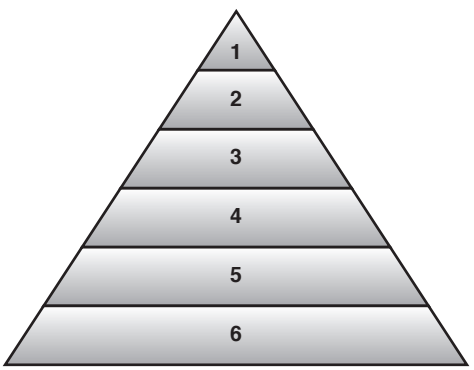
4 Introduction to analysing language

A Warm-up

1 Imagine language as a pyramid, with its features in descending order from the smallest features to the largest. Map these aspects of language onto the pyramid:

phrases *sentences* *sounds* *syllables* *texts* *words*



2 Can you think of other features of language that could go onto the pyramid?

> The answer to the question 'What do I teach when I teach English?' is, of course, 'language'. As we have been saying all along – if you're a language teacher, language should be your thing!
>
> Tim Marr and Fiona English, 2019

B Basic concepts and terminology

1 Match the terms (1–10) with their definitions (a–j). For example: 10–h.

Terms used to talk aboutlanguage	Definitions
1 vocabulary	a the rules that govern the way words are combined, adapted and sequenced in order to form sentences
2 grammar	b the purpose for which a language item is used, e.g. making requests; predicting
3 structure	c the place (in a text, or in the physical world) where an instance of language occurs
4 concept	d the way that language sounds when it is spoken

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5 function	e the area of language learning that is concerned with word knowledge
6 register	f a continuous piece of speech or writing, having a communicative purpose and a distinctive organization
7 pronunciation	g a pattern that generates examples, such as the present perfect: *I've seen . . . ; she's met . . . ; they've worked . . .*
8 context	h the way that words or sequences of words are spoken or written, e.g. /mi:t/ is written as *meat* or *meet;* the past of *meet* is *met*
9 text	i the way that spoken or written language is adapted to its particular situation of use, such as its degree of formality, e.g. *Please remain seated* v *Sit down!*
10 form	j the basic meaning of a word or grammar pattern, e.g. *You can go now* means *You are free to go now.*

2 Read the following short text and identify:

a what type of text it is
b the context in which it is typically found
c its function
d its register
e any sets of words that relate to the topic of the text
f any distinctive features of its grammar

> For the perfect cup, use one teabag per person and add freshly drawn boiling water.
> Leave standing for 3–5 minutes before stirring gently.
> Can be served with or without milk and sugar.

3 What is the effect on meaning of making the following changes to the above text?

1 For the perfect cup → For a perfect cup
e.g. 'the perfect cup' suggests we know which perfect cup – perhaps because there is only one; this can have a significant effect on meaning, as in 'The dog bit me' v 'A dog bit me'.
2 use one teabag → use one bag of tea: Can you think of other examples that follow the same pattern?
3 add freshly drawn boiling water → add boiling water: What kind of effect is the writer trying to create?
4 boiling water → boiled water: Finished or unfinished?
5 Leave standing → Leave to stand: The same or different?
6 Can be served → It can be served: Why is 'it' not necessary in this text?
7 Can be served → Should be served: Which one suggests more choice?

C Syllabus decisions

For teaching purposes, the different aspects of language are often separated out and organized into a sequence to form a syllabus. Here, for example, are the first two units of an intermediate level course:

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	Learning objectives	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation
Unit 1 And we're off!	■ Talk about personal achievements ■ Discuss good employee qualities ■ Make and respond to introductions ■ Write a comment on a blog post ■ Practice a job interview	■ Tense review (simple and continuous) ■ Dynamic and stative verbs	■ Describing accomplishments ■ Describing key qualities	■ Saying the letter *y*
Unit 2 The future of food	■ Talk about trends ■ Talk about preparing food ■ Make offers in social situations ■ Write the results of a survey ■ Create a plan to improve a restaurant	■ Real conditionals ■ Clauses with *after, until, when*	■ Describing trends ■ Preparing food	■ Saying the vowel sounds /aɪ/, /i/, and /eɪ/ ■ Listening for deleted /t/ sounds

Functional language	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking
■ Meet someone you don't know; introduce someone to others **Real-world strategy** ■ Respond to an introduction		**Flipping your job interview** ■ An article on interview skills	**A comment** ■ A comment on an article ■ Agreeing and disagreeing	■ Talk about a new activity ■ Talk about personal achievements ■ Describe your personal qualities ■ Play an introduction game **Time to speak** ■ Ask and answer interview questions
■ Make, accept, and refuse offers in social situations **Real-world strategy** ■ Acknowledge an acceptance	**Cool food** ■ A conversation between friends		**A report** ■ The results of a survey about eating habits ■ Reporting research results	■ Talk about fusion foods ■ Discuss ideas to avoid food waste ■ Explain a favorite recipe ■ Offer food and drink to others **Time to speak** ■ Present a restaurant rescue plan

Evolve Level 4

1 Work in pairs. Here are some more items from the same coursebook syllabus. Decide which column they go into: Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, or Functional language.

- present and past passive
- make an apology and explain what happened
- saying /s/ or /z/ at the end of a word
- reported questions
- talking about time and money
- *was / were going to*
- stressing long words
- keep your listener engaged
- *I wish*
- saying long or short vowel sounds

2 Work in pairs. What factors might determine the choice of items to put into a syllabus?

D Parts of speech

In English there are at least eight parts of speech (also called word classes). These are:

- ***nouns***, such as *cup, teabag, minutes*
- ***pronouns***, i.e. words that take the place of nouns, such as *it, they, ours*
- ***verbs***, such as *use, be, leave, stirring*
- ***adjectives***, such as *perfect, boiling*
- ***adverbs***, such as *freshly, gently*

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- ***prepositions***, such as *for, with, without*
- ***determiners***, such as the definite article *the*, the indefinite article *a/an*, and words like *one, some, this,* when they go in front of nouns, as *one teabag*
- ***conjunctions***, i.e. words that join parts of sentences, such as *and, or, that*

Many common words can function as different parts of speech, depending on their context. *Water,* for example, can be a noun (*a cup of water*) or a verb (*water the garden*). *One* can be a determiner (*one teabag*) or a pronoun (*would you like one?*)

Work in pairs. Identify the part of speech of each word in this text.

In the empty doorway many petals are scattered;
As they fall they blend with the song of the birds.
Slowly, the bright spring sun appears in the window
And a thin line of smoke drifts from the incense burner.

John Stevens, 1977

In	*the*	*empty*	*doorway*	*many*	*petals*	*are*	*scattered*
preposition	determiner	adjective					

As	*they*	*fall*	*they*	*blend*	*with*	*the*	*song*	*of*	*the*	*birds*
conjunction	pronoun									

Slowly	*the*	*bright*	*spring*	*sun*	*appears*	*in*	*the*	*window*
			noun					

And	*a*	*thin*	*line*	*of*	*smoke*	*drifts*	*from*	*the*	*incense*	*burner*

E Content words v grammar words

Unlike some languages, English doesn't have a lot of grammar in the form of verb endings (as in Russian) or noun cases (as in German). Instead, a lot of grammatical meaning is carried by the 'grammar' words. These act as the 'glue' that connects the 'content' words, i.e. those words that carry the main meaning.

1 Work in pairs. Look at the poem from the last activity.

1 Identify the content words. These are typically nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. The first line has been done for you: the content words are underlined.

In the <u>empty</u> <u>doorway</u> many <u>petals</u> are <u>scattered</u>;
As they fall they blend with the song of the birds.
Slowly, the bright spring sun appears in the window
And a thin line of smoke drifts from the incense burner.

2 What is the proportion of content words to grammar words? (There are 39 words altogether).
3 Do you think this would be the same for most texts? Choose a text at random and check.

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2 What do you notice about the grammar words? Here are some clues to help you: frequency, length, repetition, stress, novelty.

3 A very important sub-group of grammar words are auxiliary verbs (sometimes called 'helping verbs').

Look at this summary – from a coursebook – of the main uses of auxiliary verbs:

1.2 Uses of auxiliaries (1): auxiliaries in verb forms **1B** 4 p11

- We make continuous verb forms with *be* + verb+*ing*:
  *I**'m doing** a Master's.* (Present Continuous) *She **was hoping** to do her first degree in four years.* (Past Continuous)
- We make perfect verb forms with *have* + past participle:
  *It's something I**'ve** (= have) **wanted** to do for ages.*
  (Present Perfect Simple)
- We make all passive verb forms with *be* + past participle:
  *I **was told** you were really enjoying it.* (Past Simple Passive)
- In the Present Simple and Past Simple we use a form of *do* to make questions and negatives: ***Does** she **know** this guy?*
  *I **didn't think** you were coming.*

MODAL VERBS

- We also use modal verbs as auxiliaries. The modal verbs are: *will*, *would*, *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should*, *ought to*, *must* and *have to*.
- Modal verbs are different from the auxiliaries *be*, *do* and *have* because they have their own meanings. Most modal verbs also have more than one meaning:

  *I**'ll** see you at six.* (a promise)
  *I think we**'ll** win.* (a prediction)
  ***Can** you pick me up?* (a request)
  *He **can** play the piano.* (ability)
  *You **must** be here at nine.* (obligation)
  *You **must** see that film.* (strong recommendation)

face2face Upper Intermediate

Work in pairs or small groups.

a Think of the learners you are teaching now. Rate this explanation in terms of its clarity, economy and usefulness, from those learners' point of view.
b Assuming this is a review, at what stages in the learners' progress would they have likely met these points for the first time? (You might want to check with the coursebook you are currently using.)
c Can you think of any other uses of auxiliaries not mentioned here?

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KEY WORDS FOR TEACHERS

Check you know the meanings of these terms.

- *form, concept*
- *structure, function, register*
- *phrase*
- *part of speech (or word class)*
- *syllable*
- *noun, verb, adjective, adverb, determiner, article, pronoun, preposition, conjunction*
- *content words, grammar words*
- *auxiliary verbs*
- *modal verbs*
- *text*

REFLECTION

This unit has introduced you to some key elements of language analysis – and a lot of terminology! Reflect on your language analysis skills at this point in time:

1 How would you rate yourself, on a scale of 1 to 10, in terms of the following?
   1 Your current understanding of the main concepts introduced in this unit.
   2 Your grasp of the terminology that has been used.
   3 Your familiarity with the resources available for self-development in this area.
   4 Your motivation to improve your language analysis skills.
2 Can you identify any specific language areas on which you would appreciate more clarification right now?

Reference

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Ryokān, trans. Stevens, J. (1977). *One Robe, One Bowl: The Zen Poetry of Ryokān.* New York: Weatherhill, p.37.

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