time he or she writes an essay.

To move away from the handbook tendency to treat punctuation as a system of isolated and unrelated rules, Shaughnessy posits a detailed sequence of structures and corresponding marks that students should be taught so that they can understand "what is going on in sentences so that rules of punctuation can be consistently applied" (41). Shaughnessy's sequence begins with the sentence and ends with quoting. Although Shaughnessy's sequence takes students through all of the major structures that punctuation sets off, it is problematic for a number of reasons. Like handbook treatments of punctuation, it is syntactically oriented, and for this reason ignores semantic, prosodic, and pragmatic influences on punctuation. In addition, it focuses too heavily on metalinguistic

terminology ("*wh*-words," "relative clauses," "appositions," etc.),
terminology that will only baffle the composition student. While
Shaughnessy's notion of sequence is valuable and important,
students need to be taught a sequence of rules and principles of
punctuation that views punctuation as more than simply a syntactic
phenomenon and that does not require students to memorize an
extensive list of metalinguistic terminology. In the remainder of
this essay, I would like to sketch what such a pedagogy might
look like.

INFORMALLY INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO THE RULES OF PUNCTUATION

Because there are so many different rules of punctuation,
it makes little sense in a composition class to overwhelm students
with the vast potential of our system of punctuation.[6] However,
instructors can give an overview of this potential by informally in-
troducing their students to the "Punctuation Hierarchy" (Meyer,
Punctuation 18), a hierarchy that without making specific reference
to rules of punctuation gives students an idea of the types of con-
structions that rules of punctuation allow writers to set off. The
punctuation hierarchy is illustrated in Figure 1. Its purpose is to
demonstrate that the marks of punctuation vary in terms of the
constructions they can set off: certain marks, such as the period,
set off relatively large structures (entire sentences, for instance);
other marks, such as the comma, set off much smaller structures
(words and phrases, for instance).

Figure 1
The Punctuation Hierarchy

Mark	*Grammatical Unit It Sets Off*
Level 1	
Period	Sentence
Question Mark	Sentence
Exclamation Mark	Sentence
Level 2	
Colon	Sentence, Clause, Phrase
Parentheses	Sentence, Clause, Phrase
Dash	Sentence, Clause, Phrase

Level 3
Semicolon   Clause; Clause, Phrase in
                                   Series

Level 4
Comma   Clause, Phrase

To both explain and illustrate the hierarchy, I give students two kinds of exercises. The first exercise has students informally explore the kinds of constructions that the marks of punctuation set off. They are asked, for instance, to provide examples of sentences containing commas, and to briefly and non-technically explain the constructions the commas are setting off. A similar strategy is employed for the other marks. After completing this exercise, I give students a series of sentences (or a short paragraph) containing all of the marks of punctuation and ask them to identify the kinds of structures the marks set off.

When doing exercises of this type, students will typically have difficulty precisely articulating the kinds of structures that the marks of punctuation set off. But these kinds of difficulties are to be expected, even desirable, since the goal of presenting the punctuation hierarchy to students is not to make them experts at identifying grammatical structures but to enable them to informally explore the capabilities of the English system of punctuation.

After informally introducing students to the range of constructions that punctuation can set off, I begin focusing on specific rules of punctuation and on relevant principles of punctuation that govern their application. Since space constraints restrict me from presenting all of the rules and principles of punctuation, I focus on those necessary for teaching the punctuation of three important types of constructions: sentences, adverbials, and coordinated constructions.

PUNCTUATING THE SENTENCE

As students explore the punctuation hierarchy, they will discover that there are three marks that can be used to punctuate sentences: the period, the question mark, and the exclamation mark. Since two of these marks (the question mark and exclamation mark) occur relatively rarely in writing (Meyer, *Punctuation* 7), discussion of how to punctuate sentences should focus primarily on the period.[7]

For students to understand the use of the period, they must first understand how to identify sentences. Handbooks typically teach students about the structure of sentences by introducing them to such notions as subject, predicate, finite verb, subordinate clause, and so forth (Meyer "Improving Instruction in Grammar" 24). Not only are these terms confusing to students but they take up valuable class time to discuss. A much more effective way to teach students about grammatical structure is to teach them operational tests, tests which enable students to use their intuitions about English to help them identify grammatical structures. To help students identify sentences, I teach them Beaugrande's (123) yes/no question test (paraphrased below). This test has students transform sequences into yes/no questions to determine whether the sequence is a sentence.

Operational Test (1): A sequence of words is a sentence if it can be turned into a yes/no question.

According to this operational test, the sequences in (1a) and (2a) are sentences because they can be transformed into yes/no questions (1b and 2b):

1a. President Bush recently returned from Japan.
 b. Did President Bush recently return from Japan?
2a. Following his return, he was confronted with a massive budget deficit.
 b. Following his return, was he confronted with a massive budget deficit?

The obvious advantage of this (and other) operational tests is that they require no formal instruction in grammar to apply: to form yes/no questions, students need only rely upon their intuitions about the English language, intuitions that they possess because they are native speakers of the language.

To give students practice forming yes/no questions and identifying sentences, I have them analyze the sentences in the first paragraph or two of a draft of an essay that they are currently writing. When analyzing the sentences in this draft, students will encounter a number of difficulties. Any fragments in their essays will not be able to be turned into yes/no questions, since fragments are incomplete sentences. In example (3) below, while the first part can be turned into a yes/no question (*Is sexism in society*

difficult to change?), the second part (the fragment) cannot (**Because are old attitudes so thoroughly ingrained in our culture?*):

3. Sexism in society is difficult to change. Because old attitudes are so thoroughly ingrained in our culture.

Comma splices and run-ons, on the other hand, will be able to be turned into two yes/no questions, since they consist of two complete sentences. In example (4) below, the two sentences spliced by the comma in (4a) can be turned into two yes/no questions (sentences 4b and 4c):

4a. Nuclear war is not inevitable, it can be prevented if we sign an arms pact with the Soviets.
 b. Is nuclear war not inevitable?
 c. Can it be prevented if we sign an arms pact with the Soviets?

To correct such mispunctuations, instructors can simply tell students to reword or repunctuate the constructions so that they can be turned into one yes/no question: *because* can be removed from the fragment to yield a complete sentence; the comma creating the comma splice can be replaced by a period. But these are only single options that writers have to punctuate these constructions. To explore other options, instructors will need to introduce more rules of punctuation and, in addition, principles of punctuation.

PUNCTUATING ADVERBIALS

As Harris has observed, one of the more common types of sentence fragments is an adverbial clause that is punctuated as a complete sentence but that is actually a member of the sentence that precedes it:

5. The midwest is a popular part of the country to live in. Even though it is very cold in the winter.

To rid their essays of these types of fragments, students need to be able to identify adverbials and understand the rules and principles that govern their punctuation.

Although the term adverbial sounds intimidating to many students, they can be taught to recognize adverbials by applying the following very simple operational test:

Operational Test (2): Any sequence which can be moved around in a sentence is an adverbial.

Applied to examples (6a) and (7a) below, this test identifies as adverbials the expressions *Yesterday* and *If peace is not achieved in Central America soon*, expressions which can be freely moved around in each of the sentences in which they occur.

6a. *Yesterday*, negotiators for the union broke off talks.
 b. Negotiators for the union broke off talks *yesterday*.
7a. *If peace is not achieved in Central America soon*, the cycle of poverty will continue to exist.
 b. The cycle of poverty will continue to exist *if peace is not achieved in Central America soon*.

To give students practice applying Operational Test (1), I again have them analyze the first paragraph or two of an essay that they are currently drafting. Once they can apply the tests with relative ease, I begin introducing them to the rules and principles necessary for the punctuation of adverbials.

There are two rules governing the punctuation of adverbials:

Rule 1: Introductory adverbials can be unpunctuated or punctuated with a comma.
Rule 2: Adverbials occurring in other positions in a sentence can be unpunctuated or punctuated with one or two commas, dashes, or parentheses.

Because adverbials are a very diverse grammatical class in English, a number of principles are necessary to explain their punctuation. For this reason, adverbials provide a good forum for introducing students to most of the principles of punctuation, principles that can then be reintroduced when instructors discuss the punctuation of other constructions.

Before students are introduced to the notion of principles of punctuation, however, it is important to discuss with them the difference between rules and principles. Rules, I stress, do little more than tell us what marks we can use. The rule for punctuating introductory adverbials, for instance, says no more than that these constructions can be left unpunctuated or, alternatively, punctuated with a comma. Principles, in contrast, guide us in our choice of marks. That is to say, they tell us which mark of punctuation is most appropriate for the particular context in which we

are considering the use of a mark. This is an important distinction to make with students because so many of them have been taught that punctuation is simply a matter of right and wrong: one applies the rules he or she has been taught to "correctly" punctuate a sentence. What students need to be shown is that punctuation involves choice and that the choice of an appropriate mark of punctuation is governed not by rules but by principles.

There are four principles relevant to the punctuation of adverbials.[8] The first principle is syntactic in nature and covers the punctuation of adverbials that introduce sentences:

> Structural Principle: The lengthier and more complex a construction, the greater the need to punctuate it with as heavy a mark of punctuation as possible.

This principle will make little sense to students unless they understand the difference between light and heavy punctuation. Consequently, when discussing this principle, I schematize for students the relative weight of the marks of punctuation:

Light			heavy
no mark	comma	semicolon	period

Applied to the punctuation of introductory adverbials, this principle states that if they are quite lengthy and complex, they should be punctuated with a comma, the heaviest mark of punctuation that can be used to set off this kind of construction:

> 8. *While most composition instructors teach writing as a process*, some still place too much emphasis on grammar and mechanics.

Shorter adverbials, in contrast, need not be punctuated:

> 9. *On Tuesday* the Senate passed three new environmental laws.

Related to the Structural Principle is the Meaning Principle, a principle that ties heavy and light marks of punctuation in with meaning rather than structure:

> Meaning Principle: The more distantly related two constructions are, the greater the need to punctuate them with as heavy a mark of punctuation as possible.

This principle applies to the punctuation of adverbials in all positions. It stipulates, for instance, that conjuncts should be punctuated (example 10) but that adjuncts should not (example 11):

10. *Consequently*, the meeting was rescheduled for a time when all members of the committee could attend.
11. *Today* the corporation no longer offers its employees stock options.

Conjuncts, students should be told, are distantly related from the clauses in which they occur because they have a connective function: they relate sentences to one another, a function that is best reinforced by the use of some mark of punctuation. Adjuncts, on the other hand, serve no linking function but instead add meaning to the sentences in which they occur. For this reason, adjuncts can be optionally punctuated.

To explore more precisely when it is best to punctuate or not punctuate adjuncts and other adverbials, students need to be presented with two more principles of punctuation. One principle is tied to whether or not the adverbial is prosodically integrated into the clause in which it occurs:

Sound Principle: The less likely it is to place pauses before and/or after an adverbial, the less necessary its punctuation becomes.

Because *therefore* in example (12) is both preceded and followed by pauses, this principle states that it is acceptable to place commas around this adverbial:

12. It is necessary, therefore, to take a multi-faceted approach to curing the disease of cancer.

However, it is undesirable to place commas around *certainly* in example (13), since this adverbial is not preceded or followed by pauses:

13. The host certainly took his time seating us.

The Sound Principle is explicitly worded to cover only the punctuation of adverbials, since adverbials are the only constructions whose punctuation is directly affected by prosody (Meyer, *Punctuation* 73-83). Because many students are under the mistaken impression that they should place marks of punctuation where

they pause, it is important to stress to them that the Sound Principle applies only to adverbials. Otherwise, if this principle is applied too liberally, students will overpunctuate their texts.

The Structural, Meaning, and Sound Principles discussed thus far specify "Punctuation Norms" (Meyer, *Punctuation* 13): the most common ways that adverbials are punctuated. However, punctuation norms can be violated either to downplay the importance of a construction or to make it more prominent, a use of punctuation captured by the following principle:

> Prominence Principle: To downplay the importance of a construction, enclose it with parentheses; to draw attention to a construction, punctuate it with an emphatic mark of punctuation or with a mark that is not ordinarily used to punctuate it.

The first part of this principle reflects the fact that parentheses have the effect of indicating that the constructions they enclose are parenthetic in importance:

14. Education (as Governor Dukakis indicated in a speech the other day) is not receiving the financial support that it deserves.

The second part of the principle specifies two ways that punctuation can be used to create stylistic effects. One way is to use a mark of punctuation—either a dash or an exclamation mark—that is emphatic, irrespective of the construction in which it occurs. Since only sentences (and not adverbials) can be punctuated with exclamation marks, the dash is the only mark relevant to the punctuation of adverbials; it can be used (as Rule 2 indicates) to emphasize adverbials in either the medial (example 14) or final (example 15) positions of a sentence:

15. The instructor—in the interest of time—truncated his discussion of the death penalty in countries other than the United States.
16. English-only laws have been passed in many states—despite the fact that they are controversial and devisive.

A second way that punctuation can be used to create a stylistic effect is if a commonly used mark of punctuation sets off a construction it does not ordinarily set off. The effects of this type of

emphasis can be subtle or conspicuous. The *effects are subtle* if an adjunct is punctuated in initial position, a position in which such adverbials are ordinarily unpunctuated (Meyer, *Punctuation* 64). In example (17) below, placing a comma after the adjunct *Yesterday* makes the adjunct more prominent and hence more emphatic:

17. Yesterday, Mayor Jones was arrested for driving under the influence.

In example (18), on the other hand, the emphasis is much more pronounced. Prepositional phrases occurring at the ends of sentences are most frequently not preceded by a pause. However, placing a comma before the preposition *after* creates a very abrupt prose rhythm that emphasizes the phrase:

18. The company's production of *All's Well That Ends Well* improved greatly, after the second act.

And the emphasis in a sentence such as (18) can be even more pronounced if the two types of emphasis are combined—if an emphatic mark such as the dash is used to punctuate a construction not usually punctuated.

19. The company's production of *All's Well That Ends Well* improved greatly—after the second act.

Punctuating Coordinated Constructions

Following a discussion of the rules and principles for punctuating adverbials, instructors can move on to a discussion of the punctuation of other constructions. A particularly important construction to discuss is the coordinated construction, a grammatical structure whose punctuation is governed by two rules of punctuation and most of the principles that applied to the punctuation of adverbials.

To recognize coordinated constructions, students will need to be taught another simple operational test:

Operational Test (3): Any sequence of words joined explicitly or implicitly by the conjunctions *and, or, but, neither, nor, for, so,* and *yet* is a coordinated construction.

Example (20) contains clauses joined explicitly by the coordinator *and*:

20. The Joint Chiefs of Staff met an hour at the Pentagon, and later they adjourned to the White House for a meeting with the president.

Example (21) contains clauses joined implicitly by the coordinator *and*:

21. The governors asked the Congress for more money to fight the war against drugs; [and] they begged the president to become more actively involved in their cause.

The notion of implicit coordination is difficult for many students to grasp, but it is an important notion for them to learn if they are to understand the use of the semicolon. To teach students to recognize implicit coordination, I tell them to look for constructions (such as example 21 above) that contain identical subjects and that would make sense if the conjunction *and* were inserted to join the clauses.

There are two rules governing the punctuation of coordinated constructions:

Rule (1): Coordinated constructions where the coordinator is present can be unpunctuated or punctuated with a comma, semicolon, period, or dash.
Rule (2): Coordinated constructions where the coordinator is implied but not present can be punctuated with a semicolon.

At this juncture, instructors can begin reintroducing the principles of punctuation used to explain the punctuation of adverbials and discuss how they also cover the punctuation of coordinated constructions.

The Structural Principle states that short and non-complex coordinated constructions (such as the compound phrase in example 22) need not be punctuated but that lengthy and complex coordinated constructions (such as the coordinated clauses in example 23) should be heavily punctuated:

22. President Bush talked with leading congressmen and senators.
23. Boeing laid off 2,000 workers last fall because of a decline in orders from the defense department. But this spring they plan to call back at least half of these workers.

Instructors should stress that even though the Structural Principle applies to both adverbials and coordinated constructions, with coordinated constructions writers have a range of marks to choose from: periods and semicolons in addition to commas, dashes, or no punctuation.

The Meaning Principle states that constructions that are closely related should be punctuated with a relatively light mark of punctuation; those that are distantly related should be punctuated with a heavier mark of punctuation. Because the coordinator *and* indicates a relatively close relationship between the units it connects, it is often not punctuated, even if it conjoins clauses:

24.   Rock videos are declining in popularity and as a result MTV is worried about its future.

The coordinator *but*, on the other hand, indicates a contrast between the parts it connects. Consequently, this coordinator is often punctuated, even if it connects short phrases:

25.   The video recorder has made movies easier to obtain, but less fun to watch.

The Meaning Principle also governs the punctuation of constructions with an implicit coordinator. Arguably, the comma is the best mark of punctuation to separate such constructions, since the comma is a relatively light mark of punctuation and therefore quite suitable for indicating that constructions are closely related. However, instructors need to stress with students that Rule (2) prohibits the use of commas in such constructions and dictates the choice of the semicolon, the next best mark of punctuation for indicating that constructions are closely related:[9]

26.   Jack Nicholson is a superb actor; he has starred in many fine pictures.

The Prominence Principle accounts for use of the period in example (27) below. Because the clauses in this example are short, non-complex, and closely related, a comma or no mark of punctuation would ordinarily be the best mark to separate them. However, a period can be used to separate the clauses if the writer wishes to give prominence to the second clause and hence emphasize the information in it:

27. Punctuation is an important topic to study. And it is extremely interesting as well.

CONCLUSIONS

I have argued in this paper that functional approaches to language instruction can be of value in the composition class: they not only focus on the form of linguistic utterances but are concerned with their function as well. To illustrate the usefulness of this approach to language, I briefly outlined a functional view of punctuation and demonstrated how this view can be taught to composition students.

Future work in the practical application of functional grammar ought to investigate in greater detail topics I have not considered in this paper. Since functional grammarians have done considerable work on discourse structure (see, for instance, Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* and *Language, Context, and Text,*) we need to explore ways that this work can be adapted to the teaching of discourse structure to composition students. In addition, we need to develop functional approaches to the teaching of grammatical concepts that give composition students difficulty— concepts such as agreement, pluralization, possession, and reference. However, instead of taking an error-oriented approach to teaching these concepts, we ought to teach the concepts for their own sake. That is, when teaching reference as it relates to pronouns, for instance, we should not simply present students with a list of errors in pronoun reference but should instead teach them "the text-level functions of pronominals. . .the important role of pronouns in creating cohesive text by establishing and maintaining thematic focus" (Bernhardt 194). If students can learn the concept of reference in English, they will not make errors in pronoun reference.

Theories of linguistic competence, as I noted earlier, have not led to writing pedagogies of much value. Theories of language use, however, deal with issues of direct relevance to the teaching and theory of writing. Consequently, they ought to be given serious consideration by both writing teachers and writing theorists.

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NOTES

¹ I wish to thank Neal Bruss, Barbara Couture, and Frank Hubbard for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

² Leech's theory is an adaptation of Halliday's ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of language, which are discussed in all of the works of Halliday listed in the bibliography. For other views of functional grammar, see Dik, Firbas, Foley and Van Valin, Kuno, and Leech and Svartvik.

³ Leech (21-24) distinguishes rules and principles. Rules, according to Leech, "either apply or do not apply" (21). A speaker of English can take a sentence in the active voice, for instance, and through a very straightforward procedure transform the sentence into the passive voice. Principles, on the other hand, are regulative and very context dependent. The principle of end-focus, for instance, regulates the placement of given and new information in a text, and the manner in which this principle applies depends on what is given and new in a particular text.

⁴ Quirk et al. also posit a fourth class: subjunct. But because subjuncts are similiar to adjuncts—both are semantically intergrated into the clause—they are not relevant to the forthcoming discussion.

⁵ See Meyer (*Punctuation* 113-124) for a more complete discussion of the rules and principles needed to account for punctuation.

⁶ One of the more popular college handbooks, the *Harbrace College Handbook*, devotes nearly 50 pages to a discussion of the rules of punctuation.

⁷ At this juncture, instructors can explore with students just why question marks and exclamation marks are rare in writing: questions occur primarily in speech, since their function is to request information from the listener (Quirk et al. 803-4); exclamation marks make the writer "appear somewhat hysterical" (Millward 115) and hence are inappropriate in most styles of writing.

⁸ I have changed the wording of the principles in this section to make them easier for students to understand.

⁹ If they desire, instructors can discuss with students at this time the difference between acceptable and unacceptable comma splices. For a discussion of acceptable and unacceptable comma splices, see Meyer ("Teaching Punctuation. . . .").

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