How speakers interact with language: Exploring interpersonal meanings

Introducing...
- The interpersonal function

Discussing...
- Implications for language teaching
From Chapter 1

Language has an interpersonal function, so it has interpersonal meanings.
We use language to encode our interaction.

If we see people talking together, we may wonder what they are talking about. This experien­
tial aspect of their talk is, of course, realised in the lexicogrammar of Participants,
Process and Circumstance as we discussed in Chapter 3. But speakers do more than talk
about experience; they also use language to interact with language and to express inter­
personal meanings. In this chapter and the next, the focus is on the lexicogrammatical
resources available to realise these interpersonal meanings.

Interpersonal meanings cover two main areas: one concerns the type of interaction
taking place and the kind of commodity being exchanged, and the other concerns the
way speakers take a position in their messages. We will discuss the former in this chapter
and the latter in Chapter 5.

Interacting with language

One of the most basic interactive distinctions concerns the kind of commodity being
exchanged: that is, the difference between using language to exchange information and
using it to exchange goods and services. A second distinction concerns the type of inter­
action taking place; that is, the difference between demanding and giving. In other
words, we can demand information or we can give it and we can demand goods and services or give them. These interpersonal meanings from the semantic level of language are realised in the wordings of the lexicogrammatical level (refer to Figure 1.3 on page 7).

It is important to remember that there is not a one-to-one relationship between
semantics and lexicogrammar. What someone says may look like demanding or giving
information but could be an oblique way of demanding goods and services. For example,
we recognise that if someone says, 'Are you thirsty?', or 'It must be afternoon tea time!',
they may actually be asking us to make the tea. Nevertheless, there are predictable and
straightforward ways to create meanings in the lexicogrammar and we will see in our
observations of the following texts that the most usual way of giving information is a
statement, the most usual way of demanding information is a question and the most
usual way of demanding goods and services is a command or order. There is, however,
no linguistically straightforward way of giving goods and services.

Giving and demanding information

Demanding and giving information are meanings at the semantic level which are most
often realised at the lexicogrammatical level by asking questions or making statements.
Certain contexts will motivate these meanings in a text. In a lecture, for example, we
expect that most of the clauses will be giving information. The same is the case in a
recount, an information report or a discussion. In a law court transcript, however,
we expect that information will be demanded by a barrister and given by a witness or
defendant. Likewise, in classrooms, teachers often check what pupils know by
demanding information and, hence, there will be sequences of questions and
statements. Text 1, a Year 3 Social Studies text, is a good example of exchanging
information.

Text 1: Mike's text

Demand information

Give information

Another good example of the exchange of information is the nursery rhyme below
(Text 2).

Text 2

Demand information:

Give information:

Demand information:

Give information:

Give information (dependent clause):

Give information:

How many miles to Babylon?
Three score miles and ten.
Can I get there by candlelight?
Yes, and back again.
If your heels are nimble and light,
You may get there by candlelight.
Demanding goods and services

In contrast to the exchange of information, the exchange of goods and services involves using language to get things done, either by offering to do them ourselves or ordering someone else to do them. Demanding goods and services are meanings at the semantic level which are most often realised at the lexicogrammatical level by giving orders or instructions. Certain contexts where power or knowledge is unevenly distributed motivate the giving of orders and instructions. Procedural texts commonly contain a number of orders. Although these are not really authoritative demands, they are presented to us as orders which are to be obeyed if we want to achieve the intended results.

Text 3

To Government House from Circular Quay

'Demand' service
'Demand' service
'Demand' service
'Demand' service
'Demand' service
'Demand' service
Give information

'Demand' service
'Demand' service
'Demand' service
'Demand' service
'Demand' service
'Demand' service
Give information

Metalanguage for discussing language as interaction

In our exploration of the experiential function, we found that the crucial meanings were the relationship between the groups and phrases functioning as the Process, the Participants in the process, and the Circumstances. For interpersonal meanings the crucial relationship is between grammatical functions. The two grammatical features that carry the main burden of interpersonal meanings are the SUBJECT and the FINITE. They combine to make the MOOD of the clause. By the end of this chapter, we will see that the order of Subject and Finite is a grammatical sign of the kind of exchange taking place. We will begin our exploration by examining the grammatical resources to express interaction.

The Finite

In our discussion of clause constituents we saw that a verbal group is made up of one or more words. Whereas experientially the EVENT is the most important part of the verbal group, it is the Finite which is the focus for the expression of interpersonal meanings. The Finite is that part of the verbal group which encodes primary tense or the speaker’s opinion. Thus, the Finite has two main interpersonal roles in the verbal group – it can be a sign of TIME in relation to the speaker, or a MODAL sign of the speaker’s opinion.

If we were looking for experiential meanings we would decode all the following verbal groups (underlined) as encoding the material process eat:

1. The three little kittens soon ate up the pie
2. Jack Sprat could eat no fat
3. The pig was not eaten
4. Why is he eating the pie?
5. You will eat strawberries, sugar and cream

The Finites in the clauses, however, are quite different, for instance: the time (tense) of Clauses 1 and 3 is in the past; in Clause 3 there is a separate word was to tell us this, but in Clause 1 the pastness of the activity is mapped on to the single word ate, making this word a double sign – for the process itself and for the Finite telling the time of the process. In Clause 4 the separate Finite is is the first word in the verbal group, signifying present tense; and in Clause 5 the separate Finite will tells us that the Event will take place some time after the talk about it.

Whether an Event has occurred, is presently occurring, or is yet to take place is obviously very important if we are to argue about a clause, and in the next chapter we will be exploring the notion of arguability. With this in mind, we notice that in Clause 2 the definiteness of the clause has been moderated by the speaker’s opinion about Jack Sprat’s ability to eat fat so that the debate rests not on whether or not he did but whether or not he could. Finites that encode the speaker’s opinion rather than tense are known as MODAL FINITES. The argument of Clause 3 is a negative one – the pig was not eaten. All English clauses have either positive or negative POLARITY, but only negative polarity is shown – positive polarity is assumed unless negativity is marked.

So now let’s look at the five clauses again with just the Finite and negative polarity underlined:

1. The three little kittens soon ate up the pie
2. Jack Sprat could eat no fat
3. The pig was not eaten
4. Why is he eating the pie?
5. You will eat strawberries, sugar and cream

Where the Finite is mapped on to the same word as the Event, we regard the word as two separate signs and draw a line through its centre, marking one side as Finite and tense, and the other as Predicator.
There is a way to double check that we have identified the Finite correctly. If the verbal group contains more than one word, the Finite will be the first word in the verbal group but, if the verbal group is only one word, a Finite signifying tense as well as the Event itself, will be mapped on to that one word:

1. The three little kittens soon ate up the pie

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Predicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(past)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Jack Sprat could eat no fat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Predicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(modal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. The pig was not eaten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Predicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(past)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Why is he eating the dumplings?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Predicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(present)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. You will eat strawberries, sugar and cream

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Predicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(future)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Subject and Subject-Finite relationship

The nominal group which interacts most closely with the Finite is known as the Subject. The strong interaction between this and the Finite is a fundamental relationship in English grammar. The significance of the Subject-Finite relation can sometimes be seen in the effect of the Subject on the Finite. When the nominal group in the Subject role changes, from singular to plural or from first person (I, we) to third person (she, the team, they), the Finite may reflect the change in its form. The verb to be signals the Subject-Finite relation most strongly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Finite</th>
<th>Finite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Finite</td>
<td>(present)</td>
<td>(present)</td>
<td>(present)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whether or not it is overtly signalled by changes in the verbal group, the relationship between the Subject and Finite is what counts. It is such a strong bond that it intersects normal group boundaries so that the nominal group functioning as Subject and the Finite from the verbal group function together as the Mood (or Mood Block) of the message, leaving any other auxiliary verbs and the process itself as Predicator in the less important Residue of the clause. We'll define these terms properly after a discussion of Mood.

He was walking

The buns were eaten

Mood

The MOOD or MOOD BLOCK is the name given to the Subject and Finite plus the polarity (plus, as we shall discover in the next chapter, any other modality). One way to test a message for its Mood Block is to add a brief check, or MOOD TAG, to the message, as if we were checking that we have understood the message. After a message like: Jack Sprat could eat no fat, we add a tag: could he? The tag we add will contain the Subject and Finite in the reverse order from the original clause.

So, once we have constructed the Mood tag, we can return to the original message to identify the Mood Block, and the separate Subject and Finite within it become very obvious. The Subject is the whole nominal group referenced by the pronoun in the Mood tag and the Finite is that part of the verbal group which occurs in the Mood tag. Where the Finite is mapped onto the same word as the process itself, adding a Mood tag will show us whether the Finite is past or present. In the case of the three little kittens ate up their pie, we add a tag didn't they? This demonstrates that the Subject of the message is the whole nominal group referenced by they, so the Subject is, of course, the three little kittens. Because did is past tense, the Finite is past.
The following clauses show an interpersonal analysis including the Mood tag check to find Subject and Finite. Note that the + symbol next to the Finite indicates positive polarity and the - indicates negative polarity. Other parts of the interpersonal analysis are also labelled and will be discussed directly below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They open on Friday, don't they?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You liked the film, didn't you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He had swum there, hadn't he?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The doctor will sign the script, won't she?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Predicator**

The rest of the verbal group, including any other auxiliaries, is simply described as the Predicator because, as we shall discover in the next chapter, it is the basis for the predication, or validation, of the rest of the clause.

**Adjunct**

Adverbial groups, nominal groups and prepositional phrases that acted as Circumstances for the experiential meaning of a clause are now simply known as Adjuncts because they are added on to the interpersonal meanings.

**Complement**

Other nominal groups may be regarded as Complements because they complete the argument set up in the clause.

**Residue**

The Predicator, Complement(s) and Adjunct(s) make up the Residue of a clause.

**Extra elements**

**Vocative**

Especially in spoken language, speakers may add a direct address of some kind as in:

- Andrew, did you borrow my stapler?
- Hey, Alex, you've left your keys over here!

Elements like these, which directly address someone, are known by the traditional grammatical term VOCATIVES. They are additional to the clause structure and, although they are labelled in the interpersonal analysis, do not form part of the Mood Block or Residue.

**Person**

In describing interaction we are never very far away from the interactants themselves, the speaker as I or we, and the addressee as you. As speakers and addressees interact in conversation they take up different roles - the speaker of one clause becomes the addressee of the next as, in turn, the first addressee becomes the next speaker.

The traditional way of describing the interactants is first person (singular: I, me, my; plural: we, us, our) and second person (singular and plural: you, your). Third person is the persons and things spoken about. In English first person plural may either include or exclude the addressee, so grammarians refer to inclusive or exclusive we.

Although person is not a labelled part of our interpersonal analysis, any investigation must be concerned with the interplay of first and second person and whether the addressee is included in first person plural pronouns. The identity of I and you, and the expression of solidarity or distance by inclusive or exclusive first person plural pronouns, are expressions of the relationship between speaker and addressee. These important realisations of the tenor of discourse will be discussed again in Chapter 8.

**Metalanguage for analysing and describing interaction**

At the beginning of this chapter we drew on Halliday's discussion of exchange, which distinguishes the exchange of information from the exchange of goods and services. In both types of exchange it is possible to demand or give. The Subject/Finite relationship becomes a sign of the interaction taking place in the discourse by establishing the message as statement, question, command. We will now look at each of these in greater detail.
Exchanging information

In the exchange of information, the Subject and Finite are both present or can be easily recovered from the preceding text. The order of Subject and Finite in the Mood Block shows whether information is given or demanded.

Giving information:

The Medea text (Text 4) is taken from a Year 12 English essay where, in the way of all such essays, the writer is presenting information to the reader. Speakers and writers giving information most normally make statements. In clauses giving information, the Subject precedes the Finite, and this configuration of the Mood Block is known as DECLARATIVE MOOD. In this text the Subject always precedes the Finite, and the Finite, which is always present tense, is usually mapped on to the same word as the Event.

Text 4: The Medea text

Medea is a strange and complex character. She is inexplicable because of the extremities of emotion she displays. Both her love and her hate are awesomely powerful, almost too powerful to be human. In the final scene, Euripides displays this by placing her in a blazing chariot above the stage. By this action, she is transformed into a quasi-divine figure. But, at the same time, she remains a savage and her barbarian qualities, her 'fierce, resentful spirit', continue to govern her actions and emotions.

Finite comes before the Subject, and this order is the signal of the INTERROGATIVE mood. For example:

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Does} & \text{Penny} & \text{play} & \text{squash?} \\
\hline
\text{Finite +} & \text{Subject} & \text{Predicator} & \text{Complement} \\
\text{(present)} & & & \\
\hline
\text{Mood Block} & \text{Residue} & \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

In information-seeking questions, if the question word is Who?, Which, or What? functioning as Subject, then the Finite follows it. For example:

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Who} & \text{killed} & \text{Cock Robin?} \\
\hline
\text{Finite +} & \text{(past)} & \text{Predicator} & \text{Complement} \\
\hline
\text{Mood Block} & \text{Residue} & \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Otherwise, if the question word is not the Subject, or if any other question word is used, the sequence in the Mood Block is Finite followed by Subject. For example:

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Who} & \text{did} & \text{you} & \text{see?} \\
\hline
\text{Finite +} & \text{(past)} & \text{Subject} & \text{Predicator} \\
\hline
\text{Residue} & \text{Mood Block} & \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]
As you can see, the clauses above remain declarative mood in spite of the reversal of Subject and Finite which more typically realises interrogative mood.

**Exchanging goods and services**

**Demanding goods and services**

Speakers demanding goods or services may give orders or commands. In the most straightforward and easily recognised form of this type of exchange there is no apparent Subject or Finite, but speakers can, if they wish, make their demands more emphatic by adding a Subject or a Finite. These configurations of the Mood Block are known as **imperative mood**.

If we add a Mood tag at the end of each message, the result is *will you?* or *won't you?* Because of this, some linguists would prefer to say that the Subject is the addressee (you) and that the Finite must contain some idea of futurity. On the other hand, the suggestion that the Subject and/or Finite need not be present in the imperative highlights the difference between demanding information and demanding goods and services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mood Block</th>
<th>Predicator</th>
<th>Complement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>squash!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember that in English there is no one-to-one correspondence between meanings and the way they are encoded in the grammar. We may also find a demand for goods and services encoded as a declarative or interrogative and in such cases the Subject/Finite follows the normal pattern of declarative or interrogative mood, for example:

1. I need to see your passport
2. Can I see your passport?
Giving goods and services

Speakers who are offering goods and services do not have recourse to any special configuration of the Subject-Finite relationship, so this type of exchange does not have a special mood but is identified through the context of the message.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mood Block</th>
<th>Predicator</th>
<th>Complement</th>
<th>Residue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Finite</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **declarative mood**: give goods and services

  - I 'll make the tea
  - give goods and services
  - make the tea

- **interrogative mood**: give goods and services

  - Shall I make the tea?

Exchange in context

At the beginning of this chapter we talked about the ways in which certain contexts raise strong expectations about whether information or goods and services will be given or demanded. We can now return to an examination of texts to explore the meanings realised in their mood choices.

Texts like the Year 12 essay on Medea (Text 4) are concerned with giving information. This meaning is realised in the writer's choice of declarative mood. On the other hand, speakers and writers of procedural texts usually select imperative mood because they are giving orders which should be followed to accomplish the task. In Text 5 the verbal groups in imperative mood are underlined.

Text 5: Recipe for Sticky Date Pudding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Equipment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200 g dates</td>
<td>small saucepan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup water</td>
<td>wooden spoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 g butter</td>
<td>round or ring pan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 eggs</td>
<td>baking paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190 g white sugar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190 g SR flour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tsp bicarb, soda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 tsp vanilla essence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Method**

Put dates and water in saucepan, and heat until jammy.

Beat in the other ingredients.

Line pan with greased baking paper.

Bake at 180 C for 30 minutes.

Serve with caramel sauce and cream.

To sum up

English speakers and writers manipulate the Subject-Finite relationship of Mood to indicate whether they are giving or demanding information or demanding goods and services. However, the relation between lexicogrammar and interpersonal meanings is not always straightforward – information can be sought using the imperative and declarative moods as well the interrogative; and there is no 'normal' way of encoding an offer of goods and services. In spite of this, there are very few misunderstandings: listeners are perfectly able to distinguish a demand for goods and services mapped on to an interrogative from a genuine question.
Implications for language teaching

This chapter describes the potential of the English clause to exchange meaning. It is this potential that makes it possible for us to use language to interact with each other. Specifically the chapter explores:

- the types of meanings we exchange when we use language to interact with each other (when exchanging information or goods and services)
- how we exchange these meanings (by giving or demanding them)
- the interpersonal grammar we use to exchange these meanings in these different ways.

How is knowledge of the interpersonal grammar of exchange useful to teachers and learners?

Knowledge of the interpersonal grammar of exchange makes it possible for teachers to introduce students explicitly and systematically to the grammar they can use to exchange meanings with others.

Language teachers are already familiar with the grammar of the types of clauses discussed in this chapter; that is, declarative, interrogative and imperative. This chapter introduces the metalanguage for talking about the way the parts of these clauses function so we can interact with each other.

In some texts, for example many written texts, only declarative clauses are used. Readers are not usually able to exchange meanings with writers in an interactive way, so this one-way grammar of declaration remains constant throughout the text (though electronic communication is changing this). Some writers, however, do include questions in their texts to encourage a kind of interaction in the reader's mind, although naturally they don't expect to hear the reader's response. These questions are called rhetorical questions. (Have you noticed whether the authors of this book use rhetorical questions?)

When we are exchanging meanings face-to-face in spoken interactions, the grammar of interaction is critical to the effectiveness of the texts we construct. We draw on this grammar from moment to moment as the interaction unfolds. Let us now consider how knowledge about grammar can assist language learners to manage spoken interactive texts more effectively.

As we have been reminded in this chapter, the meanings we make when we interact—that is when we are giving or demanding information or goods and services—are at the semantic level of the language map, while the patterns we use to realise these meanings at the level of lexicogrammar will not necessarily be aligned to these meanings. Students must initially learn to manage effectively the most straightforward grammatical realisations of the interpersonal meanings used in interactions. They need to understand that:
The most straightforward way to demand information is to use interrogative clauses to ask questions.

The most straightforward way to give information is to use declarative clauses to make statements.

The most straightforward way to demand goods and services is to use imperatives to give instructions.

Although there is no straightforward way to give goods and services, we often temper an interrogative or a declarative with a modal Finite in order to make offers.

Students also need to learn how to respond in an exchange to each of these. In other words, they need to learn how to:

- respond to a question by, for example, giving or withholding information.
- respond to a statement by, for example, acknowledging or contradicting the information.
- respond to instructions by, for example, complying or declining.
- respond to offers by, for example, accepting or declining.

In addition, they need to learn how to manage the exchange by:

- confirming, clarifying or checking what they have heard and asking for repetition or more information when necessary.
- deflecting, contradicting or challenging meanings made by other speakers in the interaction.

The Subject and Finite in the Mood Block are the pivotal elements of the clause that make all these types of interaction possible. The order of the Subject and Finite is the ‘grammatical sign of the type of exchange taking place’. It determines whether the clause will be declarative, interrogative or imperative. The turns of an exchange are generated and sustained by the way speakers manipulate the Subject and Finite in clauses from one turn to the next. Teachers and students can use this knowledge to distinguish and manipulate the elements of the clause which are at stake whenever a speaker initiates an exchange or responds to someone else. They can also distinguish those elements that remain constant as the exchange unfolds. Often the constant elements are left out, or ellipsed. This moves the interaction along at a cracking pace, a pace that can be difficult for language learners to manage. In addition, knowing what to leave out of the clauses in an interaction can be just as difficult for language learners as knowing what to put in.

The elements of the Mood Block are often small, especially if the Finite is an auxiliary verb and the Subject is expressed as a pronoun. It can be difficult for people learning English to hear the Mood Block in spoken language if they do not know to listen for it. It is very important that students are conscious of this element if they are to learn to interact effectively. Awareness of the Mood Block and the work it does makes it possible for students to ‘catch the ball’ in an interaction as speakers toss meanings backwards and forwards. They can then either return the same meanings back into the flow of the interaction or they can introduce new meanings and take the interaction in a new direction.

At the expression level of English different intonation patterns are used with declarative, interrogative and imperative clause structures depending on the meaning being made. It is important that students learn the intonation patterns at the same time as they learn the grammatical patterns if they are to control the full interpersonal potential of spoken clauses in interactions.

Manipulating the parts of the Mood Block is what keeps an exchange going. In fact quite lengthy exchanges can keep going with Mood Blocks alone, something which we hear in children’s arguments and comedy routines. Have you ever heard children forget what they were arguing about? They can be so busy keeping the interpersonal meanings going, they forget the experiential meanings which began the argument in the first place! Text 7 is an extract from a transcript of a children’s argument (the transcript of this conversation appears in full in the next chapter). The Mood Block is in bold to show how:

- the order of the Subject and Finite determines the type of exchange.
- the Mood Block is tossed back and forwards from one speaker’s turn to the next.
- the Mood Block keeps the interaction going even when the rest of the clause is left out (or ellipsed).

Text 7: The Mars Bar argument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John:</th>
<th>Where did (F) you (S) get that Mars Bar? (interrogative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James:</td>
<td>Bill (S) gave (F) it to me at lunch time. (declarative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John:</td>
<td>No, he (S) didn’t (F). (ellipsed declarative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James:</td>
<td>Yes, he (S) did (F). (ellipsed declarative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John:</td>
<td>He (S) did (F) not. (ellipsed declarative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James:</td>
<td>Did (F). (ellipsed declarative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Mood Block accounts for some of the structural features of English which are most challenging for students aiming for accurate language use. These include:

- subject-verb agreement (which reflects the interdependence of the Subject and Finite)
- auxiliary verb
- tense (expressed in the Finite)
- Mood tags (based on the Subject and Finite)
- negatives (an aspect of polarity)
- modal verbs (which are usually the Finite in a clause)
- contractions (which involve the Subject and Finite or the Finite and a negative)
• the way parts of clauses are ellipsed in spoken language (‘Has, isn’t it? Yes, it is.’)
• many dialectal and non-standard variations in structure (‘Ain’t it the truth!’).

Understanding the function of the parts of the Mood Block in English helps students to understand, for example, that the morphological agreement between Subject and Finite is a reflection of the way their functional roles are intertwined in the Mood Block. Being aware of the structure of the Mood Block also helps students to explore the English tense system. For example, it helps students to understand the way the interpersonal meaning (Finite) and experiential meaning (Process) in a verb group can be fused in one word (eg runs) or teased apart in two or more words (eg is running) depending on the time of the event from the speaker's point of view.

In summary, understanding the grammar of the Mood Block shows students that some of the apparently arbitrary rules of English grammar have a functional motivation. The grammar of the Mood Block is often manipulated in what may appear to the learner very small and apparently insignificant changes in morphemes or words. If students learn to control this grammar they are able to control many of the resources in English that allow speakers to finetune, in subtle yet powerful ways, the language they use to negotiate relationships with others. We will explore this aspect of interpersonal grammar further in the next chapter.

We have already seen that students can begin working with the interpersonal meanings and grammar patterns which converge on the Mood Block by building a repertoire of the most straightforward ways of expressing meanings in an exchange. But being straightforward is not always the most useful way to interact in English, especially if we are asking people to give us something or do something for us; that is, if we are demanding goods or services. As students develop their knowledge of interpersonal grammar they will notice the way English speakers regularly finetune interpersonal meaning by shifting between structures that are straightforward ways of demanding or giving information or goods and services to those that are less straightforward. This is another example of grammatical metaphor, but in this case it is the alignment between interpersonal meaning and grammatical expression that shifts.

This shift to less straightforward structures increases the interpersonal distance between the speaker and the person they are speaking to, which is often an expression of politeness. For example, in most social settings English speakers will rarely use the imperative (eg Open the door!) to demand goods and services. Instead they usually shift their demand to an interrogative based on a modal finite (Could you open the door? Would you mind opening the door?). We will explore modality in more detail in Chapter 5.

The grammar of many of these shifts in expression is too complex for a beginner to unravel, but even beginners need to be able to express politeness in their exchanges so some of these ‘shifted’ expressions have to be learnt as whole ‘gambits’ at first. Students should also be aware that there are times when speakers of English are even less straightforward. For example they might even shift a demand for a service to a declarative clause (It’s stuffy in here, isn’t it?).

How can knowledge of the interpersonal grammar of interaction enhance teaching programs?

The interpersonal grammar speakers choose as they interact, is motivated by the tenor of the immediate context of situation. Language teaching activities can be designed to draw students’ attention to this aspect of context and how it finds its way into the clauses of an interaction.

If teachers are aware of the functions of the clause parts that express interpersonal meaning, they will be able to help students analyse authentic interactions to discover how people use interpersonal grammar to take part in the interaction. Unfortunately, many of the dialogues in language teaching textbooks do not reflect the way people use language to interact in real life. A knowledge of interpersonal grammar helps teachers select the most authentic interactions for students to work while exploring the way speakers of English use this grammar. Teachers may also want to carry an audio or video recorder with them to capture authentic interactions. Some teachers even use their children’s arguments, workplace negotiations, extracts from soap operas, or even the famous Monty Python Argument skit! Bear in mind, however, that teachers should seek the permission of the participants before using a recorded interaction in the classroom.

The interpersonal grammar of interaction and tenor

Students can explore how the tenor of the context of situation is expressed in interactions by exploring what the grammar reveals about:

• the relative power of the people taking part (who does most of talking; who shares the talking; who merely listens and acknowledges)
• the relative status of the people taking part (who does what when they talk – for example who initiates by demanding or giving information or instructing or offering and who merely responds; who has to shift the grammar; the greatest interpersonal distance from the meaning)
• the level of personal involvement between the people taking part (For example: Do they see each other regularly? Do they have a strong emotional bond?).

Learning how to build and maintain social relationships in interactions can be one of the most challenging aspects of acquiring a new language. Conscious knowledge of the interpersonal grammar of interactions makes it possible for students to explore interactions used in contexts of situation relevant to their learning needs and goals. For example, if students wish to gain employment in a particular workplace, an exploration of interactions that take place in that workplace, or similar workplaces, will reveal the most effective ways for the student to interact with management and fellow workers.
Students might also think about the effect of interpersonal meanings on experiential meanings in interactions. For example, students might investigate:

- what speakers talk about in different types of interactions
- whether different relationships between speakers influence what the speakers talk about and how they talk about it.

For example, the two speakers arguing about the Mars Bar (Text 7) are likely to be children who are brothers or schoolmates. In a workplace employees do not argue like this with their manager about confectionery. They may, however, argue about work matters although they are likely to use grammatical metaphor to shift the interpersonal grammar away from the meaning and create some interpersonal distance.

Teachers can also use their knowledge of interpersonal grammar to reflect on the way they interact and build relationships with their students in the classroom. Teachers are more powerful and have a higher status than students, so it seems 'natural' for them to dominate classroom interaction. Analysing typical classroom interactions can give teachers ideas for making more space for student contributions in class and for building relationships with students which might lead to more effective learning outcomes.

Using the grammar of interaction to build a critical response to text

Systemic functional linguists have undertaken interesting research into the roles different types of people play in interactions. For example, they have used interpersonal grammar to analyse the different roles men and women play in casual conversation.

Students might like to undertake small research tasks in which they analyse the different ways various types of people participate in interactions. They could, for example, explore interactions between young people and older people, men and women or adults and children. On the basis of their findings they might consider:

- who has the most power and status and who has the least power and status in different types of interaction
- how speakers can challenge or change relationships of power and status in different kinds of interactions.

Further reading

For more about language as interaction, read Chapter 4 of An introduction to functional grammar: 2nd edition (Halliday, 1994).

Chapter 2 of Focus on speaking (Burns and Joyce, 1997: 17-38) is titled 'Producing and negotiating spoken language'. In this chapter the authors explore different types of spoken interactions that can be used in the classroom. Focus on speaking also includes transcripts of authentic spoken language as well as a whole chapter on classroom activities.

If you want to read how systemic functional linguists use the grammar of exchange to analyse the way tenor is expressed in interaction, read Chapter 5 of Analyzing casual conversation (Eggins and Slade, 1997).

For more about how intonation patterns are mapped onto clause types, see In tempo: An English pronunciation course (Zawadzki, 1994).

**Exercises for language teachers**

1. Locate, and if necessary, record and transcribe a text which is a good example of the type of interaction you would like your students to be able to take part in effectively. If you want to read how systemic functional linguists use the grammar of exchange to analyse the way tenor is expressed in interaction, read Chapter 5 of Analyzing casual conversation (Eggins and Slade, 1997).

   - Look for patterns of interpersonal grammar that answer the following questions:
     - What types of meanings are exchanged in this interaction?
     - What interpersonal grammar is used to exchange these meanings?
     - How are these meanings exchanged (giving or demanding)?
     - What interpersonal grammar is used to exchange these meanings?

   - Relate what you have discovered about the interpersonal grammar of the interaction to your students' learning needs and goals.

2. Use what you have discovered about the interpersonal grammar of the interaction to design activities which support your students' progress towards their learning goals. These activities might draw your students' attention to:

   - how speakers initiate, respond to and manage meanings exchanged in an interaction
   - the order of Subject and Finite in declarative, interrogative and imperative clauses
   - how the Mood Block is used to generate and sustain the exchanges in an interaction
   - how the constant elements of the clauses in an exchange are often left out
   - how the Mood Block accounts for many of the grammatical patterns that demand attention to detail if language use is to be accurate and relationships are to be negotiated effectively
   - how speakers shift the grammatical expression of some of the meanings they exchange in order to be polite
   - how the relative power and status of the speakers and their involvement are expressed in the vocatives
   - how the relative power and status of the speakers and their involvement are expressed in the interaction
   - how the expression of tenor in the interaction influences the experiential meanings people make in interactions.