Groups and phrases

1 Groups
The focus in the book is very much on clause-level choices, because clauses are the main way in which we express meanings. Nevertheless, clauses are clearly not the whole story. We have already had recourse to other, smaller grammatical units in identifying exactly how the three metafunctions work; and in this chapter we will look at in a more systematic way at the elements at the next rank down from clauses: groups and phrases (see Chapter 2.2 on ranks). Just as the clause has functional slots (e.g. Subject, Actor, Theme) which are filled by groups and phrases, so these elements themselves can be analysed in terms of the functional slots that they offer, the kinds of elements which can fill those slots, and the kinds of meanings that can thereby be contributed to the meaning of the clause as a whole.

1.1 Nominal groups
Apart from the clause itself, the nominal group is the grammatical unit which allows the widest range of meanings to be expressed, not least because of the resource of embedding. Here is a fairly extreme, but by no means abnormal, example (the nominal group is marked by square brackets, and the noun which forms the central pivot, or ‘Head’, of the group is in italics):

This is [a different example of how the structure of languages is significant in understanding how the written language works].

Here the bulk of the nominal group follows the Head. This is a typical pattern; but it is also possible to fit in a fair amount of meaning, although rather less spectacularly extensive, before the Head. (In the following example, nominal groups inside embedded clauses and prepositional phrases – see Chapter 2.2 – are also enclosed in square brackets and their Heads are in italics.)

Harry stared at [the big fox terrier face], [the cold pale blue eyes enlarged by [the thick donnish glasses] ], [the neatly clipped fringe of [light grey hair]].

Although it may not at first sight appear so, it is the slots before the Head which show more functional diversity. The slot following the Head serves only one primary function, and is thus relatively simple in functional terms; but on the other hand it is structurally extremely complex and has a capacity for apparently infinite extension.
I have talked informally about the slots before and following the Head. We can formalise this by setting up a basic three-part functional structure for the nominal group: **Premodifier**, Head, **Postmodifier**. Of course, not all nominal groups have all three slots filled. The only obligatory slot is the Head. This is normally filled by a noun, though there are some exceptions: for example, in an elliptical nominal group the Head may be a determiner (or ‘Deictic’ – see below). The following horoscope shows a sample of the range of possible structures; the analyses are given in Table 1.

There is a shift of planetary emphasis to the far away things of life whether these amount to events happening in the future or situations to do with overseas. With Mercury’s move forward, you will soon be hearing the news for which you have been waiting. While you are poised for a significant development on the work and personal front you would be advised to separate fact from fiction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Different nominal group structures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a shift of planetary emphasis of life</td>
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<tr>
<td>the far away things happening in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>these events to do with overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury’s move forward</td>
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<tr>
<td>you for which you have been waiting</td>
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<tr>
<td>the news on the work and personal front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a significant development for which you have been waiting on the work and personal front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fact</td>
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<td>fiction</td>
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In functional terms, we can analyse the nominal group according to the kinds of questions that are answered in each slot. The Head normally tells us the **Thing** that is being talked about. It may be expressed by a pronoun, a proper name or a common noun. Pronouns and proper names rarely need any further specification, since they refer to unique Things, and therefore usually appear with no pre- or postmodification – although this can happen in some cases:

*It turns out he’s the same David Hays that we met in Hungary.*
Common nouns, on the other hand, refer to a class of Things, either concrete or abstract (e.g. ‘eyes’, ‘situation’, ‘emphasis’) and the communicative context frequently requires some kind of specification to be added. It is the function of the Pre- and Postmodifiers to provide the specification, in different ways.

Within the Premodifier, it is possible to identify four (or five) main functional slots, with a fixed ordering. The first of these is the Deictic. ‘Deictic’ (from a Greek word meaning ‘showing/pointing’) is the most ‘grammatical’ of the slots, and signals how the nominal group fits into the context of the text around it and/or of the wider context in which the language event is situated (there are therefore similarities with the first element in the verbal group, the Finite, and, at a higher rank, with the Theme of a clause). There are a number of different ways in which this link with the context can be signalled, but they can be divided into two main groups: specific and non-specific.

Specific deixis may link the nominal group in by identifiability or possession:

That way you can steal a march on someone else.
Uranus and Neptune have yet to deliver their verdicts.

The identifiability signal can be paraphrased as ‘the specific member of the type of Thing I am talking about is one that you, the hearer, are able to identify’. It is expressed by the demonstrative determiners, including ‘the’. As mentioned in Chapter 8.2.1, the identification may come from the co-text (‘that way’ = ‘the way I have just mentioned’) or from the external context:

The home base is a priority for much of the day [= the day the horoscope is published]
Do you want this tea? [= the tea I am pointing to]

Possession represents a particular type of identifiability: the possession signal can be paraphrased as ‘the specific member of the type of Thing I am talking about can be identified by the fact that it is possessed by the entity mentioned’. It can be realized in three ways: a possessive determiner (if the possessor is identifiable); an embedded specific nominal group with the genitive marker ‘s’ (if more information about the identifiable possessor is needed); or a non-specific genitive nominal group (if the possessor is not specifiable):

You’ll feel that life has suddenly lost its buzz.
You will need to take your partner’s feeling into account [identifiable possessor]
Refuse to be swayed by other people’s opinions [non-specifiable possessor]
Very broadly, specific Deictics point to the answer to the question ‘Which Thing?’ (or ‘Whose Thing?’ in the case of possessives).

Non-specific deixis works in a different way: it signals that the hearer or reader is not assumed, or does not need, to be familiar with the specific identity of the Thing at that point. Since the Deictic slot is not needed for identification, it is used instead to indicate what quantity of the Thing is involved – all, some or none.

There are still some tricky moments ahead.
They tell you in no uncertain terms whether you are headed in the right direction.

Note that with non-specific deixis we may also have what is sometimes called ‘zero article’ (Ø): that is, the Deictic function is carried out by the choice of nothing in the Deictic slot. This is only possible with plural and uncountable nouns, and is thus functionally equivalent to non-specific ‘a’ with singular countable nouns:

There are Ø moves underway.
You would be advised to separate Ø fact from Ø fiction.
The foundations of your ambitions are in a state of Ø flux.

Most non-specific Deictics can be probed by the question ‘How much/many Thing(s)?’ However, zero article cannot be probed (there is nothing to answer with in the Deictic slot), and neither can ‘a’ (though its marked version ‘one’ can be).

In addition to the main Deictic, we often find a second Deictic element (the Post-Deictic or Deictic2). The line between the Post-Deictic and the following Epithet (see below) is often indistinct, since both are typically realized by adjectives. Some of these items reinforce the meaning of the primary deictic: for example, in ‘a certain project’, ‘a certain’ means something like ‘I am not specifying it here [‘a’], but it is in principle specifiable [‘certain’]’; while ‘own’ in ‘your own life’ is clearly linked to the possessive meaning. Others serve a comparative function: e.g. ‘the same pattern’, ‘some other people’ (in Chapter 8.2.1, we have already noted similarities in the functions of comparatives and demonstratives). It is also possible to include in this category certain adjectives related to the various types of modality (‘possible’, ‘obvious’, ‘usual’, ‘necessary’, etc. – see Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 374).

Overlapping with Deictics to a large extent is the category of Numeratives. These specify the number or quantity of the Thing, either in exact terms (‘three’, ‘twenty’) or inexact terms (‘many’, ‘much’); or they specify order (‘first’, ‘fifth’). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 375) place these in a
separate slot after Deictics in the nominal group, since they can follow specific Deictics (e.g. ‘the two planets’).

With the next slot, we move from primarily grammatical items to lexical items. This slot is the **Epithet**, which is normally filled by one or more adjectives and which can answer two main questions: ‘What do you think of the Thing?’ and ‘What is the Thing like?’ (typically in that order). In principle there can be any number of Epithets, though in practice it is rare to find more than two. There is no absolute line between attitudinal Epithets which express evaluation and modality (i.e. interpersonal meanings), and experiential Epithets which express properties of the Thing itself: often the Epithet expresses both at once (e.g. ‘delicious’). Here are a few examples of the range of possibilities, with the Epithets in italics:

There are still some *tricky* moments ahead.

Tensions at work could undermine your usual *sunny* optimism.

Harry stared at the *big* fox terrier face, the *cold pale blue* eyes enlarged by the *thick donnish* glasses, the *neatly clipped* fringe of *light grey* hair.

As some of the examples illustrate, an Epithet may be sub-modified by another element, such as an adverb (‘*neatly clipped’*) or certain types of adjectives (‘*light grey’*).

The final slot before the Head is the **Classifier**. This may be filled by an adjective or a noun, and broadly answers the question ‘What kind of Thing?’ As the label suggests, the Classifier tells us which of the possible categories in a classificatory system the Thing belongs to. This classification may be ‘natural’: e.g. ‘cuisine’ may be ‘Chinese’, ‘Indian’, ‘French’, etc. On the other hand, it may be established by that particular nominal group: in the last example above, the ‘face’ is classified as belonging to the ‘fox terrier’ class of faces (and note that this Classifier itself comprises a noun ‘fox’ classifying the second noun ‘terrier’). Whereas a noun in the Premodifier is almost certainly a Classifier, the same adjective may sometimes be used as a Classifier or Epithet: for example, ‘green’ is Epithet in ‘green grass’ but Classifier in ‘a green salad’ (i.e. a salad of lettuce leaves rather than, say, of tomatoes). Generally adjectival Classifiers can be distinguished from Epithets by the fact that they cannot be sub-modified or appear in a comparative form: we can say, for example, ‘some *very tricky* moments’ or ‘*greener* grass’, but we cannot do the same with ‘Chinese cuisine’ or ‘a green salad’.

Table 2 shows the detailed analysis of the Premodifier in a sample of nominal groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Functional slots in the nominal group Premodifier</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other people's</td>
<td>opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some</td>
<td>very tricky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moments</td>
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</table>
The Postmodifier is typically an embedded phrase or clause, and its primary function is to add specificity to the nominal group. The main question it answers is the same as the specific Deictic: ‘Which Thing?’. Indeed, it frequently works together with the Deictic: as noted in Chapter 8.2.1, a specific determiner (especially ‘the’) can often be used to point forward to the Postmodifier, where the identifiability of the Thing will be established.

... you will soon be hearing the news for which you have been waiting.

The decisions made in your name will not necessarily bring you thanks.

So even if the results of an endeavour are satisfactory ...

The foundations of your ambitions are in a state of flux.

This Deictic-Postmodifier link emerges very clearly in examples like the following, where ‘such … as’ are part of the same phraseology:

It is largely arms races that have injected such ‘progressiveness’ as there is in evolution.

Somewhat less frequently, the Postmodifier may appear in a nominal group with a non-specific Deictic (including a zero article). In this case, it typically answers the question ‘What kind of Thing?’ – in other words, it is closer in function to the Classifier than the Deictic.

Tensions at work could undermine your usual sunny optimism.

You are dependent upon situations beyond your control.

... whether these amount to events happening in the future or situations to do with overseas

The strange goings-on may give you a feeling that you really don't know which end is up.

The similarity of the Postmodifier to a Classifier in such cases is reflected in the fact that in some cases the Postmodifier could be expressed as a Classifier with little change in meaning – e.g. ‘work tensions’, ‘future events’.
Structurally, a postmodifying embedded clause may be finite or non-finite. If it is finite, it may be a defining relative clause (‘the news for which ... ’) or a projected clause (‘a feeling that ... ’ – see Chapter 7.5.1 on embedded projected clauses). If it is non-finite, it may be an ‘-ing’ clause (‘events happening ... ’), or an ‘-en’ clause (i.e. a clause with a part participle: ‘decisions made ... ’). These non-finite clauses can be expanded into finite ones, as relative clauses: this makes clear that the ‘-ing’ clauses are basically active in voice (‘events which will happen’) whereas the ‘-en’ clauses are passive (‘decisions which have been made’). The embedded non-finite clause may also be a ‘to’-infinitive clause, in which case it may correspond to a relative clause (‘situations [which are] to do with ... ’), or it may function as a projected clause (e.g. ‘the order to leave immediately’).

As noted in Chapter 2, the Postmodifier in a nominal group, which may be a clause or a prepositional phrase or a combination of these embedded one inside another, can comprise a very extensive stretch of language. To round off this brief account of the nominal group, here is a sentence from an article of literary criticism which illustrates how complex Postmodifiers can become, especially in formal written language. The two main nominal groups are in square brackets, with the Head in italics. You might like to try to work out the structure of the two Postmodifiers.

[The Shelleyan stereotype of the poet as god-like creator who brings forth a new cosmos ex nihilo and soars beyond the range of commonsense reality] is, from another perspective, only [an honorific reformulation of the alternative stereotype of the poet as a marginal person, a hapless trifler or eccentric or a perverse libertine who inhabits a world of autistic fantasy and ignores objective reality].

- Refer to Exercise 1.

1.2 Verbal groups
While the nominal group has a mix of grammatical and lexical items, reflecting the different kinds of meanings expressed in it (identity, qualities, classification, etc.), the verbal group has only one lexical item: the main verb, which expresses the Event (cf. the Thing in nominal groups). One central function of other items in the group (auxiliary verbs) is to express choices from the same logical system, tense: they indicate the conceptual location of the Event in terms of past, present or future. There may be more than one choice, but then the choices are cyclical or serial in function. As pointed out in Chapter 4, the first choice, the Finite, signals the relation of the Event to the here-and-now of the speech situation: for example, ‘he didn’t take it’ indicates that the ‘(not) taking’ is valid for the past. The Finite, which may be fused with the main verb, may show pastness (‘did’, ‘took’) or presentness (‘does’, ‘takes’); and it may show futureness, though only by a separate operator (‘will’). Any tense choice following the Finite takes
its reference point from the time established by the Finite. For example, the Perfect forms (‘have’ + ‘-en’) indicate pastness; so ‘he hadn’t (past Finite) spoken (past Event)’, signals two steps into the past: past from the time of speaking, and then past from that point. This double time shift may be made explicit:

The letter came [past in relation to now] after I’d left [past in relation to that past point].

The same type of serial time reference is shown with the Present Perfect, though perhaps less obviously. In ‘he’s disappeared’ the Finite (‘has’) is present, but the Perfect form relates this to past time – and this in fact expresses very well what the form typically means: it is talking about the present situation (he isn’t in sight) which is the result of a past event (he disappeared).

The simple equation of tense and time assumed so far does, of course, need to be modified, since the relationship is by no means straightforward. Pastness needs to be interpreted more generally as ‘distance’ – distance from the here-and-now is transferred, for example, to distance from reality, and hence the past tense can be used to express unreal meanings even when they relate to present time:

I wish I knew some French [= I don’t know French]  
If I had a hammer ... [= I don’t have a hammer]

Similarly, the future is closely connected with modality (the future is uncertain until it happens), and ‘will’ expressing futurity therefore shades over into expressing concepts like ‘predicted certainty in the future about a present-time event’:

She’ll be at home now [= I predict future confirmation of her being at home now]

The different meanings realized by the tense forms can, however, be seen to make sense, and to be derived in understandable ways from the basic tense-as-time meanings. If we keep in mind that ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ are therefore shorthand terms for sets of complex meanings, we can use them to capture the general logical cyclicity of tense choices in the verbal group.

To do this, we need to establish the basic meanings of the different items which can appear in the verbal group. The two main auxiliaries are ‘be’ (+ ‘-ing’ – usually, misleadingly, called the Continuous form) and ‘have’ (+ ‘-en’). The first combination (the auxiliary ‘be’ plus the form it imposes on the following item) encodes presentness, while the second, as mentioned above, encodes pastness. If the auxiliary is in initial position in the group, it fuses with the Finite meaning, which adds pastness or presentness. We have already seen that ‘he has disappeared’ expresses presentness plus pastness. Similarly ‘he is disappearing’ is present plus present (i.e. ‘doubly’ present – happening as I speak):
compare ‘he was disappearing’, which is past plus present (i.e. go back to a past point, and in relation to
that point the event is present). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 399) suggest labelling the steps from the
last step backwards: thus the groups we have looked at so far are labelled as follows (in the examples
below the primary tense shown by the Finite is in bold):

He has disappeared       ‘past in present’
He had disappeared       ‘past in past’
He is disappearing       ‘present in present’
He was disappearing      ‘present in past’

We can combine these choices (in the fixed order Perfect^Continuous):

I’ve been practising since you went away.  ‘present in past in present’
She had clearly been crying.     ‘present in past in past’

For the full picture of the possibilities, we need to add three more elements. First, there are certain
forms which are sometimes called semi-auxiliaries – e.g. ‘be going to’ – which perform the same kind of
function as the main auxiliaries. For example, in the case of ‘be going to’ and ‘be about to’, this marks
future from the time marked by the Finite:

I was going to keep it a surprise.       ‘future in past’
He is about to jump.         ‘future in present’

With these included, the number of times that we can make tense choices in a single verbal group is
increased to a theoretical maximum of five. There are certain constraints on combinations of choices; and
Halliday therefore calculates that we end up with a possible 36 forms – though many of these rarely occur
in natural language use. The greatest degree of tense elaboration is represented by forms such as the
following:

has been going to have been taking       ‘present in past in future in past in present’

For a full list of the forms, see Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 401–403).

Second, we need to allow for passive forms (‘be/get’ + ‘-en’). These are not strictly speaking tense-
related forms: in principle, for every tense form in English there is a parallel passive form, which is
always expressed as the last in the cycle of choices in the verbal group (i.e. immediately before the Event).

He was sent to Spain as manager. ‘passive: past’
England had been jolted into becoming ... ‘passive: past in past’
New wealth was being created. ‘passive: present in past’

The parallel passive forms bring the number of forms in the verbal group that are theoretically possible to 72. Understandably, it is difficult to find authentic examples of many of these, especially in written text. However, they do exist: a search of the internet throws up genuine examples such as:

Help, my account has been being hacked into
Apparently they found a large ash area out the back where stuff had been being burned.

Finally, and most importantly, we must bring in modality. This is typically expressed in the Finite, and the initial tense choice in the modal operator itself is usually neutralised (see Chapter 4.4.2), although it is possible to encode pastness. Any subsequent choices mirror those of non-modal forms. Note that if the main verb follows the modal verb in the base form, it may be interpreted as expressing an Event in the present (‘Patients may complain of fatigue’) or, more commonly, in the future (‘They may arrive late this evening’).

She ought to congratulate me. [modulated present view of future event]
Lady Emma might have sown the seed [modalised present view of past event]
You must be joking. [modalised present view of present event]
I could have been shot [modalised present view of passive: past event]
I complained that she should have written [modulated past view of past event]
She could have been going to rush out [modalised past view of future in past event]

Sometimes, modal meanings are expressed in a way which requires a normal expression of primary tense:

Her children seem to have been fond of her [modalised present view of past event]
She seemed to be getting better. [modalised past view of present (same-time) event]

Certain modal meanings may also appear later in the verbal group:
They were having to force-feed her. ‘present (modulated) in past’

Folks won’t be likely to come back. ‘future (modalised)’

It was going to have to be wiped from her mind.

‘passive: future (modulated) in past’

1.3 Other types of group

Brief mention should be made of two other types of group. The first type is the adverbial group, which has an adverb as Head, and which, like the nominal group, has optional Pre- and Postmodifiers – see Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premodifier</th>
<th>Head</th>
<th>Postmodifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>more</td>
<td>regularly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite</td>
<td>appropriately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far</td>
<td>frankly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>faster</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>than I’d expected</td>
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</table>

The final type is the adjectival group, which Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 391) include as a subcategory of the nominal group. Like nominal groups, they have a range of structural possibilities, expressing different kinds of meaning related to the Head (realized by an adjective), many of which are comparable to the functions of the Pre- and Postmodifier in nominal groups. Table 4 shows a few of the possibilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premodifier</th>
<th>Head</th>
<th>Postmodifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>too</td>
<td>close</td>
<td>to call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hotter</td>
<td>than before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so</td>
<td>noisy</td>
<td>that they called the police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very</td>
<td>happy</td>
<td>with the accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>just about as</td>
<td>stupid</td>
<td>as I’d expect from him</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that in some cases the Postmodifier in a nominal group can be seen as related to an adjective in the Premodifier rather than directly to the Head:

The important thing for any particular animal is to avoid trying to do both at once.

11
This is simply another example of the phenomenon identified above: that the Postmodifier may work together with an element in the Premodifier such as the Deictic to specify the Head in some way. Gordon Tucker’s book *The Lexicogrammar of Adjectives: a systemic functional approach to lexis* (Continuum, 1998) offers a very detailed account of the options available in the adjectival group.

2 Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases consist of a preposition followed by a nominal group. They do not fit into the same Head + Modifiers pattern as groups – they have a structure which is more like that of clauses. As I said in Chapter 2, groups may consist of a single word, whereas phrases must consist of at least two elements: the Head of a group can be used (e.g. in telegraphese) to represent the whole group, but in phrases both the preposition and the Head of the following nominal group need to be kept. I mentioned in Chapter 5.2.7 Halliday and Matthiessen’s description of prepositions as ‘minor processes’, and they argue (2014: 362) that ‘whereas a group is an expansion of a word, a phrase is a contraction of a clause’. The nominal group in a phrase can be seen as dependent on the preposition, but it clearly does not modify it in the same way as the Postmodifier in a group modifies the Head: the relationship is more like that between a (non-finite) Predicator and a Complement in a clause.

As we have seen, prepositional phrases function as Adjuncts in the clause and as Postmodifiers in the nominal group. Adjuncts, of course, typically act as circumstances for the process (even textual Adjuncts like ‘on the other hand’ and modal Adjuncts like ‘in my opinion’ can be seen as metaphorical circumstances, though for the clause as a whole rather than just the process). Many Postmodifiers act as a kind of circumstantial Attribute for the Head – they can often be clumsily paraphrased in the form of a defining relative clause:

Embryos are put together by all the working genes [which are] in the developing organism.

Others, though, act more like circumstantial Adjuncts, especially when the Head is a noun which is either a nominalisation or has process-like characteristics:

Of all possible speculations about the origin of life, most can be ruled out.

Each step in the pathway needs an enzyme.

The most common preposition introducing a Postmodifier, ‘of’, has a rather different function. If, as Halliday and Matthiessen argue, prepositions are like ‘minor processes’, ‘of’ in most of its uses is closest to the relational process: it simply indicates that there is a relationship of some kind between the Head
and the nominal group in the prepositional phrase. As we saw in Chapter 9, this relationship may be that of identifying a participant in the nominalised process functioning as Head of the nominal group:

... the evolution of *life and intelligence* [life and intelligence evolved]
... the best estimate of *the probability* [someone estimates the probability]

However, ‘of’ is not restricted to this kind of context: the relationship may be of almost any kind. Some typical uses – deliberately expressed in terms that recall the descriptions of relational processes in Chapter 5 – are: ‘a stroke of luck’ (the relationship between a single instance and a general category); ‘the point of the argument’ (a kind of possessive relationship); ‘no hope of duplicating it’ (identifying what the hope is).

3 Group complexes

Most *group complexes* are relatively unproblematic: they mirror the kinds of relationships that are possible in clauses complexes (see Chapter 7), though in a less fully developed way. In most cases, both groups in the complex are of equal status (i.e. coordinated or ‘paratactic’):

She was wearing *[plimsolls \ and white socks]*.
His eyes *[glowed \ and gleamed]* with imminent laughter.
The sky had been *[grey, \ then yellowish, \ then almost white]*.

The same is true of prepositional phrase complexes (note that the complex may ‘branch’ before or after the preposition):

The cast had made a noisy procession *[from the Hall \ to the pub]*.
They had walked up *[through the poplars \ and the vineyard]*.

However, there is one type of group complex which is rather trickier to handle. This is the kind of *verbal group complex* where one part of the complex is dependent on the other. In the example above, ‘glowed and gleamed’ are both finite, and both main verbs; but in the examples below, which we came across in Chapter 5.3.4, the relationship is different:

This *[tends \ to be]* the mark of a rather literary style.
Immediately, she *[began \ to scream]*.
*[Try \ turning]* it the other way.
In these cases, it is the second verb in the complex which expresses the Event (in transitivity terms, the processes are ‘be’, ‘scream’ and ‘turning’). The function of the first verb is to modify the Event in some way: ‘tends’ is related to modality (usuality or frequency in this case); ‘began’ is related to the unfolding of the Event (starting, continuing and stopping); and ‘try’ is related to the possible outcome of the Event (attempting, succeeding, failing). As I pointed out in 5.3.4, in any verbal group only the Finite is finite, and any other elements are non-finite. This is especially clear in examples like the following, where the Event is unarguably realized by the final non-finite verb form ‘falling’:

At the moment people’s constructive thoughts on what would be nice [are going to seem to be falling] on deaf ears.

Thus it is important to bear in mind that the boundaries between verbal group and verbal group complex (and even up to clause complex, with two separate verbal groups) are inherently blurred. One way of looking at the verbal group which attempts to capture this is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** The verbal group

The verb expressing the Event is the core, obligatory element. For finite verbal groups, the Finite is also obligatory, and is the first element (it may, of course, be fused with the verb expressing the Event). Other modifying elements, of various kinds, can appear between Finite and Event (although the ordering may vary from that shown in the example). In the case of phrasal verbs, there is a following adverbial or prepositional particle forming part of the Event.

The kinds of modification that are realized by ‘full’ verbs such as ‘start’ rather than auxiliary verbs fall into three broad areas. The first is **phase**. This has two dimensions: the first is reality-phase, to do with whether the Event is ‘apparent’ (appear to be) or ‘realized’ (prove to be):

She is also messy and disorganized, but *appears to like* it that way.

The reality *turned out to be* far removed from what they dreamed of.
The second dimension is ‘duration/inception’, to do with representing the starting, continuing or ending of the Event:

A few months ago, I started crying for no reason.
The gift that keeps on giving.
Archbishop must stop ‘shouting’ at ministers.

The second main area is conation: this concerns trying and succeeding.

You are attempting to open a secure connection
Have you managed to contact eBay?

The final area is more diffuse and is termed modulation (not to be confused with modulation as a category of modality). The modifying verbs typically have a circumstantial meaning of some kind – e.g. ‘regret to do’ (do sadly) or ‘happen to do’ (do by chance).

The BBC’s reporter hastened to reassure us that there was ‘no evidence’ (do quickly)
A shipwreck that helped to shape America (do together with someone/something)

You may have noticed that the non-finite verb in verbal group complexes is often the ‘to’-infinitive form; but it is sometimes the ‘-ing’ form.

I have decided to read one book per week.
Try turning it off and on again.

Broadly speaking, the ‘to’-infinitive signals that the Event is in some way unreal: it may still be in the future in relation to the time of the modifying verb (e.g. in the first example above the ‘deciding’ came before the ‘reading’); or it may look at the Event from the perspective of moving from unrealized to realized (‘began to scream’); or it may be uncertain (‘tends to be’). As this last point in particular suggests, ‘to’ is closely linked with modality, and it is possible to see ‘to’ as the non-finite equivalent of the modal verbs. The ‘-ing’ form, on the other hand, signals reality or contemporaneous validity: ‘try turning’ means that the trying is done by turning – one involves the other – whereas ‘try to turn’ means that there is trying, but there is no guarantee that the turning happens (i.e. it is still unreal). Similarly, ‘remember phoning’ means that the ‘phoning’ happened, with the ‘remembering’ coming later; while ‘remember to phone’ means that the ‘phoning’ is not yet realized at the time of the remembering. It
should be borne in mind, though, that these correlations between grammatical form and realness/unrealness are both only general tendencies, and there are unexpected or less easily explained uses:

He had suggested *meeting* in the park [the ‘meeting’ is unreal at the time of suggesting]

- Refer to Exercise 2.

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**Exercise 1**

Below are some of the sentences from the medical textbook extract that is used in Exercise 9.1. Pick out all the nominal groups; identify the Head of each; then label the functional constituents in the Premodifier (*D, D₂, E, C*); and finally identify all cases of embedding in the Postmodifier – use [*] for embedded prepositional phrases and [[ ]] for embedded clauses. If an embedded element has other embedded elements in it, identify those as well. Label nominal groups in embedded elements in the same way. For example:

a preceding episode [of a silent or overt cardiac infarct]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D</th>
<th>D₂</th>
<th>Head</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Frozen shoulder’ is a clinical syndrome which can probably be produced by a variety of pathological processes in the shoulder joint.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>It is a condition affecting the middle-aged, in whose shoulder cuffs degenerative changes are occurring.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>The outstanding feature is limitation of movements in the shoulder.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Restriction of movements is accompanied in most cases by pain, which is often severe and may disturb sleep.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>There is frequently a history of minor trauma, which is usually presumed to produce some tearing of the degenerating shoulder cuff, thereby initiating the low-grade prolonged inflammatory changes responsible for the symptoms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>In some cases the condition is initiated by a period of immobilisation of the arm, not uncommonly as the result of the inadvised prolonged use of a sling after a Colles’ fracture.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>In some cases where pain is a particular problem, hydrocortisone injections into the shoulder cuff may be helpful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a few cases, once the acute stage is well past, manipulation of the shoulder under general anaesthesia may be helpful in restoring movements in a stiff joint.

Exercise 2

Identify all the verbal groups in the following sentences, and group them into three categories: finite (including modal), non-finite, and verbal group complexes. For all the finite groups, label them in terms of any choices between past, present and future reference. For non-finite groups, decide to what extent the past/present/future labels can be applied; and for group complexes, label the finite member of the group and decide what kind of meaning it is contributing (e.g. attempting, succeeding, failing).

Benn’s strategy was shaped by his analysis of Britain’s economic problems and the political situation as he saw it.

The reasons for the difference tend to confirm the analysis of Chapter VI.

I had been inoculated against hepatitis before leaving New Zealand, so I had never considered it as a risk.

I was bound to entertain this as an ever-present possibility.

Since the middle of June the joint shop-stewards’ committee had been examining the issue of direct action.

So we’re going to have to try to cope for a while without her.

She had been about to say that she had not expected Gareth to react quite so violently.

They’ll probably have been worrying themselves sick about the delay.
ANSWERS TO EXERCISES on groups

Exercise 1

1 ‘Frozen shoulder’
   
   C  Head
   
   a clinical syndrome [[which can probably ... in the shoulder joint]]
   
   D  C  Head
   
   a variety [of pathological processes [in the shoulder joint ] ]
   
   D Head  C  Head  D  C  Head

2 It
   
   Head
   
   a condition [[affecting the middle-aged]]
   
   D Head  D  Head
   
   whose shoulder cuffs
   
   D  C  Head
   
   degenerative changes
   
   E  Head

3 The outstanding feature
   
   D  E  Head
   
   limitation [of movements [in the shoulder] ]
   
   Head  Head  D  Head

4 Restriction [of movements]
   
   Head  Head
   
   most cases
   
   D  Head
   
   pain
   
   Head
   
   sleep
   
   Head

5 a history [of minor trauma]
   
   D  Head  E  Head
   
   some tearing [of the degenerating shoulder cuff]
   
   D  Head  D  E  C  Head
   
   the low-grade prolonged inflammatory changes [[responsible for the symptoms]]
   
   D  E  E  E (?or C)  Head  D  Head
6 some cases  
   D Head  
the condition  
   D Head  
a period [of immobilisation [of the arm]]  
   D Head Head D Head  
the result [of the inadvised prolonged use [of a sling] [after a Colles’ fracture]]  
   D Head D E E Head D Head D C Head  
   In ‘a Colles’ fracture’ the apostrophe makes it look misleadingly as though we have a  
possessive Deictic (cf. ‘a man’s arm’, where ‘a man’s’ is Deictic). The use of possessive  
proper names as Classifiers is fairly rare and is almost unique to scientific registers:  
compare, say, ‘a Dickens novel’, where the apostrophe is not used. Note that ‘after a Colles’  
fracture’ postmodifies ‘use’, not ‘sling’.  
7 some cases [[where pain is a particular problem]]  
   D Head Head D D 2 Head  
hydrocortisone injections [into the shoulder cuff]  
   C Head D C Head  
8 a few cases  
   D Head  
   I have analysed ‘a few’ as a complex Deictic. Alternatively, ‘few’ could be labelled D 2.  
the acute stage  
   D E Head  
manipulation [of the shoulder [under general anaesthesia]]  
   Head D Head C Head  
movements [in a stiff joint]  
   Head D E Head  

Exercise 2  
(a) finite; (b) = non-finite; (c) = complex  
1 was shaped (a) passive: past  
saw (a) past  
2 tend to confirm (c) present – ‘tend’ = modulation of present event  
3 had been inoculated (a) passive: past in past  
leaving (b) ‘present’ at the past time in relation to which ‘inoculated’ is past
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>had considered</th>
<th>(a) past in past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>was bound to entertain</td>
<td>(a) modulated past view of ‘future’ (in relation to the ‘being bound’) event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had been examining</td>
<td>(a) present in past in past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’re going to have to try to cope</td>
<td>(c) modulated future in present view of ‘future’ (in relation to the ‘having to’) event – ‘try’ = conation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had been about to say</td>
<td>(a) future in past in past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had not expected</td>
<td>(a) past in past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to react</td>
<td>(b) ‘future’ in relation to the time of ‘expecting’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’ll have been worrying</td>
<td>(c) modalised present view of present in past event (NB the ‘probably’ indicates that ‘will’ is expressing probability rather than futurity here)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>